

champavert

seven bitter tales

translated by Tom Moran from the French of

PETRUS BOREL

le lycanthrope

CHAMPAVERT

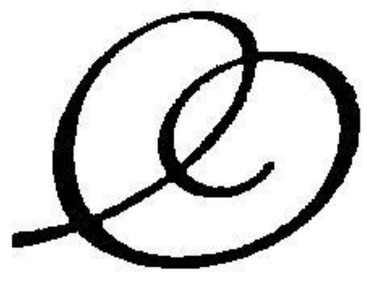
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by Pétrus Borel

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TRANSLATOR'S NOTE

Pétrus Borel was born in Lyons in 1809, the son of an iron monger. Educated to be an architect, he followed this profession for a few years before joining a group of rebel writers who looked to Gautier and Hugo as their leaders. A book of poems, *Rhapsodies*, appeared in 1832, and was followed by *Champavert, contes immoraux*, in 1833. A novel, *Madame Putiphar*, appeared in 1839. Borel spent his last years in Algeria as a government employe, dying there in poverty in 1859.

In this translation the epigraphs (35 in all and chiefly biblical), which precede each story, have been omitted; and the chapter titles, which, characteristically, Borel wrote in six languages, have also been omitted.

CONTENTS

THE PROSECUTOR 1

THE CARPENTER 18

VESALIUS 27

THREE FINGERED JACK 36

DINA 47

PASSEREAU 71

CHAMPAVERT 103

THE PROSECUTOR

I

A single candle placed on a table feebly lit up a vast high room; without the clash of glasses and silverware, without an occasional burst of voices, it would have seemed like the lamp at a wake. Carefully searching this chiaroscuro, as one searches the etchings of Rembrandt, one could descry the decoration of a dining room in the style of Louis XV which the academic inepto-romains maliciously call the Rococo. It is true that the cornice running around the ceiling was sinewed and profiled at bandeau and neckmolding without having the least kinship with the entablature of the Erechtheum, the temple of Antoninus and Faustine, or the Arch of Drusus; it is true that it was without ledges, watercourses, coping, or mouchettes pursuing and repulsing the nonexistent rain. It is true that the doors were not topped with Attic caps to keep out the water that never fell. It is true that the arches were not two and a half times wide as long. It is true that they had no regard for the illustrious Vignola and had laughed in the face of the five orders.

But is also true and must be said that this interior was certainly not an ignoble pastiche of coarse Paestum, cold, bare, rigid and hackneyed Athenian, or the aping mongrel architecture of Rome. It had their face, figure and coquetry, and it agreed with them in most points; but its face was so unique in its own way that, after the roll of the centuries, one could recognize at once the Rococo style of the fourteenth and fifteenth Louis. Fortunately our contemporary makers do not give us such ignorant copies of the old styles without imparting to their work enough of their own epoch so that, in times to come, their work will not be taken as just bad antiques displayed in the wrong country.

The big wainscot panels were covered with still-life paintings worthy of Venninx, but unsigned; and the mouldings were covered with operatic pastorals, shepherdesses and swains worthy of the delightful and immortal Watteau. These pictures, graceful and delicate, with sweet and pellucid colors, followed the style of the great master that ungrateful and unappreciative France ought to reclaim and recover as one of her chief glories.

Let us honor Watteau and Lancret and Carle Vanloo and Lenôtre! Let us boast again of Hyacinthe Rigault, Boucher, Edelinck and Oudry!

And, truth to say, one may feel more dreamy and comforted in a vast eighteenth and seventeenth century house than in a Byzantine chapter-house or a Roman cloister. All that reminds us of our fathers, our dead forebears, throws into the heart a religious melancholy. He should be ashamed who has not been moved, whose heart has not quickened, on entering an old house, a decayed mansion, a once-hallowed church.

Two men were seated at the table by the candlelight.

The younger one held his pale face lowered beneath long red hair; his eyes were hollow and treacherous, his nose long and sharp. To say that his whiskers were cut square on his cheeks like gaiterstraps is to say that this scene took place under the Empire, at the beginning of 1810.

The older one, thickset, was the prototype of the Francs-Comtois; his heavy long hair hung, like Babylon's gardens, across his broad flat face like a nightbird. These two were greedily hunched over the table, seeming like two wolves wrangling over a carcass; but their rumbling and confused talk in the sonority of the room aped the gruntings of a pig.

One was less than a wolf—he was a public prosecutor. The other was more than a pig—he was a magistrate.

The magistrate had just received his appointment for a judgeship in another city and was to leave the next day. The prosecutor, who had held his office for some time in the court of assizes in Paris, happy for his friend, was giving him this farewell dinner.

Both were dressed in black, like doctors in mourning for their murders.

Since they talked very quietly and with their mouths full, the negro who tended the door—for the young prosecutor L'Argentiere played the aristocrat—could steal only a few tatters of phrases.

— My dear Bertholin, I had such a good dinner yesterday at Arnauld de Royaumont's house! From his room, which opens on the Place de la Grève, I could see the execution of the seven conspirators we condemned just a few days ago: what a delicious meal! At each mouthful I could see a head fall!

— Poor fools, still believing in their country, they wanted to make Brutuses or Hampdens of themselves!

— Didn't they have effrontery, making speeches from the very top of the scaffold? God, their words and their heads were quickly cut off together! They yelled to high Heaven: Long live our country! Long live France! Death to tyranny! . . . Poor stupid brutes. . . . There should be no trifling with these rascals. Hurry them to the scaffold, I say, or the emperor couldn't sleep easy a single night.

Judging by these scraps, the conversation seemed only edifying, and, for the law's credit, it is regrettable that the negro didn't get any more of it. But at dessert, the wine having done its work, their talk became noisy and ribald, and it was easy to report the following.

— By the way, L'Argentière, since you're so clever at subterfuges and evasions, how would you pull out of this complication: I must positively leave tomorrow morning, and tomorrow night I have a tryst.

— Very simple. I would leave town without going on the date, or I would keep the tryst and not leave town.

— Bad business for a man of law.

— Well, be serious. Tell me more. Is your date feminine or masculine, business or bawdry?

— Feminine . . . and fun.

— Shades of Father Duchêne! If you just disregard Aristotelian unities, the problem is easy to solve. I'd take the charmer away with me and have the rendezvous at Auxerre.

— And if she turns out to be an indignant prude, a Lucretia?

— Damn it, I'd play like a good Jupiter, or force the little Europa to follow me.

— And the day after?

— Nothing. I'd just leave her at Auxerre, full of my memory!

— And what would the poor girl do?

— Poor girl? On the contrary, a lucky girl. She would only have to take a coach back here and then go find a good nurse.

— L'Argentière, you're a roué! . . . No, this isn't a girl one treats so roughly; she is a good unhappy child.

— Oh, nonsense. Such sentimentality. Quick: handkerchiefs.

— No, a dazzling illusion, a wood-nymph. She carries me away. . . .

— Right to the edge of a precipice.

— Very well, then, I'll follow. To see her is to love her.

— A plague on spineless lovers!

— You're iron-hearted in vain. It will soon be dented.

— From what cemetery, you old bear, did you dig up this piece of flesh? And how the devil did you get her favor?

— I never boasted that I had her will, I'd be lying. As for being an easy windfall, she's no godsend like that. . . . For some time Apolline and I have been living in the same house. I knew her when she was small; she used to bow to me so graciously when we met. Her dress was always so rich and neat. And the sight of her often made me sad. I cursed my celibacy and my loneliness; I envied the joy of a father possessed of such a beautiful creature; but at such times fatherhood presented itself to me

under a comic aspect. At that time her father, in the consulate service, held a very high position that provided plenty for his little family; but one day, caught in some trickery or plot, I don't know how, the police came, and he's been cooped up as a state prisoner ever since. The emperor is vindictive, and the family's affluence fell with the father's fall. Apolline grew poorer and more beautiful every year; and she finally arrived at the age when coquetry and the taste for finery made her acutely aware that she had not much more than rags, tawdry dress; but she remained haughty as a queen. It was sad to see such a pretty girl, ashamed of her state and daily fading, dressed in torn cashmere and old shoes on her feet, coming down to buy common vegetables in the neighborhood market. My heart often bled for her. What could be more poignant and more galling than such a comedown! If you want to laugh, L'Agentière, just laugh at me; it would be brutal to laugh at her.

— I'm laughing, Bertholin, at such strange words out of your mouth; you, a bachelor by dogma, a woman-hater on principle, settling down as a goodfellow! This is a bad time to chose to be a lover: Following the role of Father Cassandra with that of Harlequin is too late.

— Are you trying to offend me?

— More and more ridiculous you become. You're really in love.

— All right then, yes! I am in love! I won't blush for a love born of pity, and I praise Heaven. . . .

— Or you'll praise nothing!

— . . . Praise Heaven that has kept me free up to now so that I can be the guardian of this poor orphan.

— You subscribe to Chateaubriand, then, is that it?

— So that I can become the guardian angel of this abandoned girl. She is wholly alone today: her poor mother, weakened by so many years of privation, and even more by her daughter's sufferings, died three months ago. When Apolline's screams told me her mother was to die, deeply moved, I went up to comfort her and to offer my services. I arranged the funeral and the burial. When I spoke to her for the first time, entering her bare room, she kissed my hand, her voice shook with tears, I was beside myself, I don't know, I remember nothing clearly, I cried with her. . . . Overcome, on her knees beside the bed, she leaned over the body of her mother, whom she was calling. . . . That hour consumed six years of my life! . . . It is from such compassion that much love comes. . . . I went to see her a few days afterwards: all the time I talked with her I noticed her constraint; she remained seated with her hands folded on her lap; when she stood up to show me to the door I saw that the front of her dress was torn and ragged, and she had tried to hide her poverty under her hands.

. . . After awhile during which I gave her constant attention, bewitched by her sad and sweet manner, smitten by her unusual beauty, desperate like all young men, I confessed my love to her. She replied that she had too high a regard for me to presume that I wished to exploit her downfall; she sincerely believed in my feeling for her, but she was resolved to leave the world where she had suffered so much. She planned to write to the superior of the convent of Saint Thomas to be admitted as a novice. I had a hard time turning her from this plan. I made her see that she would kill herself in embracing the austere life of a nun after all the sorrows that had weakened her. After awhile, she yielded.

I didn't delude myself that Apolline had a strong love for me: she cherished me in a fatherly way; I am a benevolent teacher to her, a sympathetic friend. She is so much attached to me, she who had, up until now, met only selfish and cruel beings. She is good, simple, sensible, without any foolishness—could I ask for more? All the gifts that I brought her, she refused; a decent girl, she says, does not accept such things. So I have promised that we will be married before long, and the thought has filled her with joy. Then I asked her if I could come to see her tomorrow at nine to plan for our wedding, and perhaps . . . I'm not lying about it, here is her letter:

> My dear Bertholin,
>
> I presume that you have chosen such an early hour to come because of your journey to Auxerre, but I will wait on your wishes, my dearest love. I will put out my lamp to prevent any suspicions on the part of my evil-minded neighbors. Come stealthily.
>
> Your love and bride-to-be.

I have decided to leave without telling her in order to spare us the pain of further goodbyes; if I see her first, I feel that I wouldn't have the heart to leave. Soon as I arrive at Auxerre, I will write to her, and when I am settled in my work I am coming back to marry her clandestinely and then take her back right away to Auxerre and present her to my assistants as if we had been married for some time, in order to cut short all the joking. . . . I will positively leave tomorrow morning; but I will have money sent to her so that the poor girl won't die of starvation while I'm gone.

Why, it's eleven already, L'Argentière! . . . Goodbye, au revoir! . . .

And saying this, Bertholin rose and went to the door. The prosecutor, who had listened the while to this story with a cold attention, gloomy and silent, followed him to the bottom of the stairs, still asking questions.

— You say, Bertholin, that your Apolline is pretty?

— My friend, I've lived and seen a lot, but I've never met a woman so alluring: picture to yourself the Eucharis of Bertin, the Eléanore of Parny, Egeria, Diana, a nymph. . . . She is tall, gracious, slender; she is pale and melancholy like a patient; her hair, which she wears parted down the middle, gives her a girlish look, and her large blue eyes languish under heavy dark brows.

— And you say that she lives in the same house?

— The same, at the end of the corridor, above my lodgings.

L'Argentière then threw his arms around Bertholin and embraced him tightly: surely a strange gesture on his part, usually so cold and so disdainful.

II

Nine o'clock tolled from the Carmelites, the Luxembourg, Saint Sulpice, and Saint-Germain-des-Prés, and seemed to give a charivari to the falling night.

At that moment a man slipped into a fine old house in the Rue Cassette and crept up the stairs with a wolf's steps. At the top he stopped at a dark corridor. Through the planks of a door a voice could be heard. He put his ear near the keyhole; the sweet voice was saying a good-night prayer. He tapped with his finger lightly.

— Who is there?

— Open, Apolline, it's me!

— Who are you?

— Bertholin!

Right away, she opened inwards her accursed door which, creaking like old shoes, had hinges which made the grinding sound of a weathervane.

— Bertholin, my love!

— My beautiful!

— Forgive me for this inconvenience, without a light. I have no curtain on this window, and from across the way everything in the room can be seen. But why have you chosen such an early hour to come?

— All day my head has been tormented with business, and besides, there is little fulfillment in daylight: what is love without night? What is love without mystery?

— I cannot blame you for feeling like that, for I myself love God never so well as at night, in a dark church. . . . You are coughing?

— Yes, dancing attendance to the ministers, I caught a cold and I am hoarse. . . . It's very tiring.

— That is why I found your voice so changed. But let us talk seriously.

Why are we putting off our marriage so long? If people begin to notice our many meetings, they will think evil of me.

— Have patience, my dear. Today I received my appointment to the prefecture of Mont-Blanc, and I must leave tomorrow. Soon as I am installed and settled, we shall be married privately; we will leave Paris at once, and I'll present you to my people as my longtime wife.

— Oh, love, but I am so happy! . . . But you won't be gone long? Alone here, I will be suffering so much in expectation.

— Little teacher, if you only knew how much I love you!

— But Bertholin, what are you doing? . . . Do not hold me like that.

— Dear one! . . .

— You are treating me rather roughly tonight. . . .

— No, darling, I am treating you as a husband should.

— But am I wife already?

— When two beings who love each other have made a promise, is there need of the municipal stamp to sanctify it? The law simply ratifies it. We have sworn to love each other always, we are then married, and if we are married, what then? . . .

— Any liaison without God's sanction is sin.

— But God, like the law, only ratifies. . . .

— I cannot struggle with you, I am not subtle in argument, I am too weak. Be kind to me. . . .

— But I am kind to you!

— But let me go, Bertholin, you are not yourself tonight. What do you want of me? . . . It's not right, a poor girl like me! How can you torture me like this? . . . I will call out. . . .

— All right, do so. . . .

— I'll knock, and the servants will come up.

— They won't come up.

— Oh Bertholin, it's wrong, it's evil! . . .

/ / /

— And now you are going to cast me off, you despise me, you don't want anything more to do with a girl so faithless to her duty, a girl without honor?

— Don't talk like that, Apolline, you offend me. It's natural that you think me mean and low. Did I wrong you? No, never. You are still high in my regard.

— You still love me?

— Always!

— But somehow, your voice seems to have changed all of a sudden.

Heavens, is it really you, Bertholin? . . . Fool that I am. . . . What a strange foreboding I have! . . . Ah, if I have been deceived! . . . Is it really you, Bertholin? Answer me, is it you. Speak to me, Bertholin, is it you? . . . Let me touch your face . . . Bertholin has no beard! . . .

— Beautiful one, said the mystery figure in a clear voice, the moral of all this is that one should not receive one's lovers in the dark.

At the sound of this strange voice, Apolline fell in a faint upon the floor.

When she regained consciousness, she dragged herself to the window as a ray of moonlight shone down upon the head of the man sleeping soundly in the armchair. Apolline, trembling, gazed upon him: a man dressed in black, with a pale skin, long flowing red hair; his eyes were cavernous, his nose long and sharp, his cheeks covered with red whiskers in burnside style.

— Who is this man? the unhappy girl said to herself. Oh, base Bertholin, it is he who has caused this outrage. Who am I to believe? Ah, but it is frightful to be wronged like this! . . .

In the breast coat of the unknown, she felt, was a billfold. She would have given anything to remove it, hoping therefrom to discover his procurer; but this was impossible, his coat was tightly buttoned up.

In her mortal anguish, she cursed Bertholin and God.

At last, overwhelmed with grief, she lay heavily on the floor drenched in tears.

When she awoke, it was broad daylight, the armchair was empty, and she was alone, face to face with her shame.

III

In the course of the next day the porter went up to Apolline's room to give her the bag of money that Bertholin had left for her at his departure, for he feared that, before his return, the poor girl, without resources, would badly need it.

— From whom is this? asked Apolline.

— I don't know, Miss, a stranger asked me to give it to you, without saying another word.

— Take this money back.

— I can't, he just said: for Miss Apolline.

— Take it back, I tell you.

The poor man was completely disconcerted. Apolline, proud and haughty, made him recoil from her, for, in her heart she believed somehow that the money was the price of her dishonor, that the man of the night, in

fact, was paying her a fee to humiliate and debase her further. But the porter, excusing himself, threw the bag on the table and precipitately left.

All day, Apolline watched, carefully listening for some sound from Bertholin's apartment beneath her, walking, moving of furniture, or opening of doors or windows, but in vain. And for days after, she was on the lookout, without more success. At last one evening she dared to go down and knock; but there was no answer: Bertholin had taken his servants with him.

The imbroglio within her increased, and poor Apolline lost her head: Has he moved out? she asked herself. I would have heard him. . . . Did he leave Paris after plotting this hideous knavery with one of his intimates? . . . Ah, no, it would be impossible, too false, too cruel. . . . No, Bertholin is a sensitive and honorable man. . . . But how then can I explain all this? . . . In her great distress, she came even to doubt herself, asking if she had not been mistaken in the dark, and if the man in the night had not been Bertholin himself, seemingly stranger to her overwrought imagination. . . . Nevertheless, she went on, they were not his features; I was not dreaming: and yet, it wasn't his voice either; it wasn't his refined manner. No, it wasn't Bertholin at all.

About a week after this calamity, Apolline received a letter from Mont Blanc: My betrothed, forgive me for leaving you without kissing your hand: I only wished to spare you sorrowful leavetaking. Called to the prefecture of Mont Blanc here, I went to take possession of my domain. In a fortnight I hope to steal back to you and celebrate our marriage secretly, and immediately after, we will return here to this country which I am sure will not displease you. I hope too that you have not had the false pride to refuse the small amount remitted to you from invisible hands: you are my wife, and I would suffer much if I thought you were in need.

This letter increased Apolline's perplexity: after such endearments, she dared not accuse him of black perfidy; at their rendezvous, he or another well informed of it, had come in his stead and had violated her. It was an insoluble mystery, unless one could believe that his note had strayed into the hands of a stranger.

Some time after this letter, she received another in which he announced that, due to the pressure of unforseen work, he was forced to postpone his departure.

At this period, Apolline began to have a sense of general malaise. Loathing all food, she was often taken with nausea and griping pains. Her distress became extreme. A doctor advised her to take safflower, but this had no result, and he then told her plainly that she was with child. At this news,

Libraries

Apolline was seized with consternation and despair. Night and day, she wept bitterly. Her situation was a cruel one. At last, Bertholin wrote to tell her of his return, and, hour after hour, she awaited him. What could she do? To deceive him was dishonest and difficult; to frankly reveal everything to him was to lose everything. So she resolved to confess all to him as soon as he arrived, hoping that his generosity would perhaps forgive her for her heartbreaking mistake, which had, after all, been made for him.

At last, Bertholin made his appearance, and from the very first, he noted a great change in her, a sadness, a constrained air in front of him, an emaciation and an alteration in her beauty. He caressed her so ardently that, despite her firm resolution, she dared not begin her confession: twenty times the words died on her trembling lips; she dared not disillusion this man who was so smitten with love of her. For his part, Bertholin was disturbed too, and he hardly knew to what to attribute these many tears.

The fatal hour struck: the preparations for the legal business were made, and the wedding date was set for the following Saturday. It was to be at Saint Sulpice, at noontime and before two or three witnesses, with the greatest simplicity, and after the nuptial blessing, they would leave that very day.

On Thursday evening, Bertholin invited Apolline down to his apartment, and happily he led her into the living room: the round table and the sofa were covered with materials, shawls, dresses, jewelry.

— There, dear one, are a few gifts your humble husband offers you, with the hope that they will please you.

Suddenly Apolline uttered a sob, and stopped glumly at the entrance.

— What is the matter, my dear? Come, all this is yours. Don't you like this blue velvet, this gold jeannette, these coral bracelets, this cashmere? . . .

Apolline sank to her knees.

— Oh, Bertholin! Bertholin! If you knew. . . .

— What's the matter, child?

— If you but knew how unworthy I am of all this! Oh, God, must I tell him everything? Oh Bertholin, if you knew, you would drive out this girl you are calling your bride!

He was petrified.

— Listen to me. Perhaps it is you, perhaps you are responsible for my crime. Look upon me!

And saying this, she tore away her shawl and her folded dress that concealed her pregnancy.

— Look at me then! . . . Must I tell you of my shame?

— Damnation! . . . You, pregnant, Apolline? How can you abuse my generosity so? . . . There, then, is the girl I chose in pity to be my bride! Nobody's daughter I wanted to raise up! . . . a prostitute!

— I'd sooner die a thousand deaths, Apolline cried. In God's name, listen to me. You can kill me after, but first listen to the truth.

— Will you be quiet, you shameless. . . .

— God sees my innocence and your guilt, for I was pure before I knew you. Listen to me. One evening before you left, you asked me for a rendezvous at my apartment, and I agreed. At nine o'clock someone knocked at my door, I opened it in the dark, Bertholin, and I believed it to be you. The devil feigned your voice and deceived me. After a struggle, I gave in, believing you to be the man . . . and he ravished me! . . .

— Apolline, you are lying about it!

— When the monster had finished with me, he revealed my mistake to me himself. In the moonlight I made out his features: he was pale, with long red hair, deepset eyes, dressed in a long black coat.

— Apolline, you are lying to me!

— Oh, believe me! I swear by Christ, by my mother who is listening to me from the beyond. . . . I thought it was to you that I abandoned myself, and now you treat me thus. . . . You mislaid the letter . . . and it must have been one of your friends. . . .

— You are lying to me. Get away. Get out, or I'll crush you under my feet like these boxes. To find love at fifty, only to meet this! Get out, and spare me from killing you. Get out, tramp, harlot!

Apolline fell to the floor. He grabbed her by the feet, dragged her to the door, and thrust her out.

IV

Nothing is more demoralizing than injustice, nothing throws more bitterness and hatred into the heart. Bertholin seemed unjust to Apolline, and she seemed guilty to him, and indeed she would have seemed guilty in the eyes of the whole world. Only a complex of circumstances had made guilt out of innocence. It is only by the probable and the apparent that men can be judged with the use of short antennae. Crimes can be compared to votes; the judge estimates the contents by the envelope, and when, by his verdict, he declares it spoiled and unacceptable, and throws it overboard, the envelope may break open, and its contents revealed. The stupidity of the court becomes patent, and the mob sneers; but the judge draws himself up grandly, and with his ridiculously pontifical tone says: I'm infallible!

Gnawed by a most grievous melancholy, Apolline, day by day, was gradually wasting away. Soon, in a few months, though still beautiful, she became thin as a consumptive, a ghost, and went out only at night to escape the gaze of the malicious. The neighborhood would have thought her dead if, from time to time, she had not played her old piano, which also served as a table, sad relic of her old splendor. It was even noticed and remembered that she chanted certain favorite stanzas more than others.

Hangman, end my torture!
Wrong has warped my heart.
And to God, world, and nature,
My hatred I impart. . . .

This refrain of itself was enough to show Apolline's bent, and how suffering and misfortune can pervert the finest nature; she, once so sweet, good, loving and religious, now had only rancour in her breast and venom in her mouth. She loathed everything, even her very creator she abjured, avenging herself in abandoning the deity who had abandoned her. When a being has come to this pass, there is more than just a hell's laugh on her scornful lips, everything provokes her disgust; the more a thing is saintly and sacred, the more it is revered by the world, the more joy it gives the bitter to profane it and to grind it underfoot. For those who are miserable, such blasphemy is a voluptuousness!

As her term approached its end, her misery became profound. The eight previous months she had existed on the meager sum that Bertholine had given her. No more remained. Evenings she tore up some wild plants from along the deserted road, but this food, fit only for animals, had so weakened her that, near the end of the ninth month, she found it almost impossible to leave her room. Hunger had in fact given her such vertigo and had wracked her brain so much that her dementia was now become extreme. She came to have the most atrocious lacerating stomach pains and spasms such as epileptics have. When she felt her first pains of childbirth, two days passed during which she ate nothing: stretched on her sickbed, devoured by hunger, she gnawed the leather cover of an old book, utterly deprived of reason. . . .

At the sight of her baby, her madness seemed to awaken and to renew its force: she stood up on her feet, embraced and slapped it by turns, gave it to her empty breasts, threw it down, weeping, and lay down upon it. At last, wrapping it in a cloth and putting it under her arm like a package, she dragged herself down and left the house. It was night.

About two o'clock in the morning, Herman Busenbaum, a Vaugirard fruitseller, perched on his wagon and whistling a tune while on his way

to market, came down Four street. In passing one of the dark and filthy alleys that emerged from it, he heard the wailing of a newborn child, halted, paused and listened: the sound seemed to come from out a nearby sewer. He leaped down from his wagon, put his ear to the opening, and drew back, frightened. Immediately he rushed away to inform the guardhouse keeper at the Abbaye prison nearby. The commissioner, as it happened, was just booking two streetwalkers who had been arrested for stabbing one of their clients. Quickly putting himself at the head of a patrol, Busenbaum guided the corporal, carrying a lantern. They hurried to the sewer. Except for the rippling water, there was silence. The soldier, a born wag, jeered Busenbaum on his sham hearing, which he ascribed to fear; and the commissioner was ready to curse the awkward fellow who had put him on the spot, when the wailing sounds were resumed, louder. The lantern was placed near the sewer outlet and a white object was seen near the front. One of the guards pulled it out with his bayonet. Then Busenbaum and the commissioner, like Pharaoh's daughter, unwrapped the linen and disclosed a newborn baby.

— Christ, but here's a rookie who's escaped from a tough life!

— Poor little mummy, said the tenderhearted Busenbaum.

— It's a case where kids are really unlucky to have parents.

— Gentlemen, said the perspicacious commissioner, taking the stance of a caliph, a crime has been committed, and we must look into it.

He began to examine the child, looking for grievous wounds. To the great satisfaction of the Army, after a conscientious and dignified research confirmed by the Academy, it was announced, to the majority of those present, that the child was of masculine or neuter gender. A smile appeared on the lips of old Busenbaum.

— What are you going to do with the little monkey? he asked. Right now my wife's about to have another lying-in, for the third time. To our grief, she only has stillborns. If you'll trust me, I'll take the baby to her right now as a substitute. She'll take care of it, and we'll adopt it.

At the moment he lifted the baby to place it in his wagon, it stiffened and died: and the commissioner at that instant observed a track of blood going up the street, and ordered the patrol to follow him. Although going a long way, the bloody drops were enough to serve as a guide. At the end of Buttery street they disappeared, but were found again in an alley from Columbier street, and still closely following, they went up Cassette street, and at last ended before a door.

— Here, said the commissioner, we'll go in. He knocked.

— Open, in the name of the law, said the corporal, striking on the door with his musket. The terrified porter obeyed at once.

— What a to-do, gentlemen. What do you want?

— We're going to search this place. Lead us through it. Wait: here are the tracks of blood again! Follow me.

He went up the stairs to the top floor and then down a corridor, where the tracks again ended in front of a door.

— Who lives here, porter?

— A nice quiet young lady.

— Open, then, in the name of the law! . . . Corporal, break in the door!

The door opened under the blows, and they eagerly stared into the room, where, in the glimmer of a lamp, lying on the floor in a pool of blood, was a girl, wasted and pale.

They raised her up; she was still a little warm.

They took her on a stretcher to the Maternity hospital, which is called La Bourbe, the muddy place, by the vulgar.

V

All over Paris the next day, the only thing talked about was a child thrown down a sewer, and newsboys went around the city as if in a procession, selling for a sous all the details of the horrible infanticide committed in the Faubourg Sainte-Germaine by a daughter of one of the wealthy.

The event had moved the bourgeoise, who were already avid for the trial, to get to the bottom of the story. Maliciously, they were already enjoying the rare spectacle of an aristocratic girl standing on the platform of the scaffold.

At the hospital, Apolline's life was despaired of, at first, but she was given the greatest attention, on recommendation of the court, who feared that death would bring in a verdict without them, and thus encroach upon the rights of both law and hangman. At the end of a week she began to recover strength, and memory returned. Her amazement was great and painful as she realized that she was in a hospital room. She had not the least recollection of what she had done, or of what had passed, and, like a sobering drunkard, had no memory of her follies. Her questions received only the vaguest answers. When her health was restored enough, they told her that she was to be transferred to La Force prison.

— To La Force! she cried. But why?

— On a charge of infanticide.

— I? Oh no, you must be mad! . . .

— You threw your baby down a sewer.

She brought her hands to her breast, shocked and silent, and, as if suddenly seeming to wake from a dream, collapsed.

When she regained her senses she was alone in a narrow and gloomy cell.

Her trial was slow in coming up, and after four months of contact with all that is stinking and vile caught up by the social pickaxe, she made her appearance in the Assizes court. The scandal had brought a great crowd of curious anxious to see the beautiful and unnatural mother of the Faubourg Sainte-Germaine. Her reputation for ferocity was made equal to that of her renown as a beauty. The windows of the picture shops were decorated with imaginary portraits of the beautiful Apolline fully as authentic as those of Héloise or Joan of Arc: one recalled Madame de la Valliere; another, Charlotte Corday; another, Josephine; but the public, which wants to be fooled at any price, was well satisfied. The palace was clogged with lawyers as if they were at a gaming table. A general murmur of chagrin arose when the bailiffs announced that the judges had ordered a closed session of court.

Soon Apolline was brought into the room: her youth, her lovely figure, her sad and guileless manner, her sweet voice, her carriage, vividly impressed the blasé courtroom.

In order not to implicate Bertholin, she had charged that a man, a complete stranger, had slipped into her room one night and had raped her. As for the crime for which she was indicted, she admitted that it might be truth, she could not remember anything positive, and, having been without food for days before her labors had begun, she must have been in a state of complete insanity. Of the five doctors who had been called to testify as to what her condition had been before her accouchement, only one had affirmed that she had been deranged, while the others denied it.

At the moment in which M. L'Argentière, the prosecutor, rose to intone his declamation, Apolline, struck with a familiar accent, turned her eyes on him, and uttered a piercing cry, straining to remember. . . .

Never was a prosecutor's charge to a jury more violent and inhuman: he staked his all to crush the accused. He compared her in his rage to Saturn devouring his children. He ended by demanding her head for the state. — Don't let yourself be beguiled by the beauty of this unnatural mother, the laurel rose contains a subtle poison, beauty is often only the veil of treachery. Don't weaken, gentlemen, this case must be an example to help stop such crimes. Gentlemen, be inexorable and you will be just!

Apolline's attorney performed his duty with an unusual talent; his plea would have forced tears from a tiger, but the tribunal remained cold, and the prosecutor began a brutal rejoinder.

When poor Apolline had gathered her senses, she abruptly stood up, and, pointing her finger at the prosecutor, cried out: It's he! He is the man I saw in the moonlight, that man who is talking there, with the sallow face, red hair, deepset eyes. . . .

— This girl is demented, M. de L'Argentière said coldly, and his gloomy face showed not the least trace of emotion.

— Take the accused away, the president ordered. Gentlemen, we shall now deliberate in the jury room.

After a quarter of an hour, the court emerged from its sitting, and the president delivered the sentence condemning Apolline to the supreme penalty. She heard the decision with dignity, and, turning away from the prosecutor, said only: Those who are sending for the executioner are just those who should be sent to him.

Her counsel, distraught and weeping, took her in his arms, to the great scandal of the court, who asked her if she wished to make an appeal.

— Yes, Apolline answered, but to the judgment seat of God.

The next morning they brought a priest to prepare her for death, and he stayed near her. Naively she told him the story of her life, and the poor man became convinced of her innocence; he, who came to console her, was weaker and less consolable than she. He called her a poor martyr and kissed her as one kisses a reliquary. He did not dare to tell her of the goodness and justice of his God: his Providence was too much compromised by this tragic life.

At four o'clock the jailer went up to notify her. She prepared herself and came down, supporting her confessor. At once the cart was put into the procession. It seemed as if the whole population of Paris was packing the streets from the Palace to La Grève. Windows were filled from top to bottom with avid spectators. Never had an execution attracted so many.

— There she is! There she is! they yelled, all down the line.

How beautiful she appeared at the top of the tumbrel, unhappy Apolline! And with what dignity and resignation! Her skin was whiter than the gown that covered her, and her hair blacker than the priest who wept beside her. She turned her eyes with weariness upon the crowd; the old crones shook their fists, and the tenderhearted young men blew kisses to her. At last the cart was opened at La Grève. Walking up the staircase to the guillotine, Apolline caught sight of the face of M. de L'Argentière at a window: he looked at her coldly. She uttered a long scream of horror and sank helplessly into the arms of a retainer. The agitated mob began a general hubbub. It rained.

— Put down your umbrellas, we can't see! they yelled from all sides. Put down your umbrellas, be decent, we can't see anything!

The throng, necks stretched, was on tiptoe.

When the cutlass fell, a muffled clamor could be heard; and an Englishman, leaning out of a window he had rented for 500 francs, uttered a long and satisfied Very Well! as he clapped his hands.

THE CARPENTER

I

It was God's day, betokened by the calm of the countryside, the white clothes and carefree manner of the slaves strolling in the distance, no longer groaning under the enormous burdens and mule's bells, luckless men! of their daily tasks. The sunlight was at siesta hour, and meanwhile the carpenter Jaquez Barraou, huge and husky black, came out to sit at the door of his hut, cramped, as it were, in a creek where two pinasses and a felucca undergoing repairs were moored. Barks, trunks and heavy timbers were strewn here and there on the ground.

Jaquez Barraou was still wearing his striped shirt and his work clothes, but he was not working for, to him, so religious, this would have been a mortal sin. He was barefooted. There was in his manner an air of watchful waiting that contrasted strongly with his energetic figure. Under his wooly crinkled hair his two great eyes rolled, and often he turned them from sea to land, and raised them to the skies, frowning and scornfully blowing the blue smoke of his long cigar.

It would be difficult to explain the odd movements and heavy sighs of this man. His troubled and forbidding look that rested so often on the vast Antillean sea, whose spread he seemed to measure, and the look he cast on the land, might have made one think that he was immersed in nostalgic longings, that his heart was bruised with homesickness, that violent love of one's faraway country that nothing can overthrow, that still can bring tears to the eyes of Canadians bent under the infamous yoke of English rule, remembering nothing now but the name of their ancient country, and repulsing with disgust their younger countrymen, who weary the ears of their elders with the rude speech of the conquerors. He seemed to survey the distance from his Africa to this American shore, and to curse the barbarous Europeans who had transplanted him here in exchange for a saw or a sabre.

These thoughts might have been galling to some, but they did not disturb Barraou, for he was a Cuban and he had nothing of Africa in him save the spirit and the features. Suddenly he tossed his unfinished

cigar far away, sat down heavily again, muttering words that sounded like grossest oaths. He gnashed his teeth, knocked the back of his head against the wall, and at last, a little calmer, said in a weeping voice:

— Jealousy! Jealousy! What ill you have done me! Jealousy, how you devour me! . . . Cursed I am, cursed be Jaquez Barraou! My breast is as fiery as if I had swallowed cubeb and paprika. Jealousy, you are eating my heart with teeth sharper than the teeth of the serpent! The more I repulse you, the more you besiege me. In fact, how can I beat you off? . . . They left no doubt in my mind; for, the other night, when I came back from town, I surprised him, for the third time, running from the house; he was certainly leaving it. . . . Yes, I saw him, that villain Juan Cazador. . . . What are you trying to do to my Amada? . . . And how has Amada taken it? . . . No, no, Amada, I know you are a good woman, yes! . . . And meanwhile, what can I believe? Woman are such cheats. What cruel luck . . . and horrible uncertainty! I will solve this or die. False friend, I once called you my Johnnie. You who have known me since I was small as this lamb; you, who slept with me so often, dead drunk, all night, nights of the dearest outpouring of friendship, and dreams sweeter than any dream! Rum . . . smoking. . . . Those days are gone far away, Jaquez! You made merry in your youth, and now that you are growing old like your father it makes you weep.

How unjust men are! Have I ever coveted them their wives? Then why do they try to play false with mine? I am poor, I have nothing, I had only Amada. I possess nothing on earth on which I could raise a tithe, not even the one I chose from a thousand. I am too gullible. . . . But it may be some strategem . . . an ambush . . . a trick . . . can settle this thing: if it turns out I am mistaken, well, I will have peace again, my mind will be at rest . . . but if . . . then, vengeance! . . . *Santa Virgen,* come to my aid, and tomorrow all will be finished.

Suddenly he stopped as if he had heard something new, and, collecting himself, assumed an air of calmness as a young woman came out of the house and coquettishly went up to him, leaning on his shoulder. And it was true that her beauty seemed worthy of all his distress and worry. I do not know whether I am blinded by a prejudice, but I have always had a propensity for colored women, surrendering to their African loveliness in my dreams, and searching, like a child, for the kisses of black loves, and remaining cold to the caresses of our creole whites. But how beautiful she seemed! She was slender, vivacious, smiling; the tint of her skin was of the kind scornfully called mulatto, her features as delicate as those of an Arlesienne, and her almond eyes sparkled. A muslin turban was gracefully wound around her head; coral pendants hung from her

ears; a collar of Venetian work in gilt made a dainty contour on her neck; her fingers were made prisoners of some fine rings; her short skirt of white cotton revealed plumpish legs and Cinderella feet that were shod only in Spanish sandals.

— What are you doing here? she asked, lifting her long hair and pressing her pursed lips against his forehead. It's Sunday, and you are still not dressed up? Dear Jaquez, you seem upset about something. What is the matter then? Share it with me. Tell me.

— I am all right. It may be the heat depresses me.

— No, you are hiding something. Even when you speak you seem to be thinking of something else. Besides, didn't I hear you? Just now you were talking, wrangling and complaining aloud.

— Dear heart, but you are mistaken, I was humming. I thought you were asleep, I was singing that song of yours:

Stop your moaning, Paxarito,
Stop, while sleeps my amorita,
Though we know you're wounded sore
By that rascal Cazador!

— Ah, but you are so good, Jaquez, always to be dreaming of me.

— But you deign to love me as well; but enough of that. Can you prepare a specially good supper tonight? I want to invite Cazador.

— That man . . . but why?

— What a question! Why does it seem so odd to you? Is it the first time I've invited him to our table? . . .

— Nothing! But you have been so sullen. . . . I mean, so sad. . . .

— What matter? He will have his hostess' cheerful talk. Tell Pablo to come here; he must be around, near the woodshed. I saw him awhile ago playing with the old dog, Spalestro. Go and fetch him.

(My fatal suspicions have just been justified. How she blushed at his very name! How surprised . . . and embarrassed! And that woman's trick of receiving with calmness news that thrilled her heart!)

— Master, you sent for me. Here I am, what must I do?

— Listen carefully, Pablo. Take from the chest a packet of tobacco, and then go find Juan Cazador at his master's house, Gideon Robertson. Give him the tobacco and tell him he's invited to have supper here tonight, at his friend's house, Jaquez Barraou. Be quick, don't come back without him. Quick, leave, my blessing on you.

II

As soon as little Pablo was away, Barraou reentered his hut. While Amada made her *Lord's Supper*, he washed himself and put on his Sunday clothes.

Unhooking the carbine rifle that was hung on the wall below the images of Saint James of Galicia and some caparisoned madonnas, he started to clean it with a kind of somber relish that Amada noticed.

— Why are doing that? she asked him.

— Nothing, dear one. Just removing some of the rust. . . .

— Only to remove the rust? What's the use of doing that? . . . *Santa Virgen*, but what are you doing now? Powder! And bullets! You are going to load it? That's foolish. Please, I beg you. Bad luck will come of it. It will be within reach of the first comer. . . .

— Yes, perhaps. . . . Something bad will happen!

— But why are you doing it? Tell me.

— Why? You want to know? Well, tomorrow I have to go into the timber lands to buy some lumber, and bands of runaway slaves are hiding along the roads. It's a wise thing to go armed. . . . Amada, where is my knife? It was here, and now I can't find it.

— Here it is. But why do you have to have this too? Is this for the robbers tomorrow too?

— Please God!

She began setting the table without saying another word. He began striding back and forth in front of the hut, impatiently looking in the distance. While she worked, Amada, inwardly agitated, had the bruised feeling of one buffeted by a hundred different thoughts; she made a hundred conjectures, mostly strange and absurd. She would have given the delights of a whole night of love, or her blessed golden rosary, to foresee the morrow, or to read the smallest corner of Barraou's heart. Oftentimes she sighed.

— Lord, protect thy servant. Angels, stay the arm of Barraou, as you restrained the arm of Father Abraham! . . .

Pablo found Juan Cazador as he was about to leave for a dance, rapturously twanging some nasal sounds from a cracked mandolin.

— May it please you, sir, my master has sent me to you with this gift of tobacco from the royal plantation, and to invite you to supper with him tonight. I must not come back without her, he say.

Cazador, happy and surprised, thanked Pablo, and they started back. On the way back he could not contain his high spirits, asking himself what could have made Jaquez favor him like this? . . . Jaquez, always so easily offended, who for such a long time has avoided me. Could it have been Amada? Could she have influenced him? Oh, no, it couldn't have been! Can she be in love with me . . . a little? Love . . . love. . . . No, I'm too unlucky!

III

When Juan approached the hut, Jaquez saw him from far off. He went up to him, greeting him in a friendly way, and Cazador answered him enthusiastically. At the moment they entered the room, Amada turned around, and without being seen, raised her eyes as if to implore the mercy of Heaven, and quickly made the sign of the cross. Then calmly turning to them, she said:

— Welcome to you, Cazador. You can say grace at once. Everything is ready.

— Very good, we will, answered Barraou, placing Juan at his right. Friend, it's been a long time since I had the honor of dining with you. We must mark the occasion with some real good old wine. We'll drink as in old times, when we were boys and didn't have our good Amada here with us. He's a coward and a glutton who gives up first! . . .

— Bravo! Bravo! Agreed! said Cazador. That suits me, and the loser will pay a forfeit. Watch out, Barraou!

— Friend, pay attention to your own score. How many times I've drunk you under the table. Watch out yourself, you chicken!

Saying this, Barraou drew out and replunged his knife in its scabbard, and at this movement Amada uttered a cry of terror: the two men immediately expressed great concern, alarmed at her sudden turn, solicitous. She recovered in a moment, saying only: It's nothing, a sudden flutter of my heart. . . .

— You scared me, Jaquez said.

— You turned both head and heart, Juan murmured.

— Ah, Juan, but that was a neat thing to say. Clever.

— Oh, I didn't mean anything by it. It was nothing.

— What do you think he meant, Amada?

— My word, Barraou, but you are tiresome.

— I was just joking, you know. *Dexadas las burlas*. Come on, friends, let's have some full glasses, bumpers. Amada, would you go fetch some bottles of that Xerès wine in the cellar? No, never mind; don't bother. I'll go myself. You don't know where it is. Let me get it, Juan, and you can give me a good report on it. . . .

— Amada, my heart, without losing any time! We're here alone, quick, tell me if I owe this invitation to you.

— What do you mean?

— Being here. Sharing your. . . .

— No, no, you owe me nothing. I didn't ask him to invite you here, far from it! . . .

— So you are still surly to me? Come on, let me steal the kiss you refused the other night.

— No, I hate you, I detest you . . . and I even pity you.

— Oh, what luck!

— Listen, you are in great peril here. Watch out, and pray to God that he watch over you too.

— Tell me what you mean.

— I know no more. Be quiet or you are lost, Juan. I hear him.

— Here it is, the famous Xerès! Give me your glass and taste it.

— *Visa usted!* It's delicious!

— All right, let's get started. Double glasses. What's the matter, afraid of too much? Afraid of being a glutton?

— Juan Cazador is no novice at this. Better get your penalty ready, Barraou, I can see your eyes begin to glaze. . . .

What are you saying? Take care; he may have you sitting on a seesaw.

Barraou was, in fact, starting to get very drunk. He sang like a cradle-rocker, declaimed and struck the table, laughing loudly, recited prayers and told coarse jokes like the ones those Biscayan muledrivers make when excited, singing medleys of both Old and New Testaments. After fighting with himself like this for some time, with many indecencies that disgusted Amada, he fell across the table and passed out.

— We can't leave him here in this state. Help me, Cazador, help me lay him out on his mat. He'll sleep it off better there, the drunken villain. . . .

Barraou let himself be carried.

— Cazador, take his knife away from him, there, from his side; he could cut himself. We'll throw this cape on him. . . . What are you doing, Cazador? Don't cover his face like that, you will smother him! No, no, don't cover him like that, I tell you.

— What a foolish woman you are! . . . But forgive my saying that to you; I can't help it. Now, thanks to his drunkenness, we are free of his watching, and it's he himself who made this easy. Let me cover with kisses that hand that repulses me. Amada, don't be so sullen.

— Be silent! . . .

— Be kinder to one who loves you more than his own freedom.

— Stop, Cazador, I am the wife of Jaquez Barraou, your friend.

— Will you always be so hard on me? At our last meeting you left me grovelling at your feet rather than give me the least favor. You have made me miserable. Amada, you should be afraid of my violence! . . .

— *Alma de Dios*, save me. Stop it, Juan . . . I will call Barraou! . . .

— Well, wake him up, if you dare to, what's it to me? Call him if you want to. He's dead drunk.

Suddenly Barraou, throwing off the cape, stood up.

— So, coward! . . . You think then, you ruffian, that Barraou gets drunker than Cazador? Villain, you fell right into my snare; die!

Then he seized his rifle, taking aim at Cazador who, meanwhile, was already at the door. Amada, holding on to his arm, mercifully stopped him. He shook her off, seized a knife from the table and raised his arm to strike just as the door slammed, the blade sliding deep into the plank. Roaring oaths and foaming with rage, Barraou was in pursuit.

— Stop! Stop! Jaquez, stop! Amada begs you. Be merciful! Let him go!

But, without hearing her, Barraou, like a gust of wind, followed his nimble enemy, plunging into a cluster of trees in the next plantation. Amada unsteadily dragged herself back into the hut. Weeping, she accused herself of Juan's death. Nevertheless, we know that she was beyond reproach; she had given Juan not the least encouragement, she had always repulsed his designs on her; and moreover she had not loved him in the slightest degree.

But when the being for whom a woman has only the slightest sympathy suffers misery for her, nothing can prevent a kind of sweetness from flowering within her; she had no love for him, true, but she had great pity for his plight. She had scarcely given birth to the hope that Juan would escape from her husband's fury when the sound of a gunshot burst from the distance.

— There is no doubt about his fate now . . . *Santa Virgen,* she cried, giving way and falling to her knees; Oh Virgin Mary, have mercy on us. *Jesu Cristo,* who has redeemed all men, have pity on him! God of Mercy, grant me mercy at thy great tribunal!

And her voice fading away gradually, she remained sunk in anguish.

Suddenly she heard quick steps outside. Breathless, wildeyed, Barraou came in, dragging his carbine in his shoulder-belt.

— Get up, Amada; you can pray later. Get me some water.

She draws near to him, trembling, giving him a jug. Barraou turns up the sleeves of his jacket. Amada, seeing his two hands covered with blood, lets the basin fall and it breaks.

— Oh, Jaquez, you have killed him! . . .

— It's nothing. No, but I believed I killed him when he fell. Unfortunately, God didn't do me the favor. When he escaped my grip I ran after him. His wound is light. I swear by all the saints that I will have his life. Nothing is going to help him. . . . Amada, how tired I am . . . and you? Come, let us lie down in bed. I may find in your arms some rest, some peace.

— Jaquez, at least change this shirt; you smell of blood!

IV

At daybreak the next day, Monday, while Amada still slept, Barraou went to Havana. He could be seen every day in the neighborhood of Gideon Robertson's house. Four days and nights he prowled the village without success; without a doubt Juan's wound kept him to his bed.

At last, on the fatal Friday, Barraou saw him on the harbor, and followed him closely. When he stepped into a deserted alley, behind the fortress:

— Stop, villain! he shouted to him. I have found you at last!

— You were searching for me then? Here I am.

— Save yourself if you can!

And saying this, he threw himself upon Cazador like a hyena, drawing his cutlass. Juan eluded the stroke, and, drawing his own knife quickly, hacked at the forearm of Barraou, who thereupon seized him around the waist and stabbed him in the side. Desperately, Juan fell upon him, bit him on the cheek, tearing a ribbon of flesh which made bare his jawbone. Barraou spat foam and blood into his eyes.

And at that moment the eight o'clock Angelus bell tolled from the nearby convent; the two raging men broke from each other and fell to their knees.

Barraou.

The angel of the Lord declared unto Mary, and she conceived of the Holy Ghost.

Juan.

Hail Mary, full of grace! the Lord is with thee. . . .

Barraou.

Behold the handmaid of the Lord. Be it done unto me according to thy word.

Juan.

Hail Mary, full of grace! the Lord is with thee. . . .

Barraou.

And the Word was made flesh. And dwelt among us.

Juan.

Hail Mary, full of grace! the Lord is with thee . . . Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners, now and at the hour of our death. Amen.

— Let's go, Cazador. Get up! What are you doing still on your knees?

— I was praying for your soul.

— No need for that; I prayed for yours. Watch out!

And right away, he slashed him across the breast, the blood gushing far

out. Juan uttered a loud cry and fell upon one knee, holding Barraou around the legs. Barraou tore out his hair, striking him with redoubled fury across the loins, and, with a backhand stroke he stabbed him in the belly as if to degut him. Both of them now on the ground, they rolled in the dirt, sometimes with Jaquez on top, sometimes Juan. They groaned and twisted. Then one of them raised his arm and broke his blade on a stone of the wall, and the other plunged his own blade into his neck. Slashed, covered with blood, they emitted the most frightful dying gasps, seeming no more than a mass of gore that ran and clotted.

Before long, thousands of gnats and obscene beetles crawled in and out of their nostrils and their mouths, and wallowed in the pustulence of their wounds.

Towards nightfall, a passing merchant stumbled across the two corpses and saying, Ah, they're only niggers, passed on.

VESALIUS

I

At that time of the peaceful night when cities seem like necropoli, a certain winding alley in Madrid, like a dark artery, still beat with a strong and feverish pulse. This somnambulic by-street of the sleepy city was known as the *Callejuela casa del Campo*. At one end rose a fine house, the home of a foreigner, a Fleming. The glass windows shown splendidly from the fires of the interior and reflected them in pieces on the blackish front of the house opposite which appeared in the darkness to be sprinkled with the mouths of furnaces, blazing panes, and golden networks.

The door of this house was wide open, making visible a vast porch with a groined vaulting and hanging keystones, and, at the foot of a grand stone staircase, a balustrade with openwork cutouts like the ivory of a fan sown with fragrant flowers. It was, humorously put, a carnival of walls, all their faces falsely masked under tapestries, velvets, and glittering lamp-sconces.

Knights in halberds walked up and down before the entrance.

Every now and then, when the clamor of the crowd of people outside abated, one could hear a sweet dance music falling the length of the staircase, and making the vault speak sonorously.

All the palace was feasting except the mob of commoners howling around the doorway; they were the organs of a temple, beggars in a church plaza. Sometimes frightening huzzas, sometimes derisive laughs and the noise of brass instruments continued from group to group in the darkness, and then died away like walking devils laughing from stormy clouds.

— The doctor made a good choice for his wedding day, Saturday, witches-night, a sorcerer couldn't have done better, said a toothless hag crouching in the slope of a window.

— You're right, dearie; and, as I love God, if all his dead dogs came back here, they'd dance all around Madrid.

— But what then? said the other. If all the poor folk this butcher of the dead has picked to pieces were paid off by God, would that give them back their skins?

— They tell me, said a little bearded man buried in the crowd and raising himself on tiptoe, that he often dines on cutlets that don't come from the butchershops.

— You're right! It's true!

— No, no, it's false! cried a tall young man, hanging from the trellis of a window, it's false. Ask Rivadeneyra, the butcher.

— Oh, be quiet, will you? cried another, dressed in a brown cape and with a sombrero over his eyes. Don't you recognize him? It's Henrique Zapata, the apprentice skinner. I'll bet if you grope under his doublet you'll find some hand and some leg.

— What an idea! The old cannibal marries a young girl! said the old hag. If I were King Philip I'd put a stop to the ogre. . . .

— That's all very well, said the stranger in the brown cape, but the fact is that Philip protects this Flemish dog. Why, only yesterday, Torriijo, the baker from *La Cebada,* disappeared; he's gone for sure into the meat pie at the wedding. It's horrible, it ought to be stopped!

— The king had better protect him, muttered some people; he ought to be burned alive.

— Christians! This man is a heretic, a necromancer, a man from Flanders! He deserves to die, said some kindly monks from the convent of Our Lady of Atocha, newly-founded by the Inquisitor-General, Father Garcia de Loaysa, Archbishop of Seville, and Juan Hurtado de Mendoza, confessor of the Emperor Carlos V.

— To death! screamed the mob, pushing back the soldiers.

— To death! howled the monks who, crucifix in fist, egged them on. To death! Put him to the flames!

Suddenly the coming storm broke. Yells of fury and death rained down, the rabble jammed into the porch, one monk brandishing a torch overhead; but the soldiers, aided by Zapata and other students, fought back stoutly, forcing the unleashed mob into retreat, bellowing their rage. The tumult redoubled. They tolled the bells, striking swords and making a din with copper pots. It was a clashing thunder, stupefying, a murderous symphony.

II

In the salons within, hilarity real or bantering prevailed: nobody bothered himself about the noise outside, the custom being to render similar noisy treatment within at the wedding of an old man and a young girl.

At the entrance of the gallery which served as a dressing room, a brown cape was hanging. The bride was dancing with a handsome partner the guests had up to now caught only a glimpse of; they seemed more im-

mersed in their whispering than in their dancing. In the other corner of the room the groom paid court to a little girl, one of the bride's relatives.

The big room ended in a loge opening onto a courtyard crowded with guests, ladies and men old and young who, under the pretext of getting some fresh night air, were there largely to give free rein to their spite and satire. It was a contest of conversational give and take; an orchestra of fluty voices, or underhanded, raucous, or quavering ones; a collection of pretty faces and expressions wrinkled with horselaughs or sharp with malignant smiles, a keyboard of treachery, mouths crenellated like a dungeon, or toothed like the cornice of the vault.

— Who is that man the bride is dallying with?

— Now, *senorica,* you are being too unkind!

— Ha! Ha! Look over there at Don Vesalius, he's like a pair of stilts in those long breeches and those black doublets. By Allah! don't his legs in those boots look like pens in an inkstand? Look at him skipping around with Amalia de Cardenas, that plump little thing, so fresh and rosy. Doesn't he look like old Saturn himself?

— Or Death, making Life dance.

— Holbein's dance.

— Tell me, Olivares, what's he going to do with his girl?

— Give her an anatomy lesson.

— There, the sarabande is over; look at him kissing her hand.

— This isn't a bourgeoise affair; it's a very stylish hop.

— Where's the bride now?

— And where's her handsome new beau?

— Don Vesalius is looking for her, he's scared, the old dog.

— Go ask the old sorcerer where Maria is this very moment.

— Friend, never put your finger between hammer and anvil.

The dance was resumed. Vesalius asked Amalia again, and she made a little pout, laughing behind his back.

The bride was no longer in the salon, nor was the brown cape hanging in the dressing room, and in a dark corridor one could hear steps and then this:

— Put this cape around you, Maria. Quick, let's leave!

— Alderan, I cannot.

— You, the prey of this Vesalius? No, never; you belong to me. When I was gone, you jilted me, I know. I came here post-haste this very morning, I join this party, I find you alone by yourself, and I ask you to leave, and now you refuse. Maria, you're deluding yourself. Come, there is still time, break this degrading tie. We shall be happy together. I'll be everything to you, forever! Come. . . .

— Alderan, it was my family that put this yoke on me and I must submit to it. But you will always be my love, and I your lover. What does this old man matter? He's no more than a valet to me, a curtain that will veil our secret love. Leave me, leave me. Goodbye!

— So you don't want to, Maria. All right! Go dirty yourself with this old man. Do as you wish. I will go my way.

And, pushed from his arms, she fled back to the salon. He stayed as if overcome for a moment, then, cursing, disappeared in the darkness.

In the meantime, the crowd was swelling like a pond in a storm. The tumult increased in intensity, the bacchanal became terrifying. The populace had regained its boldness, laughing at the halberdiers. Curses and shouts roared out anew. Suddenly the crowd parted to give way to a dishevelled woman who howled like a dog at the moon: it was the wife of the baker, Torrija, calling for her husband, and demanding vengeance.

— It's the baker's wife, La Torrija, was heard from all sides. The wolf-pack, softened to pity for moment, became silent as the woman sobbed and raved. Then the man in the brown cape, mounting the top steps, yelled out: Friends, let's have justice here! Vengeance! Death to Vesalius! Death to the necromancer!

The answer was a hailstorm of stones thrown at the windows, and the soldiers, who backed away toward the staircase. The rabble vomited itself into the porch, threw itself against the pikes that tore and bruised it. Seized with a panic terror, the crowd poured down the stairs again, out the windows and doors.

— In the name of the king, withdraw!

— Down with the Flemish dog!

The royal police marched into the porch on horseback, a rain of missiles welcoming them, and they replied with a volley that threw back the most daring of the mob. The man in the brown cape yelled and clutched his flank. Both wounded and unscathed took to flight, only five bodies remained on the ground. Suddenly, the palace and the street became still. The night watchmen carried off the bodies of the vanquished. The trembling guests made their escape at the back. The doors were bolted, the lamps put out, and a scene of death followed a scene of life. And in one wing where Vesalius had his rooms, two windows alone shown in the darkness.

III

Through the smashed panel of a salon door Maria had seen the man in the brown cape struck down, and at his heartbreaking cry she had swooned. They had carried her to her room where she lay stretched out for a long

time, oblivious to everything. Vesalius, on his knees beside her, weeping and shaking, kissed her hands and her face.

— How are you now, Maria, my dearest love?

— Better. Is everything quiet again?

— Yes! The ugly mob has had its senses restored to it. Can one imagine what these people have against me: me, peaceful and retiring, quietly passing my days in the study of anatomy for the benefit of humanity, for the progress of scientific knowledge, for the glory of God? They demand my head, they believe me to be a sorcerer; if anyone disappears in the city they say I kidnapped him for my experiments. The great mass of the people will always be ugly and beastly. You see then the fate reserved for all those who devote themselves to human welfare, to all those who find new ways, new ideas. They crucified Jesus of Nazareth, and laughed at Columbus. Yes, the masses will always be ugly and cruel, cruel and ungrateful!

— Gloomy thoughts, Vesalius; but, frankly, this brawl was not made to gain their love.

— Oh, after all, what does it matter to me so long as I have your own love, Maria. You do love me, don't you, a little?

— You still can ask me that?

— Maria, I know that I am old, and when one is old, one doubts. I know that I am without much amorousness, worn out, skinny, nearly like the skeletons in my workshop; but my heart is young and full of ardor! See, the passion I have for you is not at all a rancid one. I bring to you a new spirit under an old cover. In my life I have met many women, but not one, I swear, has lit such fire in me as you have. What a fatality, to have come to decreptitude in order to understand love and its violences! Maria, you must get used to seeing the rough coffer that imprisons my youthful spirit; sap mounts even in the wood of the hundred-year-old oak.

Maria threw an arm around his neck and pressed her mouth to his bald head and white beard. Vesalius wept with happiness.

Bedtime, that hour so frenzied, beating with shame and voluptousness, that overwhelms all humanity, that hour that fires and nourishes desires, where deceptions or beauties are disclosed, that too often reveals the most painful contrasts, and at times is even fatal. . . .

The bride gracefully took off her wedding dress and her jewels, like a rose shedding its perianthal petals: a Castillian beauty such as one sees in dreams! . . .

Vesalius awkwardly took off his clothes and revealed his ugly frame: a mummy unwrapping its bandages!

The lamp wavered, the curtains jingled on their rods, and a deep still-

ness followed, sometimes interrupted; but, for all that, one could not hear Maria utter a sound. . . .

But, far into the night, caresses and kisses unanswered, and afterwards murmurs and exclamations of disappointment, and the wise old professor of anatomy said, trembling:

— Oh, Maria, don't think it's my impotence; it's the very strength of my love that hurts me, your beauty makes me ashamed of myself, it seems I'm touching something consecrated. I love you so much, Maria, so much! But don't start believing it's impotence! Tomorrow morning, I'll show you twenty authors, Mundinus, Galianus, Gonthierus Andernaci, my master, chief physician of Francis the First, you will see that, on the contrary, my great power, my excess of love. . . .

One can believe, though, that the excess of his love was not allayed, for scarcely had a few days passed, when he installed Maria in some rooms in an isolated part of the palace with an aged devoted housekeeper the professor had metamorphosed into a sort of chaperon for his wife. Save at mealtimes, the owl didn't meet his turtledove; and they treated each other with the cold courtesy that stranger has for stranger.

Vesalius married his studies anew, and, bent over his researches, passed back and forth from dissecting room to laboratory.

There is a lesson here for the young and virile and those ripe for love: if you have an ardently passionate nature, it is not necessary, if you can choose, to marry a learned doctor, a member of the Academy. . . .

IV

About an olympiade after these events, Dona Maria, who, contrary to her custom, had not appeared at their meal table for some time, sent for Vesalius. He repaired to her at once. She was lying on her bed, pallid, wasted, eyes dark-circled, faint-voiced. Vesalius seated himself beside her in an armchair and bent his head to hear her. Maria, feeling his hot breath on her face, raised her fringed eyes, recognized him, and gasped in an agonizing tone:

— You are my husband, Andrea Vesalius. I feel myself failing little by little. Soon I shall be at the feet of God, my severe judge. I am unchaste, I have sinned against you! But the sinner asks your forgiveness. Do not inveigh against me. You are a just man, you are my good husband and master. Let me put myself into your hands now.

— Senora, you are not as fallen as you seem to believe. It is just that you are in a gloomy mood.

— No one feels his ill better than the patient. Something cries within

me that my end is near. Listen to me and forgive me; perhaps I can even be excused in some ways. We two took a vow at the marriage altar, but we both have been unfaithful to each other; I, because I was young and brimming with life, and you, because your hair was white with study and your body feebled with labor. Oh, what a misfortune it is to be cursed with the passion of youth! Oh, Vesalius, if you only knew what it is to be a young girl, if you knew what a young girl feels within herself, you would pardon me! Listen to me solemnly: I tell you that I have committed adultery, I have basely deceived you. I am truly guilty. Andrea, I brought my lovers into your house, I made them drink your wine, I stuffed them with food from your table; and while you were plunged in study or sleep, we laughed at you; our foul iniquity made mockery of your good nature; you were the food of our derision. You see, it was infamous! . . . Even this bed on which I am dying still shakes with our lust; and now God calls me to him. I am dying. Do not reject me. . . .

Her voice choked up with sobs; then, after a moment of silence, she resumed in a clear voice:

— And yet, I have been bitterly punished, atrociously so! An adulterous woman should be cast off, yes. She must drag her shame with her. Since we married, I have had three lovers, but, actually, I have possessed each one for one night only. When I gave in to their nagging, when I surrendered my body to them, and a part of this bed. . . . At daybreak, when I awoke, I was alone, and I never saw them again, never! Can anyone be punished more severely? Crime is tied to punishment, crime calls for supplication. You must be merciful to me, Andrea! I loved the last one with a desperate passion, a love simply without bounds. His loss is killing me. Forsaken by him, I feel that I am dying. Now, I have told you everything: in the name of Our Lady of Atocha, in the name of Saint Isadore of Labrador, in the name of your patron, Saint Andrew, grant forgiveness to a poor weak girl who has so wronged you, and purify her with your blessing . . . she is dying. . . . Forgive her. . . .

And taking his hand, she covered it with kisses and tears. He pushed her back roughly, repelling her siege, and said in a tight voice:

— Get up, Maria, and follow me.

— I cannot, I am too weak.

— Get up, I say, and follow me.

Maria stood up with great difficulty, drew on a dressing gown, and unsteadily followed him. They went down the great staircase, crossed the courtyard, and opened a low door, pierced with barbacanes which opened onto a small building lit by stone baywindows. A kind of wicket closed behind them, and the bolts inside grated in their hasps.

V

We are in the laboratory or workshop of Vesalius: a large square room of cloistral arches, thick high walls, and flagstones. A few greasy and dirty tables, some benches, two or three washtubs, some chests and cupboards, these were the only furnishings. Some kettles were hanging around the chimney whose mantelpiece rose to the high vaulting; from its pothook a cauldron was suspended over a fierce fire. The benches were weighed down with pieces of newly-cut cadavers; underfoot one stepped upon strips of flesh, amputated limbs; and under the professor's sandals muscles and cartilages were pulverized. On the door a skeleton was hung up which, when it stirred, clacked like the wooden candlesticks of a chandelier in a north wind. The ceilings and walls were covered with bones, spines, and carcasses, some of them human, but mostly of monkeys and pigs, animals that most nearly resembled the human frame, all serving the studies of Vesalius, the first to make of anatomy a real science, and the first to dissect human bodies, even of orthodox Christians, and to work on them publicly. It is true that Mundinus, the Boulogne professor, in 1315, had presented the spectacle of three dissected human skeletons to the world. This kind of scandal was not repeated, the church forbidding it as a sacrilege. Frightened by the papal edict, Mundinus obtained little benefit from his researches. The touch or even the sight of a dead body, among the ancients, was a contamination that lustral ablutions and other expiations could scarcely wipe away. In the middle ages the dissection of a body made in the image and likeness of God was a shameful impiety, worthy of death by hanging.

VI

— Now, what are you going to do with me, Vesalius? Maria asked, weeping. What do you want of me? I cannot stay here, these decaying odors are smothering me, open the door, let me out, I'm suffering so. . . .

— No, what do I care? Listen to me now: you have had three lovers, haven't you?

— Yes, my lord.

— You got them drunk with my wine, didn't you?

— Yes, my lord.

— Well, it wasn't pure wine: your housekeeper poured a narcotic into it, some opium. You slept deeply for a long time, didn't you?

— Yes! And when I awoke, I was alone.

— You were alone?

— Yes, and never saw them again.

— Never! Well, but come then. . . .

And holding her by the arm, he led her to the far end of the room. There he opened a great chest, and in it a skeleton was hooked, the pallor ivory, all its parts intact.

— Do you recognize this man?

— What, these bones? . . .

— Do you recall this doublet, this brown cape?

— The cape of the cavalier Alderan!

— Look at it closely, senora . . . with whom you danced on our wedding night. . . .

— Alderan! Maria uttered a scream that could call the dead.

— At least, lady, you see that all this is for the benefit of science, he said to her coldly. You understand, for science we have the greatest obligations.

Then, sneering, he led her to a kind of reliquary or cage decorated with painted glass through which could be seen a human skeleton marvellously preserved; the arteries were filled with a red liquid, and the veins with a blue. This bony frame seemed covered with a silken network. To study it was easy; some tufts of beard and hair still stuck to it.

— Here now, lady, doesn't this stir your memory somewhat? Look at the fine beard, and his blond hair.

— Fernando! You killed him?

— Up to the present, a living body has never been dissected so as to show the blood's circulation; but thanks to you, my lady, Vesalius has lifted the veil, and made himself eternally famous!

Then, holding her by the hair, he dragged her to an enormous chest, the lid of which he raised with difficulty.

— And lastly, look at this. It's your last, isn't it? . . .

The chest contained large bottles filled with substances in which portions of flesh were soaking.

— Pedro! Pedro! Then you killed him too?

— Yes! He too.

She fell to the floor with a frightful sob.

The next day a funeral procession left the house. The grave-diggers who lowered the casket into the vault of the church of Sainte-Marie-La-Mayor remarked to each other that it was very heavy, and that it made a noise, when being let down, that was not the noise of a casket with a body in it.

And the following night, through the barbacanes of the door, one could see Vesalius in his laboratory performing a dissection on the beautiful corpse of a girl whose long blond hair fell from the worktable to the floor.

THREE-FINGERED JACK

I

— Abigail, Abigail, make a story, tell us a tale! . . . a crowd of children cried as, ebony, ivory, woodcolored, or copperskinned, sucking long sugar-canes, they played on the gravel at the feet of a young black girl. Abigail —it was the name given her by her Puritan mistress—was an artlessly pretty girl, dressed in simple linen. She sat on the ground near the door of a handsome house, stroking a white parrot perched on her finger, humming to it a creole tune of which, surely, she did not know the meaning: *Fly away, Becky, to the white skies.* Sweet and a little melancholy, head bent to one side, she appeared to be immersed in those instinctive dreams of joys to come which all girls indulge in.

— Abigail, make us a story, the little children kept on. We promise to behave, we won't fight with Johnnie Blackheat any more!

— But children, she said, arousing herself from her sweet meditation, I don't know any story.

— Yes, yes, yes, you do, the one about the picaroons, you know? the ones who carried you off . . . and the obi-man, you know? . . .

In a low voice she commenced to tell them, the while she passed her fingers through the long white plumes of the parrot, and the children sat beside her with their great black eyes and teethy mouths open.

Once upon a time we were at war, and the picaroons of San Domingo often overran the island at night, waking the sleeping blacks in their huts, dragging them away to be sold in the slave markets of their country. This time, despite the vigilance of the ships guarding the coast, they crept up a creek and ventured as far as Saint Anne's. Once there, armed to the teeth, they wormed themselves stealthily into the plantation. Already they had carried off about a hundred blacks onto their sloops when they came to the house of Abigail, your nurse, who always loves you when you are nice and good. A couple of men, who looked like monsters in the dark, broke in the door, grabbed me while I was sleeping, and dragged me down to the river.

Now notice, my dears, that these cruel men were whites, and even

so, they spoke like growling dogs, all their words ending in a or o. The sloops, filled with weeping and moaning blacks despite their gags, were ready to sail. I myself was in a dinghy with the last picaroons staying as lookouts. We hardly started to get away when we heard a noise like that of a body falling into the water, and right away we could see a black swimming toward us. *Que biba?* the picaroons yelled, and I think this jabber meant *Watch Out!*

Recklessly, the man swam between the waves, and when he seized the side of one of the boats, one of the savages raised a hatchet to strike him down when, with all his might, he jerked the boat sideways, overturning it and throwing everybody into the water. I rose to the surface right away and suddenly felt myself seized around the waist. Carried in this way by the big black who had overturned the dinghy, I was stretched out on the shore, half-drowned, while the good young man rubbed my hands and wiped my face.

— You have saved me, I owe my life to you, I cried, coming to.

— Few people owe me anything, he replied in a low voice.

— But let me kiss your hands, or at least tell me your name so that I can bless it.

— My name . . . you would shudder to hear it! . . .

Suddenly he stopped, as the noise of musketry and steps approached: it was the colonists who, awakened by the picaroons and the kidnapped blacks, came tardily running up to the rescue.

— Goodbye, goodbye, the unknown whispered, shaking my hands in his rough paws.

— But your name, please. I am Abigail, daughter of John Fox!

— To most men I am less than a hunted lynx: *I am Three-Fingered Jack of Libanus*.

— Three-Fingered Jack, the obi-man . . . the voodooist?

— Yes, the obi-man!

I cried out in terror. He disappeared into the obscurity of the night, and I remained dumbfounded. All the colonists were rushing toward the river bank, but there was no boat left with which they could give chase, and furiously they fired more fusillades. Far away, the retreating pirates answered with guffaws of contempt that covered the howls of the poor blacks huddled in their boats. . . .

The children sat listening to her with their big eyes and teethy mouths; and at that moment a mulatto, appearing suddenly from behind the house, come over to her and said: Abigail, meet me tonight at the three palms near the fountain.

II

It was late at night, and the whole world, sky and land, was plunged in the blankness of sleep and silence; one could hear only the scattered melodies of the tiny birds that sing to the heavens when the earth is deaf. Under the three palms of the fountain a voice was saying:

— Abigail, let's rest awhile: Love, love is all right, but . . . I am ambitious. I sent for you tonight to tell you, for underneath my carefree self my heart is gnawed with discontent. In my veins runs a debased blood, and despite this strong back that bends under the whips of stupid whites who gloat when I sweat and make fun of me when I sink gasping with weariness, I have a head that thinks. I have suffered enough! This coward's life kills me, I want another. This slave wants his wrongs righted, and to break his chains. I am proud, you see, I am ambitious, something within me drives me on, slave that I am, to rule: I dream of royalty, of rich clothes, a sword, a horse. . . .

— Ah, Quasher, your only kingship is misfortune!

If I had the chance, if opportunity should come, I might become rich, great, stuffed with gold. Those who repulse me today might give me their hand tomorrow, and in my turn I could spit in their faces!

— Ah, Quasher, stay as you are: wealth makes cruelty.

— There is a price, an enormous price, on the head of the obi-man, Three-Fingered Jack . . . and I will have it! . . .

— You are mad, Quasher. To attack a voodooist like Three-Fingered Jack is folly.

— I know that Jack and his obi are strong, but Quasher and his heart are strong too; besides, I am resigned to death, more life, freedom.

— No, no, Quasher, I beg you, take care. If you love me, remain as you are. The poor alone are happy, happier than their masters. Let us remain where fate has placed us.

— What can you dread, Abigail? We will get back our own, we will be redeemed, we shall be free. We will have our own house, our own slaves, we will love each other forever, alone together, always, to live as we please. Can't you picture it, this dream . . . to be free!

— Dear Quasher, yes, I know, you have boasted so often of freedom to me; but, when you become rich, I may lose you, you may repulse this poor negress who loves you so much, you will want a white woman. . . .

— Listen, Abigail, a woman who makes a strong man weak is contemptible. Do you think that your charms are strong enough to keep me here? Do you think that your tears are going to change me? No! Your embraces are in vain. Quasher has said it, Quasher will do it. Have confidence in him, he will be faithful to you throughout his life, as God

is his judge. Have no suspicion or jealousy, and he will place his wealth at your feet. . . . Well, weep, weep, you won't change me. Goodbye! . . .

III

Left alone, Abigail rose suddenly, moved by a deep distrust and a feeling that her lover would be lost to her. She feared for him, understanding so well his proud aspiration and his audacity. If he lost his life in such a combat, or even perhaps, winning the big award promised for Jack's head, he should change all his ways, and if, puffed up with vanity and opulence, he turned away from her, spurning her, a poor black slave, in preference to one of those great and fine ladies outside their lives, who peddles their dry hearts, and their mean and venal spirits to all men who brought them riches as a scorpion gets its prey. . . . Poor woman, she sensed her inevitable abandonment. The thought tore her with grief.

With a sudden resolve, instead of taking the road that led back to her house, she plunged into the savannahs, walking towards the mountains without stopping, hiding at the approach of islanders, and especially avoiding the runaway slaves and the cudjos. It was a laborious and tormenting pilgrimage, by hills, hollows, ravines, virgin woods. Her aching feet could hardly bear the touch of the ground. She had hardly eaten anything save some wild apples, and she had drunk water from the springs where she bathed her feet swollen from the burning earth.

On the third day, at that hour solemnly termed *crépuscle* by composers of romantic piano pieces, and simply *entre chien et loup* by Madame de Sévigné: at that hour when nature begins to spread her evening gloom, and, mysteriously, to pull down her veil like a beauty lowering the veil of her hat, rendering her face doubtful to the gaze of the curious, at the hour when colors fade and contours are defined like phantasmagoric shadows on the high-warp of a blue tapestry. . . . By a steep and stony path edged, or rather blocked, with larches, Abigail, bending her head under the low branches, crawled like those poor travelers one sees coming into towns at night searching with weary eyes for the consoling sign of an inn. Sweat ran down her face and she breathed heavily and groaned every time the stones cut her feet. The path led directly to a great boulder and went around it. At the summit of the boulder someone less weary than she would have noticed a tall blackish figure, motionless, seeming like the mast of a sailing ship, or like a menhir of the druids in ancient Gaul. Abigail was scarcely three hundred steps from this inscrutable being, when it was suddenly lit up by a flash accompanied by a gunshot that echoed over the plain. She uttered a loud cry and fell to the earth. With the speed of

a greyhound, the black gnome leaped down from the rock, flying straight to Abigail, and at the sight of her uttered one word: A woman! He lifted her up and stretched her on the grass. This phantom was simply a negro of great stature, carrying a long carbine like a Bedouin, with a big knife and a cutlass in his belt.

— You are wounded! he cried, striving to soften his hoarse voice.

But Abigail remained mute in suffering; the ball had hit her in the flesh of the leg. The black, throwing aside his robe, and pressing his lips to the wound, sucked out the flowing blood. A witness to this frightening scene would have thought that he was looking at a vampire feasting on a woman. Then, pouring out some brandy from a gourd onto some leaves, he made a compress of them to her wound, and he rubbed her temples with the rest of the liquor. Soon, Abigail reopened her eyes and looked around her.

— Don't be afraid, woman, I am your friend.

— And yet you would kill me, she said, getting up and leaning with her back against a tree.

— Don't think that, woman. Jack has so many enemies he cannot let anyone unknown to him come near his hiding place. Some flickering lights deceived me, I thought you were a man. Forgive me, there are some men I hate, cruel as they are cowardly. You can console yourself that the wound is not serious.

— Aren't you called Jack the Three-Fingered? . . . Thank God, I have found you at last! I searched for you. . . .

— For me, and why?

— I am Abigail, have you no remembrance of me?

—No.

— Don't you recall the woman you saved, two years ago, from the picaroons who were carrying her away?

— What, it is you then?

— Jack, there is a price on your head.

— I know it.

— I owe my life to you, and I have come here to repay the debt. Be on your guard always, because Quasher wants the reward for your blood, and he will come here some day and kill you.

— To kill me? Me? repeated Jack, carelessly.

— Keep away from him, but do not kill him, I beg you.

— Woman, I must thank you. Forget the wrong I have done you.

— You ask pardon of me? But I owe my life to you!

— Now, what shall I do with you? Do you want to remain here?

— It's three days since I left my master's house. He must be very disturbed at my absence. If I were not wounded. . . .

— Oh, if it's only that. Look, take this as a remembrance of me, and wear it always. It will keep you safe from harm.

It was a small bag containing an obi charm in it. Then gently raising Abigail, he hoisted her across his shoulders and went down the path under the mohagany trees. Dawn was breaking and everyone still slept in the town of Saint Anne's when Jack and Abigail appeared in front of the house. He carried her as easily as a woman carries a jug to a fountain. He let her down at the entrance.

— Farewell, Abigail!

— Farewell, Jack. God keep you always!

With his cutlass the obi-man knocked loudly on the door, and then, swift as a stag, he fled.

Hatsarmaveth Abraham Westmacot came to the door with others, and seeing a woman streched out, he uttered a cry.

— Don't be afraid, master; it is your servant, Abigail! . . . Yes. . . . Some slaves, after having wounded me, took me away to the mountains. . . .

IV

Before we go any further, since I have just been speaking of obi, obi-men, and obi charms, it seems necessary that I explain to the European reader just what is meant by these terms.

Doctor Mosely, to whom I owe this Jamaican story, seriously pretends, in his *Treatise on Sugar,* that obi and other such tricks and frauds were the only examples of African folklore he had found the meaning of which had never been demonstrated. Ah, Doctor, you were not a negrophile! Poor man, he hardly suspected that, in writing of Jamaican sugar cane and Jack the obi-man, that posterity would be questioning him about them in 1832!

Generally speaking, the word obi designates both the magic and the magician; nevertheless, in the English colonies, one uses the word obi-man or voodooist. . . . I will offer no other etymological probability on the origin and significance of this word imported by negroes from Africa into the world of Columbus than this: *nobi,* in Arabic, means prophet, and certainly there is a great rapport between these two words. . . . After all, I sincerely believe that this etymology sounds better than some others, even those of Voltaire, who pretends that the word boulevard comes from boules, balls, and vard or vert, which means green. . . .

The science of obi is a very extensive one, more so than that of phar-

macology; if there were an examination to pass to become an obi-man, some of our brilliant druggists would have a hard time of it. . . . Obi, which has as its objective the casting of spells and the affliction of sickness, languors, and melancholy, is made of mud from graveyards, hair, sharks-teeth and other teeth, blood, feathers, eggshells, wax figures, bird's hearts, roots, herbs, and bushes yet unknown to Europeans, that the ancients employed for the same purpose. Certain mixtures of these are burned, or sunk deep into the ground, or hung by a chimney, or placed under the doorsill of whomever is to undergo the spell, to the accompaniment of imprecations and incantations, spoken at midnight, having regard for the phases and aspects of the moon. . . A negro who believes himself to be under an obi spell applies to an obi-man or an obi-woman, just as a sick person, the patient of a doctor, goes to a druggist. . . . Some hypocritical laws have been devised in the West Indies to punish with death the practice of voodooism: they are useless. You stupid legislators, aren't these bloody laws nullified since the origin of voodoo ideas is in the very center of Africa from which you harvest your slaves?

Our Doctor Mosely tells us in his treatise that he saw the obi of a famous negro, a robber as he was termed, Three-Fingered Jack, the terror of Jamaica in 1780 and 1781, which the slaves who had killed him, had brought to him. It was the endpiece of a goat's horn, filled with dirt from a grave, blood from a black cat, human fat, all ground up into a paste. . . . He never had accomplices or associates. Once, in the woods of Libanus where he had his lair, some fugitive negroes found him; but, because he had put the mark of his obi on them, they were powerless to betray him. He disdained all help, trusted nobody, he went on his forays alone, fought his own fights, killing all those in pursuit, and climbed higher than Mount Spartacus. His spells not only terrorized the blacks, but many whites as well. . . . Give a dog a bad name and hang him, says the proverb. Clamor and outcry were raised against the cruel sorceror, and nearly all marital mishaps were attributed to the spells he cast on wedding days. God knows, though, that poor Jack had enough sins on his head without being charged with the crimes of others. . . . But in spite of his hatred for whites, it could never be said of him that he had harmed a child or forced a woman.

V

But, after all, Jack was indeed destined to die. Attracted by the reward offered by Governor Dalling in a proclamation dated October 12, 1780, two colored men, Quasher, whom we have already met, and Sam, son of Captain

Davy, with a party, went out to search for him. Before going, Quasher had himself baptized, and changed his name to James Reeder.

They scoured the woods for three weeks, vainly attempting to block off the farthest and most inaccessible part of the island to which Jack had retired, entirely removed from all human contact.

Jack was one of those strong organizations, one of those forceful minds born to dominate, who, stifling in the cramped cage of life where fate had thrown them, into this society which would bend them to its will, shrinking them to vulgar size, break forever with men they loathe if they do not break with life. Three-Fingered Jack was a lycanthrope!

Weary of this kind of warfare, Reeder and Sam resolved to track Jack down in his very lair, to take him by storm or to die in the attempt. Leaving the others, they took with them a plucky boy who was a sharp-shooter with a rifle. These fearless three, that old Doctor Mosely flattered himself he knew so well, had hardly started on the way when their crafty eyes noticed, by the rumpled grass and shrubbery, that someone had passed down this way a little while before. They followed carefully, noiselessly, and soon perceived some smoke rising. Ready for combat even before Jack saw them, they were upon him. He had been roasting some plantains on a little fire at the mouth of his cavern. There followed a scene in which extraordinary actors played extraordinary roles.

Jack, whose face was savage and terrible, simply told them he would kill them. Instead of drawing his gun, however, Reeder replied that Jack's obi was powerless to harm him because he was now baptized and had a new name. Jack knew Reeder, and, as if paralyzed, left his two guns on the ground and held only his cutlass. Some years before this, these two had had a desperate fight in the forest in which Jack had lost two fingers, and this was the origin of his name. Jack had beaten him then, and would have killed him and his aids, if they had not all taken to flight. Now, to do justice to Jack, he could easily have killed Reeder and Sam if he wished, for they were frightened with his look and the terrible sound of his voice. And he could have done it also because they had no magic means of protection such as he had, and had to fight just as ferocious men. Jack was dumbfounded at Reeder's statement, for he had himself predicted that the white obi would prevail over Jack's obi.

Without further parley, Jack, cutlass in hand, threw himself to the bottom of a precipice behind the cavern. Like a bulldog, and with his own knife in hand, Reeder threw himself headlong after Jack; the fall, straight down, was nearly thirty meters in depth; both men held onto their cutlasses. It was a theatre in which two of the toughest fighters ever to meet outside of four walls commenced a bloody struggle.

The boy, who had been behind the others, now appeared at the top of the gulf, and, during the fight, fired at Jack, hitting him in the belly. Sam, with a cool craft, took a roundabout way down to the scene of battle, and when he got there, Jack and Reeder had rolled down over another precipice on the flank of the mountain, both of them losing their knives in the fall. Sliding after them, Sam, too, lost his cutlass in the bushes. Jack's wound was a deep one, and he was in violent agony. Sam had fallen just in time to save Reeder, for Jack, with a giant's grip, had seized him by the throat. Reeder's hand was nearly sliced off, and Jack was streaming with blood from shoulder and belly. Both were covered with curdling gore and gashes, and it was at this point that Sam became arbiter and made the decision. He began to batter Jack with a piece of rock. And now at last, when the lion was down, the two tigers began to crush the head with stones.

Soon after, the boy found the path to join them. With his cutlass he cut off Jack's head and the three-fingered hand, and they were taken to Morantbay. Once there, the three showed their trophies in a bucket of rum, and, followed by an immense throng of blacks, no longer in terror of Jack and his voodoo power, took them to San Yago de la Vego, Kingstown, to claim the reward promised by the royal proclamation.

VI

When Reeder and Sam passed through Spanishtown, I was there staying at the home of two very old women, sisters almost centenarians, daughters of Spanish colonists born long after the capture of the island by Admiral Pen in 1655. Alone, and like twin monuments of the Spanish domination, a species of incarnated landmarking columns, they were still testimony of transition, as druid dolmens remind us of our Gallic forebears who now form the vegetative couch which covers the soil of France like a manure. These saintly dowagers, although receiving pensions from the government they mortally hated, never wanted to speak the language of the conquerors, and had passed, without mixing with them, across several generations, speaking always their own divine Castilian tongue.

As if making a religious pilgrimage to old ruins, I had come to greet them. My visit filled them with joy, rejuvenating them nearly a century, awakening in them a thousand tender and sad memories. They made me stay with them awhile, for I was like a son to them. They told me all the old things over again, all they knew in the world, showing off their wares in broad day and, no doubt, for the last time, the gilded scraps of their memory, shaking the dusty pages of this book of merry lore which

time was gnawing like a stupid rat, and which was soon to close itself with their lives in the grave.

We were sitting near a window gossiping when from far away we heard a tumult and the sound of muskets firing. Out the window, we could see our heroes, Reeder and Sam, marching in triumph, carrying on the top of a pike the head and hand of the luckless Jack. They were followed by a great concourse of people.

Not far from the house of my two old friends, a young negress who appeared to be wounded in the leg, was sitting on a rock, lost in thought. Awakened rudely by the sound of the crowd and the guns, she turned toward the coming procession, and remained motionless like a she-wolf that has scented her prey. Just as Reeder passed, she called out to him.

— Quasher! Quasher!

Reeder, who had spotted her from afar, proudly turned away.

— Quasher! Have you forgotten Abigail already?

He made no reply and seemed to quicken his steps. She sat down again, her back to the street, remaining there all evening. Before going to bed that night, I went out for some air, and in the moonlight I could see her stretched out sleeping near the stone of the roadway. Next morning, I was awakened by an uproar like that of the night before. It was Reeder and Sam who had received the reward promised by the colonial assembly, and were coming back with their compatriots.

The mob screamed its hurrahs, yelled like wild beasts, chanting in an unknown tongue, dancing to the tambourines. Most of the men were drunk and disorderly, having passed the night in an orgy of celebration, dragging with them some low women of the town attracted by the smell of money. In front, four negroes carried the bloody prize in a basket run through with a pole. Reeder preceded them, so drunk he almost fell down, and giving his arm to a drunk and skinny woman. When they arrived just in front of our house, the young black who had been sitting on the stone suddenly stood up at sight of Reeder, and threw herself upon him like a tigress.

— Quasher! You are a coward and a villain, she screamed, and plunged a knife into his breast.

As he cried out, the negroes rushed up and surrounded Abigail, but, brandishing overhead her knife and the obi that Jack had given her, she struck such terror to the mob that they fell face downward on the ground. And thus, opening a passage through them, she stole away and disappeared in the distance. . . .

When I said that I was at Spanishtown when they passed, it was not true, I was lying in my throat! . . . But, lest I am accused of taking

pleasure in the horrible, I say, it is all history, attested by Doctor Mosely in his treatise, and I did not prune the story the way the Jesuit Jouvency edited the Latin classics *ad usum scholarum.*

At the moment I write this, January 6th, 1832, the black population of Jamaica, deluded into thinking that the king had signed a proclamation emancipating the slaves, a revolt broke out in the parishes of Saint James and Trelawney. Fifteen estates have been destroyed and martial law has been declared at Montego. Three Anabaptist missionaries have been put in irons as instigators of this insurrection, and, without doubt, at this very moment, the heads of some brave Africans are laid on the block, and, in the name of Christian equality, the axe is steeped again in the blood of slaves.

DINA

I

Curfew tolled, the drawbridge of the castle was raised, some tardy townsfolk hurried along home, and the rich city of Lyons, set between its two rivers, was about to go to sleep, circled by its walls like a warrior in an armor of iron.

On one of the narrow and deserted quays, two men, a youth and an old man, were walking along, preceded by a footman carrying a lantern.

When I say quays, I am not quite accurate, for, in those days, most of the quays were like streets enclosed by a double hedgerow of buildings; the foundations of the hovels that hemmed the river were watersoaked. Suspended on piles or grounded in the mud, these amphibious dwellings had gables on the street side and gables also looking out over the water, and at the back there might be a stone stairway, winding and deep, going down into the river like Spanish cisterns, sometimes out of the current and sometimes flooded halfway.

To how many crimes must these stones have been witness, and how many murders had shaken these walls! With what hellish ease one could get rid of an enemy, a rival, or a wronged woman . . . just by pushing them off the top of the quay, or out of a sash window. . . . At most, there could only be the noise of a falling body whose last gasp would be lost in the current. If these ruins could tell their secrets!

The young man, wrapped in a white mantle, and with a felt hat hiding his bearded face, was tall and slender. By his jaunty and carefree walk, his clicking spurs, and the sword under his cloak, one could detect the gentleman.

The older man, tangled up in a black robe, and with a black mortarboard roosting on his shock of gray hair, and parchment roll in his fist, as clearly as a gunshot emitted the fact that he was a lawyer. Elderman or counsellor, or procurator, or judge or notary, whatever he was, this bird of prey suddenly broke the silence.

— My Lord Aymar, he croaked, if I am not indiscreet, this young lady with whom we have business, must be very pretty, judging by your exquisite taste in these things, no?

— Must be pretty? Really, Master Chastelart, this question annoys me. It seems to me that anyone must have had an inkling of her beauty. Dina, he asks me if you are beautiful! She is more beautiful than the Soudanese Saracens, a tower of ivory, a vessel of silver!

— At least, Lord Aymar, you won't insist that I know anything about her financial state. Has she any wealth?

— You are asking if gold has any gold, if the sun is radiant. She has enough gold in her dowry to bend a mare's back.

— You are young, Lord Aymar; what is shoving you into marriage so soon? I speak from experience: the young colt needs to be toned down in the fields, he must be raced around and used well by the world before cloistering his passion in a wife. It's a very serious thing to pin your whole life on. Consider me: I entered the confraternity of lawyers when I was forty, and that, believe me, is the best time. At that age, one starts to go down the hill of life. . . . One can then select a sweet good woman with an attractive patrimony, as I did. Youth is a stormy time. . . . When I recall my life in Paris, a clerk. . . .

— Without offending you, Master Chastelart, let me tell you that such advice is not for me, and I won't follow a bit of it.

— Young man, you are too positive. I can refer you to the wisdom of Pierre Charron, doctor of laws. The holy sacrament of marriage is not in itself such a good thing. Listen to what he has to say in a certain malicious chapter of the three-volume work to which I've prayed all my life: Much as the marriage state is the fountain of human society, *prima societas in conjugio est, quod principium urbis*, it is true that it is disparaged by a great number of eminent people who have judged it unworthy of strong and original minds and have set themselves against it. The marriage bond is a cruel and unjust captivity: if the match is bad, if it turns out to be false, one remains miserable for a lifetime. What could be a greater iniquity than, for an unwise bargaining, and from a fault done, not in malice but through carelessness, and often just to take the advice of other people, one has to suffer forever! It would be better to put a rope around one's neck or to throw oneself headlong into the sea than to suffer forever from such a foolish mistake. . . . The inventor of the marriage knot found a fine and expedient method of revenging himself upon humanity, a trap, a net, and then to see them slowly tortured on a fire! For strong and free souls, marriage is a corruption and a degeneration, more especially because the kindness of the one we love, the affection of children, the care of the house, all serve to abate one's ambition, soften one's fiber, and to enervate the vigor of the strongest man—witness the fate of Samson, Solomon, and Mark Antony. As a last resort, only those should marry who

have more flesh than spirituality, those who aim for mean and petty goals depending on their reach. But isn't it a tragedy that the large-souled sometimes are speared and strangled like stable beasts? Utility is one side of marriage, but integrity is the other. . . .

— Enough, Master Chastelart, enough! Please!

— In short, marriage is a great misfortune. . . .

— Enough, you're making me dizzy. Finish this monk's talk!

— At least, my dear sir, you can't accuse me, as a lawyer, of giving you this advice with an eye to my own interest.

— Your advice may be fine and good, but not an absolute rule. For men who are kind and loving, who hate taverns, and who flee drink and dice and ribaldry, there is real content in a sweet and loving wife, a peaceful home, and children. I'm hotheaded, yes, but still my heart needs a tranquil and chaste love. At first I gave this love to my studies, all my energy and my strength; but my father, who, with lordly cocksureness, calls artists tramps and working men beggars, has broken my violin bow and burned the studies I made of Philibert Delorme. Idle and bored, my thoughts wandered like the dove from the ark looking for a branch on which to rest; and now I've found a flowering myrtle, and there I'm going to stay! . . . If there are Dalilahs who shear the strength of their lovers and sell them, there are other women who give men the greatest comfort, surrounding them with the odor of felicity, pouring balm on their wounds.

— Ah, but Lord Aymar, what flowery parables! Love has turned your head, and you're storming the country for it. . . . But we've been tramping a long time, won't we get there soon? By Saint Polycarp! where the devil are you taking me anyway?

— Now don't you be impatient, Chastelart, we'll soon be there. The Ghetto can't be far away now.

— The Ghetto!

— Yes, the Ghetto, where they are waiting for us.

— Your intended is then a heretic? A Jewess?

— An Israelite, Master.

— Jesus, this is really the last straw! And you're dragging me there, to these infidels, at this time of night? You want me to preside at a Sanhedrin, or keep holy their sabbath day? No, thank you. I'll have no traffic with these damned people. It's a conspiracy to dress me in sulphur and have me roasted by Old Man Carnifex, thank you!

— What are you afraid of, Chastelart? You're in the company of trustworthy gentlemen, and it's simply a matter of a contract to sign.

— Don't be childish! Do you take me for an attorney for Hell? You can make your own pacts yourself, I think. Good night!

— You're going to come with me, I tell you, or I'm going to cut you in two and nail you on to that door like an owl. You act like a lout, a mule-driver dressed up like a doctor. You're going to come with me and do your duty, and this purse goes into your face. Come on.

— Sir, I'll do everything you want. Put your sword back. . . . Calm yourself. I'm your humble servant.

— Hypocrite! . . .

Aymar put his sword back into its scabbard, and the two silently went on their way again. After a moment our garrulous licentiate broke the silence a second time.

— You must allow me, Lord Aymar, to manifest my surprise at your union with a heretic. In my capacity as a lawyer and a man of wide experience, you will permit me to tell you that it is unseemly and dangerous to marry a Jewess.

— You, a Jew yourself? You tell me that?

— Yes, Jew that I am.

— Yes, donkey-driver that you are! What else are you then, if not?

— I'm the legitimate son of Claude Chastelart, master printer of the primate church of Lyons, and of Madame Anne-Petronille-Maguelonne de Saint Marcelin, my mother, may God keep her. And I am the brother of Pantaléon Chastelart, and I am a Hebrew, a heretic! Well now, young man, is your head swimming?

— But you are somewhat less than a faithful one, doctor! Look, aren't we all pagans or reformed Jews, infidels, deserters, renegades from the Mosaic Law, from Saduceeism, polytheism, changed over to the protestantism of the peasant of Bethlehem? Monsters that we are, we would level the rock whence our torrent flows. Degenerate race that we are, we would cut the throats of our own ancestors. We burn Jews at the stake and then we kiss their books, we burn them because they are faithful to their law and their God, and then we sing the psalms of David around the stake, yelling *Hosanna in excelis* to the skies! Bloody masquerade! . . .

— Will we arrive there soon, Lord Aymar? . . . But how, by the prince of devils, Beezelbub, did you find this swallow and her nest?

— Purely by chance. . . .

II

— Yes, by chance. . . . Every year I used to come down from my father's house in Montelimart, our country, to spend a few days in Avignon, for lack of something to do. One evening, when I was walking off my boredom on the ramparts, getting away from the noise of the town, I

was involuntarily drawn towards the spell of some hidden harmony, and suddenly I woke from revery and found myself in the midst of a small crowd of people who had assembled on a bowling green, nice people of the village, fiddlers, lute-players, mandolinists, viellists, and trumpeteers, who made a little concert every evening for voices and instruments. How many delicious evenings I spent there under the ultramarine firmament, speckled with stars, where the fresh breeze, serene and perfumed and melodious, played about our heads, lulled and enraptured by choirs of human voices and celestial music! And, above all, what ecstasy it was when they struck up some glorious hymn, some romanza in a bland provencial tongue; or when, in religious solemnity on holy days, they chanted sacred music, spiritual songs, plain chants, funeral and majestic psalms, the stately and sonorous *Stabat Mater*, the sepulchral *Dies Irae*, which, though without organ and the mystery of the cathedral, makes us shiver with terror in the solitary contemplation of nocturnal immensity.

As if in a carrousel, the girls and the women were seated in a circle in places of honor; their husbands or escorts, posted behind them, and very attentive, were ready at the least finger gesture, or the least glance, to signify their pleasure or disapproval, and to applaud loudly the motet or the fiddler that pleased them.

Now, on that evening, I noticed near me, apart from the other women and at the edge of the crowd, a very young girl leaning on the shoulder of an old man.

I turned around, surprised, and gazed at her.

And from that moment, the music did not interest me, I heard it no more, as if the thought of her beauty had exorcized all else. I would not know how to describe my rapture. Stock still, like a statue whose marble breast could beat, I studied her. She seemed like some virgin in all her glory painted by Murillo or Velasquez. Her face was little like a nun's; she seemed neither like the girls of Arles, nor my own mountainous country, nor the vivid Marseillaises, nor the pretty Lyons girls, nor the girls of Paris, nor the Brabantine blondes; it was something of the orient, of the skies, of the unknown. With reddish hair, slender and graceful features, creamy-white skin, her eyes seemed veiled, and her lips were like garnets. Her costume was simple, but sparkling jewels made rich her hair, her ears, her neck, and her fingers, and indicated her place in life.

The old man, head bare and with white beard, appeared to be dozing as he sat beside her, leaning on a staff.

For a long time I looked at her, when, by chance, her gray eyes strayed to mine, and, as if they were bullets from a harquebus, I was struck straight to the heart. For the first time, under a woman's look, I felt something

like real emotion, my legs gave way voluptuously, I turned red, I turned white, I froze, then I burned; all my blood had surged to my agitated heart, and for the first time I felt myself subjugated; for the first time the love that I did not know, that I defied, now came to me, but as a storm that hurls itself at a dovecot without finding an outlet; this love would find no other outlet, it will be eternal.

Recovering myself, getting my boldness back, I took advantage of the fiddler's resting, and went up to the old man.

— Sire, I said, bowing deferentially, I hope you won't think it improper of a gentlemen to suggest that the young lady with you ought not be outside of the serenaders; if you please, may I take her to the circle of ladies. . . .

— Sir, I can't accept your kind offer, but I thank you with all my heart.

— Sire, the young lady is too far away from the serenaders to hear the music well.

The girl turned red and nodded her head to thank me; I was so upset I could only mumble.

— Sir, the old man said, my daughter Dina is very appreciative of your kindness, and we thank you again sincerely, but it is not possible for us to accept your offer, for we come from a foreign hive, and this bee couldn't with affront visit a wasp's nest.

I retired as best I could, inwardly rejoicing at my impudence. But I went only a few steps away, watching for them to depart, at which time I could follow them home, and learn more about this beautiful unknown, and perhaps meet her again on her balcony while passing her house, and send a message to her. I indulged in the fondest dreams of her, I planned it all in my head, how I would find her house, I would pass under her window, she would be leaning out, I would greet her with a smile and lifted hat, I would win over her chaperon; or, better still, I would follow her into church, and, as if by accident, our fingers would meet in the holy-water fountain, and she would bless herself where soon my lips would touch also. I planned all this, I would declare my love, she would give me hers, I would be received into her father's house. . . . I swam in a lake of happiness, lost among illusions. Meanwhile, I was tormented by the meaning of the words her father had uttered: *We are from another hive, and this bee could not, without affront, visit a wasp's nest.* I made a thousand guesses as to what he could have meant. I metamorphosed them; I gave Spain, Bohemia, Bosnia, Venice, as their country. . . . I made Hospodars of them, and Boyars, royalty traveling incognito, exiles, and then all these interpretations would seem foolish, and none seemed to explain

why they should keep to themselves. Then the name of Dina pestered me, it wasn't unknown to me, I had a vague memory of having jolted me, breaking my reveries. I found myself leaning against a fence, alone on the deserted ramparts. The serenade had ended, the crowd had left. I stumbled out, cursing my awkward thoughtlessness; my dreams of bliss vanished, and my hope of seeing her again, and my zeal fell as abruptly as it had been born.

Ah, but it's a great trial to be held in thrall by a congenial being one has met! One sees her out promenading, or at a ball, or on a voyage, or at church, one looks at her and receives an answering look, or one touches her hand, one has a little furtive chat with her, one is enamored, ravished, already shaping a future of the most deepseated love. . . .

I wandered about for some time on the ramparts, inveighing against my bad luck and the mockery of it, which, like an infernal archer, had shot an arrow only to give me a fatal wound. I wandered in the solitude and the serenity, distressed by Dina's image, which came and went before me, replunged me from a tempest to an ascetic rapture, or into a frenzied fever of the sensual.

The clock was striking the hour at the moment I returned home: in my insomnia, going over all these things, I remembered that the name Dina, which I had thought I knew, was in the Bible. I relit my lamp, and reopened my Bible, always placed on a table near by bed, and, fingering through Genesis, I found in the thirty-fourth chapter, *Dinah defiled by Shechem.* 1. *And Dinah, the daughter of Leah, which she bare unto Jacob, went out to see the daughters of the land.* 2. *And when Shechem the son of Hamor the Hivite, prince of the country, saw her, he took her, and lay with her, and defiled her,* etc., etc. The discovery of this passage filled me with joy, and I conjectured that Dina must be a Jewish girl. Her oriental features corroborated this, and thus I could explain the enigmatic words her father had spoken to me. Consoled and encouraged by this small success, I had hopes of finding her retreat, and I swore that, in the end, I would find her.

From that morning, I rambled through the town. Presuming them to be transients, I began by visiting the hotels: I went from the Golden Cross to the Saint-Esprit, from the Ecu de France to the Trois-Maures, from the Lion d'Argent to the Saint-Vidal, enquiring of the managers if they had as guests a white-bearded old man accompanied by a girl named Dina. I received only negative answers. With as little success, I went looking for a rabbi. . . . But, without being discouraged, I prowled about the town, I went up and down the streets, on the ramparts, the plazas, the churches, the synagogues, I didn't miss any concerts, and I

even visited the environs of the town, but all in vain, for I obtained not the least clue. After fifteen days of assiduous and laborious search, I gave it up. The activity had sustained me, but suddenly I fell into ennui and despond; I went out no more, I stayed in bed part of the day, my Bible opened near me, and, from time to time, I kissed the page on which Dina's name shown.

Avignon had become insipid to me, I hated it, I hated everything; everything seemed stinking and gloomy to me, and a feeling of emptiness seemed to come between me and living. I toyed with the very idea of my annihilation, an idea that I had always carried within reach. My landlady advised me to visit my father for a few weeks to get rid of this malaise, which she attributed to spring fever.

Well, I went back to Montelimart, and boredom followed me: for a long time I had the idea of visiting the beautiful city of Lyon, so I left Montelimart abruptly.

III

But I had been here only a few days, and ennui still followed me, and I had made up my mind more than ever to put an end to my existence, when, walking around the somber and majestic cathedral of Saint John, I perceived a girl, as she hurried along, whom I thought I recognized by her walk. I drew near her: it was Dina! Yet, I dare not assert myself by brashly accosting her. I followed behind and called her in a low voice, Dina! Dina! She turned around and bowed to me without giving any sign of recognition. I went up to her and trembling said: My dear miss, don't you recall the man who, on the rampart of Avignon, that evening of the serenade, spoke to your father, the one you thanked for his courtesy?

— What, it's you then? she said, visibly affected, placing her hand on my arm, her face coloring as she stood on the flagstones of the church.

— Oh, my dear Dina, I am overjoyed to meet you again! Please, do not send me away, let me pour out to you all that I've endured since I first laid eyes on you, since when I lost all peace of mind! You have made a great change in me; a violent love has sprung up in my heart for you. . . . I watched the serenade that night in the hope of following you and finding you home, and then declaring my love for you. But I lost you somehow. I searched everywhere for you, without success. A mortal despair took hold of me, and I took it here with me. . . . Oh, thank Heaven that I have the good fortune to see you again. . . . Dina, you are the mistress of my life, I am on my knees to you, and if you spurn me now, it will kill me.

— Sir, it isn't proper for a girl to talk with a man in the street like

this. Don't detain me, I pray you. Calm yourself. People are watching us.

— Then, for Heaven's sake, let us go into this dark church, and under the shadowy vaults we can talk of love away from the evil-minded.

— Ah, but no, sir, I cannot enter this temple, for here the enemy of my God dwells. My father would be terribly grieved. . . .

— Who is your God then?

— The God of Israel!

— I guessed as much, since I found your name in Genesis. If that be so, be my sister, let me go with you, and we shall talk. . . .

— Sir, I put my trust in you.

— For how long have you lived in Lyons?

— I was born here, sir.

— Your beauty should have taught me that. But when did you leave Avignon?

— The day after the concert. Perhaps it isn't nice to be so frank about it, but I cannot deny it: when you looked at me I felt myself seized with a new kind of feeling: I noticed how agitated you were and I could guess the reason for it. When we got up to leave you were leaning against a fence. You were so preoccupied that when we passed you my father bowed to you and you did not notice him. I turned around several times in the street but I did not see anyone following us. Perhaps it is unseemly to be telling you all this, but it is true. The thought of you troubled me all night long. I tried hard to delay our departure in the hope of seeing you again. My father, who is a dealer in precious stones, had come to Avignon on business, and was urgently summoned back to Lyons. I too have suffered so much ever since that night! . . .

The poor girl wiped tears from her eyes.

— Ah, Dina, Dina, how happy I am! And how I do love you . . . I adore you, you are like a Rachel to me, my good angel. Dina, from the first moment I ever saw you, I walked proudly and scornfully among all women, loving only you!

— Oh, if I could believe all this, and test you! . . . But tell me your name. . . .

— Aymar de Rochegude.

— Oh Aymar, if all that I feel is love, believe me I have a wealth of love indeed!

During this mutual outpouring of feeling, we had come to the threshold of her house. I asked for a rendezvous for the next day.

— And why? she asked me.

— To see you again, and talk of love!

— Aymar, there is no need of meeting like that. You are a gentleman,

you love me, and I know well that I love you. Come here to my father's house when you wish; if you will, come in right now. I shall tell my father: here is the young man we met at the serenade at Avignon. . . . I love him, he loves me. . . And my father will welcome you and will love you for the love of me.

We went up the stairs. The good old man, Judas, received me with kindness and introduced me to his wife, Lea. And since then, six months ago, I have spent all my free time in their house. My love for Dina only increased with our chaste and delicious intimacy, and the affection and solicitude of Judas and Lea made me forget that I had lost my mother when I was a child.

IV

At that moment, they turned a corner.

— Master Chastelart, said Rochegude, don't yawn so loudly. You'll make so much noise the whole town will wake up and the watchmen will come after us.

— My Lord Aymar, it was only that. . . .

— Oh, that's all right. Don't be concerned. My story is finished, and besides, here we are at the Jewry.

— Jesus Lord, the Jewry, cried the old lawyer in a shaking voice, crossing himself vigorously.

— Yes, here it is. Look over there in that corner. The house has a turret tower designed by your famous countryman, Philibert Delorme.

— Philibert Delorme! Wasn't he a sorcerer? An astrologer? Alas, my Lord Aymar, cover me with your mantle. I am afraid of Hell. I think something might fall on my head. I have heard it said that it is dangerous to walk at night near the Ghettos, because it might rain pots and pans and bottles, and black cats, and mandrakes and bats and Greek fire.

— How can you, a lawyer, and at your age, believe such twaddle? Really, you make me feel sorry for you. Believe me, I can certify positively that if it rains tonight here it won't be mandrakes or black cats.

V

The footman, who held the lantern in front of him, stopped in the middle of the street before a tall house whose windows were plainly glazed with oiled paper at the fifth, sixth, seventh, eighth, and ninth floors, doubtless occupied by workers in goldstuffs and silks who sought a mild and subdued daylight. The bay-door was low and narrow: Aymar was a head taller; and this door, of massive wood cut in lozenges, was embellished

and made stronger by large nails with round heads like those of Milanese armor. A grotesque face, made of tooled copper, hung in the center, and served as a knocker; and, under the stone lintel, the transom was cross-braced.

Aymar de Rochegude knocked twice, and right away one could hear a window on the second floor creaking, and a sweet voice call out, Ah, it's you, Lord Aymar. I'm coming.

The stairwell suddenly became lit up, and the light was reflected in the great windows of the wall opposite. The door made a long groan and was opened: Dina appeared in all her radiance outlined in the darkness, dressed in a short brocatel gown, and, as befitted that costume, laden with gems and jewels. Her white figure—one could have called her the angel of the Annunciation—shone in the obscurity. Her slim little hand carried an iron candlestick, unshaded, and curled in spiral form like a philosopher's lamp.

Upon seeing this beautiful girl, the amazed Chastelart opened his eyes wide and was taken aback, so great was the power of her charm. Aymar went up to her, took her by the hand, and kissed her on the forehead where she wore a jewel suspended on a chain.

— You are a little late, she said in a bittersweet tone.

— It's true, despite myself, I was delayed. But do not scold me, I pray you; I could not come without the notary here.

At this, Chastelart doffed his mortar hat and made a series of salaams toward Dina, and then the three went up the stone spiral stairway, with the help of a handrail on the side made of rope and shining from long usage like the staff of a halberd. During the walkup Bonaventure pulled Aymar's cloak and whispered in his ear: You didn't lie at all; this heretic is really beautiful!

They went down a gallery that overhung the court, and entered a large room lighted by a girondole set on a standard of gilded wood. The inner walls were covered with hangings of gilded leather, embossed and corded like the backs of books. At the rear of the room in a vaste niche was a buffet of palisander marquetry, incrusted with ivory and nacre, at the top of which was a block of cherry marble hollowed out like a shell in the form of a holy-water basin. Right and left were large pitchers of pewter, potbellied like amphoras, looking like those jugs that servants still carry nowadays when they fetch water from the public wells.

Against one of the walls was a glass case the shelves of which were loaded with wooden bowls filled with turquoises, amethysts, beryls, onyxes, carnelians, ruby cabochons, emeralds, aventurines, topazes, sydoines, diamonds, lapis-lazuli, marcasites, cameos and a thousand other stones. Neck-

laces of garnets, amber, and coral were hanging in front of the glass, all of them trade goods of Judas, the lapidary, who, sitting in his easy chair by a table covered with a Bergamasque tapestry, and on which lay a folio Bible with many clasps, was reading, with lofty solemnity, a passage from Exodus.

At his left sat his wife, Lea, beautifully dressed, the brown of her neck and her hands almost merging with the color of her robe of Cap de More moire. Her brows and eyelashes, thick and long and chestnut-colored, veiled her eyes, which sparkled as through a trellis; her beaked nose cut her face in two like a knifeblade; but, despite all this, she was both dignified and affable, and the sweet sound of her mellifluous voice was captivating.

Near her stood a group of men and women: their half-oriental dress and characteristic headdress of so-called turbans smacked of the Mesopo tamian. These were the relatives and neighbors of Judas who had come to act as witnesses for the marriage contract. Whether they were Talmud-ists or Caraites could not be known, but, after the fashion of those people, all of them claimed to be of the tribe of Aaron. When Aymar entered, they bowed and greeted him with God-be-with-yous, to which he answered by kissing their hands.

— Forgive me, my good friends, if I made you wait, but it was the fault of my notary here, Master Bonaventure Chastelart, and I have the honor of presenting him to you. I am forced to return to Montelimart to-morrow by my father under penalty of being disinherited, and I could not put this off any longer.

— Judith, said Judas to a servant, bring an inkstand to the table so that the attorney can commence. . . .

At her father's right, Dina smiled knowingly with Rochegude at the panic-stricken look on Bonaventure's face as he tightly clutched a rosary in his hands. Rochegude gripped him by the arm in encouragement. Don't be stupid, he whispered to the lawyer, seating him at the table as one sets down a mannequin.

— If you are ready, Master, you can start the proceedings. Ask questions and we will answer.

— Sir, your son-in-law and my clerk have drawn up this contract with me, stuttered Chastelart, taking a parchment from his case. I crave your attention. We will start reading. Listen:

Theodebert de Chantemerle, chevalier, Lord of Rochecardon, Gorge-de-Loup, and elsewhere, Seneschal of Lyons, hereby gives notice that, in the presence of the king's counsellors and notaries of Lyons, the undersigned, that Lord Carloman Aymar de Rochegude of Lyons, son of Lord Tiburce Aymar . . . and of the late Madelaine Garnaud, future husband of one

party . . . and Dina, daughter of Israel Judas, of Tripoli and Syria, lapidary, and of Lea Baruch of Damascus, wife-to-be, of the second party, have made a promise of marriage at the church of. . . .

— No, No, Bonaventure, cried Rochegude, synagogue.

— All right, damn it, at the synagogue.

— Sir, you are very rude, insulting these proceedings like this. . . .

— . . . And for this purpose, to present themselves at the synagogue, to receive the nuptial maledic . . . benediction . . . and the said Israel Judas has made and given a dowry for his daughter, the sum of fifteen thousand. . . .

— All right, all right, that's enough of that, Chastelart, go on to the next part, we know those terms.

— Well then, ta ta ta ta ta ta ta. . . . Oh, here we are: And the said future husband makes declaration herewith that his goods and wealth from the estate of his late mother consists of the following: first, two farms and appurtenances located at the said Remusant, near Lyons, estimated value, twenty thousand pounds sterling; second, a country house situated at the same place. . . . Executed and signed in the aforesaid city of Lyons, in the house of Israel Judas, undersigned, this evening of June 28th, 1661. . . . Now, gentlemen, you will all sign your names, you first, Lord Aymar, and then you, Mademoiselle Dina. . . .

The servant Judith now brought to the table two enormous bowls of sugared almonds, and some baskets, chests and valises. When all the witnesses had signed, Aymar kissed Dina on both cheeks. She presented one of the bowls to him and he took out a big handful of comfits. Dina and Aymar now embraced Judith and Lea, who wept with happiness. Then all the others embraced the couple, and Judith passed around the bowls, and Dina and Aymar gave to their aunts, cousins and friends the boxes of bonbons and valuable toilet articles, as was the village custom. And the ceremonies and the congratulations at an end, with the avowals of eternal love and friendship, Dina's parents made to retire. It was growing late.

— Goodbye, my friends, Rochegude said. Goodbye. I must leave tomorrow for Montelimart. Like the tyrant that he is, my father has ordered me back home at once. I hope to win him over and get his permission to return so that we can have our wedding as soon as possible. I shall see you soon. May God keep you in his care.

— Goodbye, Lord Aymar. Goodbye, my friend. Good luck.

— And you, Master Bonaventure, wait for me. We'll leave together.

— Ah, why must you leave us, Aymar. Stay, stay, for a few days. . . .

— Do not weep, Dina, I will come back soon, and then we shall never be parted again, never.

— Stay, stay with me! I have a fatal foreboding. . . .

— My dear, that is a foolish thought.

— No, I feel something from afar, some misfortune, something that weighs upon me. Heaven cannot be wrong about this. . . .

— Be comforted, my dear daughter, said Judas. What is it, after all, but a few days of waiting? Think of Jacob, who, at the home of his uncle Laban, waited seven years for Rachel. . . .

— Have courage, my daughter, repeated Lea, kissing her tearfully.

— Father, said Aymar, on his knees before Judas, give me your blessing.

Judas, placing his two hands on Aymar's head, read some passages from the Bible, recited some prayers in Hebrew, and then added in a loud voice: My son, I bless thee as Isaac blessed Esau: May thy posterity be numerous, a nation of people, and may the Most High Lord God of Israel live in thee and thy descendants. Stand up, my son; you will not be hindered, for God will keep you safe in his shade, and walk with you always.

Aymar wept, and kissed the hands and white beard of Judas while Dina and Lea sobbed. Aymar could stand it no longer.

— Goodbye! Goodbye! Come, Chastelart, let us leave at once.

On the quay, by means of the lantern carried by the footman, one could see coins flashing in the hands of Rochegude; and then, because of the silence, one could hear a big sigh, like a syncopated, silvery-toned music, escape from Chastelart's wallet.

VI

The end of July drew near, nearly a month since Aymar had left for his father's house in the domain of Dieulefit. In the meantime Dina had received only a single message from him, with a box of nougats, a coffret of larchwood and toys, pine cones from Briancon, and a basket of delicious biscuits from the fair at Saint Madelaine of Beaucaire. In the basket she found a note worded as follows:

AYMAR DE ROCHEGUDE TO DINA

My beautiful one, do not be vexed if I seem to treat you like a child, for I love you as a child! How miserable our separation makes me! Ah, if at least you were near me, how this grand and primitive country surrounding me, which today seems so dull and insipid, would come to life, and spring like a ram, and leap like a lamb! How much more of it I would understand if you were here, expanding my spirit now tight as a sea-urchin, if I had your voice to hear to swell my heart, if I had your hand in mine, and if the mistral wind from these mountains, astray in your long red hair, suffused me in its wafting nard. Joyously we would

ramble through these lovely fields, we would climb the highest peak, and, together under the same cloak, lost in its shade, we would see under our feet the floors of clouds, and we would greet the vastness around us, viewing the presence of the spirit of the God of Israel which lives in the highest levels. . . . Forgive me, the pain of our separation has made me distraught. . . . Meanwhile, wouldn't all this be wonderful? We would roam from the grotto of Balme up to Briancon, and the eagle's eyrie; and then from the bears of Saint John of Maurienne to the fortified castle of Viviers, perched like a hat on the summit of a lofty rock.

Awhile ago, a highlander of Monestier sold me a young eagle and I am rearing it to amuse myself: I know you won't be angry when I tell you that I have named it Dina so that I can often repeat your sweet name. My father and all the people here are surprised to hear me say this name, and have asked me the source of it, and I do not know what to tell them. I told them it was just my idle fancy. These good royalists would like it better if I had named the bird Margot.

Since I arrived here at Dieulefit I have had several interviews with my father which have turned into arguments, and, as you can guess, haven't settled anything. My father is always armored and ready for battle by inclination, and nothing can swerve his iron will. His violence has increased, but for a few days past he has been giving me a honey-tongued approach, to win me over, no doubt, a sweetness he is not accustomed to distill. The morning of my arrival here, I was badly mistreated. The proud man had received the legal notice about our marriage, and it was a riot act to him: he vented his hatred on me, he abused me, he damned me. I kept silent, but note what he did next: he threw me, his own son, to the ground, and while I clasped his knees, he kicked me. . . . After these outubursts, which cost him so much energy, weakness and chills take hold of him, and he has to take to his bed for several days.

He doesn't want to hear any more talk of my marriage to you, a heretic, a gypsy, as he calls you: for him, Israelites are thieves and infidels. He not only threatens to disinherit me, but worse, he threatens to shut me up in a state prison, in Pierre-Encise, or the Bastille, I don't know where, perhaps the Charterhouse. I have almost lost all hope of changing him, but still, I will try again, and whatever happens, I will soon be with you, cursed or blessed.

Kiss our mother and father for me: more than ever I need their blessing. And as for you, my Dina, I adore you, and my spirit beholds thee as an ark of the Lord. . . . If you can find leisure to write and comfort me, send me a note, not to Dieulefit, because of my father, but to Montelimart at the Sign of the Golden Arm from where it will be forwarded to me.

This letter filled Dina with both joy and affliction: the good girl accused herself of causing Aymar's misery, and she regarded herself as guilty of the suffering he was enduring because of her love for him. She could not understand the elder Rochegude: to her, essentially good and without a trace of malignity, and ignorant of evil, his cruelty appeared as an inhuman and ogrish thing. She could not believe that any man could be guilty of such callousness. This happy child did not know that society perverts all things, that greed for possessions and religious fanaticism hardens men and makes them bloodhungry; and she did not know that the good man in his natural state, upon becoming civilized, turns into a soldier, a landlord, a priest, or a judge, or a hangman. She was ignorant of the fact that, when she was a child, her grandparents had been burned to death in the Place de la Grève in Paris, and that, only a little while before, her father, accused of magic, had fled from the city soaked in human blood.

Six weeks passed, Rochegude did not come, and poor Dina grieved more and more each day. Her happy nature shed its leaves gradually. How difficult it was, this long waiting! Time was gathering behind her, the future seemed somber to her vision. She said to herself: Perhaps Aymar is even now crouching in some damp dungeon, calling for me in a dying voice, only the raw echoes of a subterranean place answer his groans, and his voice rends the stalactites of the ceiling. Or perhaps he has been butchered by bandits on his way to me here.

And those were the roses of thoughts with which she pricked herself. Anxiety wasted her. Once so talkative, she became silent and idle, seated near her favorite window. It grieved her mother and old Judas that her melancholy no longer allowed her to show them affection save with a face wet with tears. Depraved with sorrow, she ardently sought out everything that irritated her nerves, all that tickled and woke her apathy. She burdened herself with the most odorous flowers; she surrounded herself with vases filled with syringas, jasmine, vervain, roses, lilies, tuberoses; she burned incense and balsam; she spread around her amber, cinnamon, storax, and musk. Often she was violently disturbed, coming and going through the rooms like a lost soul; and sometimes she would even disappear for a few hours. Her absence would alarm everyone, they would fly around the town vainly searching for her; and then she would calmly turn up again: I felt stifled, I went out to see the sky, and now I feel better. . . .

At that time of year when all is reborn, when everything is revived, when the coldest being feels himself being moved, when one has a pressing need to burgeon one's soul, when the most misanthropic sheds his hatred and austerity and seeks to be urbane; at the time when harmony draws

us to love, that young love that torments even those unaware of it and throws them into a kind of languourous malaise; at that time when Dina, who, for a year past had a lover beside her on his knees, and with whom she passed days talking, reading from the Bible, and indulging in confessions and glamorous hopes; Dina, obedient and trusting, accustomed to think and dream only of the man she loved, whose touch had bloomed her into a new life, and whom she needed more than ever before, Dina found herself fatally isolated. The arm which sustained her, the hand which guided her, the mouth which breathed desire for him, everything failed her. The poor girl, distraught by her plight, sank, overwhelmed; the thought that she had lost or would lose her beloved one was killing her.

Nothing could tear her from these fears, and meantime her understanding parents did everything to divert her. They bought her innumerable things for which she did not care; like an invalid child who rejects his toys, she scarcely looked at the jewels and trifles which, once in the past, would have delighted her. They often took her for walks into town, often they traveled with her into the country, to Ile-Barbe, to Roche-Taille, in the woods of Tassin, or Roche-Cardon, or around the Belle-Allemande, or on the beaches of the Saone and the Rhone, but nothing pleased her. She remained silent under her drawn veil.

One day she asked her mother for permission to write to her fiancé: Aymar, I beg you, if you love Dina as she loves you, return at once, if you are still free to do so. Break your bonds, and wherever you go, I will go. Or tell me where your prison is that I may die there with you. Your absence has made me so ill, and I am so enfeebled, I can hardly hold this pen or put my thoughts together. Come back to me, my dearest love!

Six days afterwards, Dina received this answer: Be comforted, dear one. I am leaving tomorrow at daybreak. Forgive me if my absence has made you so ill; I, too, have suffered much. To offset my heartache I have been hunting bears in the mountains . . . as you have been hugged by the leaden arms of distress. Thinking that I could return sooner, I have delayed making answer. I hoped to soften my father, but he is inflexible as the Alps. Tonight I told him I planned to leave; can you foresee the storm rising? . . . Pray that the hurricane spare me. . . . Goodbye. In three days I shall be knocking at your door.

VII

And in truth, the very evening this message was sent, Aymar followed his father into his bedroom after they had eaten.

—Father, he said, trembling, forgive me if I bother you again, but I

beg you, do not be angry with me. Remember, all my life I've been a dutiful son to you. And now, for the first time, it happens that your son has a will of his own, and on a serious matter. You know that love cannot be compelled, that true love cannot be driven out, for, didn't you love my mother? . . .

At this word, Rochegude gave a start, as if suddenly affected by dreadful memories, and then tried to recover himself.

— Is it my fault, Aymar went on, if the woman that Heaven has sent to me happens to be an Israelite, one of the chosen people of God? Is it my fault if she happens to be of the same blood as your Christ? . . . She is lovely, she is pure and innocent, and I adore her! She adores me, and you would adore her, too, father. Is the love of a daughter nothing to you? She would be the delight of your old age. You don't answer, but, tell me, what daughter would you want?

— Never, Aymar, would I permit the Christian blood of a Rochegude to mingle with the blood of a gipsy, a vile heretic . . . a hussy!

— A hussy! . . . Oh, father how unfair you are! Wait, read this contract; she is my fiancée. Read it. We can't wait longer for your signature. Dina is not without fortune, if that is what you want. . . .

— Damnation! This is a devil's compact!

And without reading the paper, he tore it up and threw it in Aymar's face, the while raining blows upon him.

— There, there is your engagement! We'll see, you base wretch, if you can dishonor our family thus!

— Father, you strike me because you know that I will not strike you back. But, for all that, remember that I am young and strong, and I have hot blood too. Look, I could crush you, old man that you are, as easily as I can break this door! . . .

And the door gave in under his blows with a dreadful noise. Rochegude, pale with stupefaction, quailed in his chair.

— But this is enough, father. This is killing me. You are rock, and I shall be iron. I am leaving tomorrow. Goodbye!

— You are not leaving, do you hear me?

— Father, I am leaving. But in Heaven's name, tell me, what is so terrible about my marriage? Why are you so savage about it?

— She is a gipsy, a damned heretic! Rochegude blood is Christian!

— Good God, but you make your Christian blood sound so grand and lofty! What does Christian or pagan matter to you? Are you so religious, do you have such ardent faith? I am even certain that you don't believe in God. Do you really believe in him?

Rochegude suddenly sat up in his chair, and in a demoniacal fury, seized

a knife by its blade, and, his hand stained with blood, struck the handle on the table.

— Get out, go away, you ruffian, and be damned!

And with his other hand he seized his son by the hair, hauled him on the floor the length of the corridor, and threw him head first down the stairway.

VIII

At dawn the next day, Aymar came down. His horsemen, one of them leading his own black horse, a filly destined for Dina, and several mules laden with baggage, were already waiting for him. Awakened by the neighing of the horses, Rochegude hurriedly opened his chamber window, clacking the shutters back against the wall, and, dumbfounded, screamed to Aymar:

— If you leave, I will disinherit and curse you!

— I am leaving, father, and, as for the rest, it can be as you will. My other father, back yonder, where I am going, will bless me.

Rochegude left the window. Aymar and his party started out. Scarcely were they in the middle of the road when Rochegude reappeared half-dressed on the steps of the house with a gun in his hand.

— Stop, parricide! Stop, I curse you. May lightning strike you down, May Hell swallow you up! I will curse you and hunt you down. It is your own father who damns you and makes Heaven his witness to it! You shall not leave this house!

He stamped on the pavement, striking the pillars of the wall while the house shook, frightening the onlookers. But Aymar, silent, went steadily on his way. When he came to a turn in the road, losing all hope of bringing him back, the fury of Rochegude redoubled.

— Go away, then, you parricide, you monster! Go away, forever. . . .

He aimed his arquebus, a shot rang out, Aymar uttered a cry, and Rochegude fell stiffly on the steps of the porch.

IX

Ever since Dina had received Aymar's letter, she had been less worried, but still restless; and, in the evening of the next day she said to her father: I am going out to visit my friend Elizabeth, but I will be back soon.

The foolish girl was deceiving him, for she was little inclined at the moment to meet and chat with anyone: in reality she wanted to walk—unwisely, alone—on the banks of the Saone, musing contentedly under the sky of the evening. Aymar was to arrive in two or three days: what a joy to dream happy dreams of him in solitude!

A little this side of the Ile-Barbe, a ferryman was seated at the prow of his *bèche*, a kind of boat with a canvas top like a gondola.

Suddenly a fantastic idea took hold of Dina.

— Boatman, she said to him, I would like very much to take a ride out on the water, but . . . I am alone.

— Well, lady, what difference does that make?

— Boatman, here is my fare, and here is the purse of an invalid for you to take care of. . . .

The boatman took the money and the purse; Dina jumped into the boat and disappeared under the awning. Soon the boat was far out in the stream. All of a sudden they could hear a soft music floating on the water, and another boat came into sight, moving swiftly, from which came uncontrollable laughter. It was filled with young men and girls who had come out to sing and amuse themselves in the cool of the evening. They rowed alongside of Dina's boat, peering under her silent awning; but her ferryman hurriedly began to row away upstream, and the inquisitive drew away downstream without seeing her.

Although the dark night was now falling, and although Dina had told the boatman to row only for an hour at most, the boat went out farther and farther.

And then the boatman, leaving his seat, slid under the awning, and a scream broke the silence as the boat disappeared out of sight.

X

— Boatman, what are you doing? Stay in your seat, and keep on rowing. Let us go back, you can see it is very late. Don't come near me! . . .

— You're a very pretty girl, miss.

— Don't be impertinent!

— It's your fault, you put this foolishness in my head.

— Keep away, and don't touch me. What do you want?

— Nothing, only . . . just to tell you that your lord seneschal had my sister three months ago.

— My lord seneschal! . . . You slander him.

— I do slander him . . . and it's my sister's belly that slanders him. Oh, what pretty hands you got, never felt any so soft. What sweet luck to be petted by such pretty white little darlings! And the little foot there . . . and let's see . . . the leg. . . .

— Help! Help! Get away, you stupid, vulgar. . . .

— Pretty, very pretty dame you are. Don't bawl. What a leg. . . .

— Save me! Murder! . . .

— Murder? No, not yet. You're going about that too fast. . . . Come on, just calm down, so I can kiss your eyes. . . . Come on, be a good sport, I ain't going to hurt you. . . . Let me kiss your pretty. . . .

— Oh, I could die. . . . Help me, someone, help me!

— You're just yelling for nothing, nobody's going to come. Besides, I can shut you up good if I want to. . . . I've a little stock of ropes here, and stuff for some good gags.

— Villain! Coward! Kill me then!

— I wouldn't get so scared for so little. I'm in the habit of doing this, I am. Anybody who gets a liking for me, I don't want her. I like to force her! . . . So, in the last German war, didn't I enlist? And, God knows it, I seeded more French than I killed Germans. You can fight all you want, dearie; you ain't strong enough! I ain't afraid, I tell you. I make a practice of doing this. I force a girl easy as you play your little piano. And I kill, too, easy as you sew a collar.

— Oh, Aymar, my poor love! . . .

— Oho, so we're engaged, eh? All right, it's a nice quiet evening, let's chat a little. . . . So you're engaged, are you, my little virgin? . . . Your fiancé is just going to have to pass away, that's all. . . . It ain't always the fisherman who eats the fish. That's the way things go in this world, you can't count on nothing. Guillot does the work, but it's Charlot gets fat. . . . You sure are a charmer, dearie. . . . I'm crazy about you. . . . I sure would like to hug you in these arms, I would. Jean Ponthu, ferryman, just a peasant with a high-class dame. . . . If you'd only give me just a little loving. . . . Let's see those rings. Pretty expensive-looking, I'd say. A hand just the size of my Marian's. I'll make a present to her from you. . . .

— You are breaking my fingers! . . .

— When I was a soldier, on sentry duty at night, I often used to think, and I'd say to myself: We peasants, and our sisters, and our daughters and our wives, we're just nobodies to the swells and the rich: they're always raping our women, and we're just a pack of fools, we don't do anything to theirs: it just ain't fair. . . . I used to ask myself: Why is it they're rich, and we are poor? . . . I just couldn't explain it. . . . It's unfair, ain't it? To take a boy and make him cruel: that's what war is! . . . That collar you're wearing, pretty nice . . . and those pearls. . . . You've a neck just like my Marian. I'm going to give them to her as a gift from you, yes? Honestly, I hate to strip those cute ears of yours, but you won't let me kiss them. . . . My Marian ain't got no suitable earrings to wear when she dresses up. . . . Well, don't cry, I'll make her a present of yours. . . . But you can't keep those gold pins in your hair

now, your dress is too plain. I see I'll have to undo your hair too. . . . You know, you're a hundred times better looking, now that you're all mussed up like that! Well, now that we have nothing more to lose, at least. . . .

— Help! Help me! I beg you, let me go . . . or kill me!

— Then you're going to keep on fighting? Damn it, give me those hands, I'll have to tie them up. . . .

— Murderer! Will no one come to help me then? . . .

— You be quiet, I tell you. Here's a ribbon that ought to calm you down. Come on, raise your head . . . for this little gag. . . .

— Please, please. . . . In God's name, let me be! Please, oh please, let me go. . . . Set me free! What do you want, money? You shall have it! This torture is too much! Wretch! Villain! Ah, I am lost. . . .

And now, no more could be heard in the boat but low moans, stifled cries, and death-sobs that died slowly away.

Nearly an hour later, the ferryman came out from beneath the awning, dragging Dina by her hair. At the very moment that her body hit the water, the gag became undone, and in a broken voice she called out Aymar's name.

And Jean Ponthu, at the prow of his boat and with a harpoon in his hand, pierced and thrust Dina's body down under the water each time it rose to the surface.

XI

They searched for Dina in the town all night long.

At daybreak, some peasants who were bringing their milk and produce to town noticed, while going across the stone bridge, the body of a young woman caught by her long red hair on the rocks at the point where the breakers rumple the surface of the Saone.

Jean Ponthu, the ferryman, recovered it in his boat, and brought it to that part of the shore called Death-Cheat. A crowd gathered around it, curious and sympathetic. They stared at her beautiful and fatal form. Her two little hands, bruised and cold, were tied together by a heavy cord.

Suddenly someone in the crowd cried out: Don't you recognize her? It's Dina, the Russian girl, you know, the pretty Jewess, the daughter of the lapidary, Judas. They live back there in the ghetto. . . .

All day long there was a throng of people in the house of Judas. Dina was laid out on her bed, dressed as for a holiday, and adorned with her jewels, following the Hebrew ritual. Seated at the foot of the bed was Lea, the mother, softly moaning. Hunched in his armchair, his tunic rent

and his head covered with ashes, was Judas, speechless, eating his heart with sorrow.

A rabbi prayed.

XII

At noontime, at the door of the magistrate's office in the city hall, a stocky and weatherbeaten man in seaman's dress fought to get past the clerks blocking his way.

— What's the matter, boys? a voice from within cried. What's all the noise for?

— Sir, it's a boatmen, he's trying to get in, despite your orders.

— Damn it, I'm Jean Ponthu, the ferryman. They made me wait two hours. What do they take me for?

And thrusting the office workers aside with blows of his fist, he opened the door and dashed into the magistrate's room.

— Mr. Ferryman, you're a boor, a ruffian. You deserve to be sent to jail for making such a racket.

— Your Honor. . . .

— All right, what do you want of me?

— I came to notify you of a drowned body I took out of the river near the bridge, and I claim the reward. . . .

— Has the corpse been identified?

— Yes, your Honor, it's a young lady named Dina, daughter of a lapidary named Israel Judas.

— A Jewess?

— Yes, a heretic, a Huguenot, a Jewess. . . .

— A Jewess? . . . You've been fishing for Jews then, you lout? And you have the impudence to come here and ask for a reward? Boys! Martin! Lefabre! Come here, and show this blockhead to the street. Mr. Boatman, he who has fished a heretic out of the river has fished a dog.

XIII

About two o'clock in the morning, a white casket, carried by four men, and followed by a small cortege, silently passed through the town. Now and then, one could hear windows raised, the grating of sashes, the noise of bolts; and heads with nightcaps leaned out. It was the townsfolk and gossips, who, awakened by the sounds in the street, hastened to their windows to discuss it.

— If I'm not mistaken, wife, it's the funeral of a heretic. I seem to see a white coffin. . . .

— It's certainly for a young person, too, poor thing. . . . Happy they who die young, before life wears them out with misfortunes.

And then these good citizens sighed deeply and closed their shutters again.

— Master Bonaventure Chastelart, isn't that the funeral of a Huguenot that just passed?

— No, it isn't, because there are neither torches nor lights. Besides, this isn't the way to go to perdition. It's nobody but some bitch of a Jewess being dragged to the Madeleine or the convict's graveyard.

Sometime later one could distinguish, on the left side of the Rhone, beyond the plain, a caravan on horseback. It was headed by a young man accompanied by some lively cavaliers followed by valets and muleteers carrying the luggage. When they arrived at a field named La Madeleine, a cemetery for executed criminals, and a Golgotha for the Israelites there, the head horseman said to the old man who was digging a grave:

— My good man, what time of day would it be now?

— Nearly three o'clock. You are at the city gates.

— Good. But for whom is this grave you are digging so early in the morning?

— My lord, it is for a girl found yesterday in the Saone.

— A very young girl?

— Seventeen years old, my lord.

— But this field isn't holy ground?

— That is true, my lord; it is the cemetery for murderers and Jews.

— For Israelites! . . . Do you know the name of this girl?

— If I am not mistaken, my lord, it is Dina, daughter of a lapidary named Israel Judas.

— Dina! . . . Oh, I am accursed! My beloved one! . . .

— Anyway, my lord, there is the procession coming now. Do you see the white coffin?

Frozen, desolate, Aymar remained still for a moment; then he called to one of the horsemen:

— Carl, my friend, in a little while I want you to take my cloak and carry it to my father, as they took the bloody robe of Joseph to his father Jacob . . . and you must tell him that you saw my fiancée . . . for there she is, coming. Look! . . . And you, old man, dig this grave larger! . . .

He threw his purse to the old gravedigger; and then he cried out to the wide sky with a resounding voice:

— Dina! . . . Israel! . . . Eternity! . . .

And he fired his pistol into his head.

PASSEREAU

I

— It's a good thing, my dear Passereau, that I don't believe in woman's virtue at all. Otherwise, believe me, I would have had a pasteboard nose of especially beautiful size.

— What a school-boy you are, Albert.

— I've already had some remote suspicions: my virgin didn't appear to me to be too immaculate; her mother, who looks so respectable, seemed to me to have the false air of a procuress. And then I had observed that the frontal or coronal bone of her cranium was undeveloped, that the occipital distance between her ears was enormous, and that her cerebellum, the seat of physical love, as you know, made an extraordinary protuberance. Besides, she has eyes large as an antique Venus, and her open and arched nostrils invariably signify luxury.

It was seven o'clock this morning. After having drummed loudly for a long time on the door, it was opened to me and she throws herself into my arms. On going in, a flavor of two-footed game seized the olfactory. Good Lord, my beautiful, I said to her, what kind of stuff have you been roasting? There's surely a masculine odor in here!

— What do you mean, dear? It's nothing, just the close night air. I'll open the windows.

— And the fresh cigar smoke? . . . You smoke cigars? Since when have you become a Spaniard?

— My dear, it was my brother, last night. . . . He forgot it.

— Ah, your brother. He surely is precocious, smoking in his cradle. Quite a libertine, to turn from the nipple to the cigar. Bravo!

— My older brother, I meant.

— Ah, that's it. And do you carry a cane with a gilded knob now? Rather old-fashioned, isn't it?

— It's my father's walking-stick; he forgot it yesterday.

— Seems your whole family was here yesterday. . . . And Russian boots! Your father forgot them yesterday, too, of course, and he went home barefooted? Poor man! . . .

At this crack, my fine girl throws herself into my arms, and starts kissing me:

— Listen to me, I beg you. Albert, forgive me. I'll tell you everything, if only you don't get angry. . . .

— Oh, I'm not a bit upset, madam. I'm completely calm and composed. Why are you crying then? Your little brother smokes, your father goes home without his cane and his boots: all this is only natural. Why do you want me to be upset about it? No, believe me, I'm calm, very calm.

— Albert, how cruel you are! Please don't spurn me without hearing my story. I was chaste as long as I was without wants. If you only knew how far one can be forced by hunger and misery. . . .

— And idleness too, madam.

At that moment a formidable sneeze came from a nearby closet.

— Well, my little minx, tell me, did your father forget his sneeze yesterday too? Open up quick, the poor man will die of cold!

— Albert, please, I beg you, don't make so much noise in the house. They will put me out. They will suspect me, don't make a scene.

— Calm yourself, senora. Don't make a scene, eh? When I write a drama, I'll chose my heroes myself. But this poor accomplice of yours must be pretty cold. It's rude of you, let me open the door and let him out. . . . Well, Mr. Adventure, come on out, I beg you, so that I won't suffer for you so much. . . . To stay stark naked in such a cold spot, when there's so much epidemic flu around! Heavens, man, you'll come down with the cholera!

— What right have you, Mr. Intern, coming here at dawning disturbing decent people?

— At dawning . . . with its rosy fingers. Why, you can write poetry, can't you? What right, you ask me? I should be asking you. Anyway, in any case, you should be happy to get out of this Nesle tower.

— Why you. . . . What do you mean?

— Nothing.

— Albert, you are outrageous to treat me like this.

— Well, my pretty, you are rather coarse-minded yourself this morning. Now then, stranger, you can get dressed, don't be timid. You just asked me who I was. Tell me first who you are. I'll tell you both who you are. Our trinity hasn't a very saintly look; though decent at bottom, I suppose, we look like devils. You, a pub crawler, Madam Harlot, ought to know that a spade ought to be called a spade, a courtesan works at court, and Shakespeare called a pimp a Pandarus. But as for me, I'm just a plain bachelor, like Lindor, Albert de Romorantin, and my family is well

known. I thought you had some modesty. I was ready to bring you love, but I really needed money, no?

Her good unknown friend was only a little ugly graying fellow, awful-looking, but, believe it or not, very well dressed.

— My dear young man, he says to me then, your candor charms me. You have nice manners, I can see you come from a good family: let's be friends. I am, he murmurs in my ear, the vicomte de Bagneux. Yesterday I met this lady, followed her, and came up here. I wouldn't have done it, old that I am, only my Doctor Lisfranc had especially prescribed some sex for me in order to disperse some bloody congestions.

— Doctor Lisfranc, my clinic professor! Bravo! Madam, I shall thank him for your part in this. It's the good doctor who brings such a noble clientel. And so, sir, you prefer love to the thermal waters of Barège?

— Yes, at this time of year. But, my dear student, you haven't had breakfast yet, have you? Will you eat with me at the Palais Royal? I really mean it.

— I can't refuse such a generous offer. I'm your guest. Estelle was weeping.

— Let's leave right away, my young friend.

— But have you paid madam here yet? The women on the public bridges don't get paid; but the banal ones, like this, have to be.

— Albert, you are outrageous.

— Adieu, my little concubine, said the vicomte to Estelle with the air of being a guardian; don't take any more chances.

— Goodbye, my little rosebud, I said to her in my turn. Goodbye, my stainless virgin, my angel of honesty and candor; goodbye, my bashful lass; goodbye, my little night-flower.

— Yes, Albert, laugh at me, walk over me. I am guilty. But if you'll forgive me, and come back tonight, I'll tell all about it. . . .

— Oh, a plague on it!

— But you will come back, Albert, won't you?

— Angel, when I get some money, will you tell me what your tariff is?

We left as she sank into a chair.

What a wonderful breakfast I had with the man! I'm still keyed up thinking about it. I still feel a little groggy from the wine.

— Albert, you talk to the first girl you meet on the street, you pick up love anywhere, and then you blame her!

— No, Passereau, I don't complain about it.

— I'm not surprised at your low opinion of women, if you judge them all by Estelle. It's as if you judged the climate of France by the nagging skies of Paris.

— No, I've priced women from my studies of them in the mass. Like you, I have known some of them to be pyramids of chastity. I know what virtuous stuff is, I know the warp and woof of it, and I've made lint of it.

— If I thought that you really believed all that, I'd be angry with you; but you're only talking with your lips, or anyway it's your breakfast that's talking. And then it's always good form to play the roué. It's customary to castigate women, so it's easy. Charles the Ninth hated cats intensely: so, courtiers, valets, and even the most insignificant bourgeoise, came to find nothing but evil in a tom-cat's look, just to give themselves a royal air and princely style. So cats are treacherous, false, deadly, or what have you? Like a song that's become as popular as Marborough. Henri the Third detested women, so he needed favorites: they suited him well, and then everybody, even the doormen, has his own, on Sunday, and rails against women. But that was far away and long ago. Calumny of women, like the madrigal, is out of date, it smells of the provincial, don't you see?

— Oh illusions! Illusions! Poor Passereau, what a novice you are! Poor boy, you really distress me. You make the most insignificant tramp you meet into a star, a pearl, a flower. You sanctify her, you purify her. You really amuse me. Oh, illusions!

— Well, even if they are, please don't disillusion me; it would be the death of me. What is life without illusions? A squeezed sponge, a fleshless skeleton, a sorrowful nothingness.

— Jokes!

— Don't you see that it's the first intimacies we receive in life that give us the bent and direction of our heart and thoughts? You despise women because you've only known despicable ones, or those who seem so. It has just happened that in my path through life I have known good and virtuous ones only, and I judge the unknown by the known. If I'm deluding myself, is that so bad? Leave me my error. But tell me, do you suppose that my Philogene is anything but kind and good and faithful? I'll put my hand in the fire. . . .

— No, no, Passereau, don't put anything into the fire, don't swear to anything. How long have you known Philogene?

— It's almost two months.

— I give you another month, and then you'll see. Three months is the usual time for these infatuations.

— Albert, really, you are offensive.

— Goodbye, Passereau, see you in a month!

All this conversation had been made by two students leaving their lecture hall, walking down the Rue Saint-Jacques with big books under their arms, not tramps, but smart young men elegantly dressed. One, named Passereau, had a serene and dreamy air, and wore a costume imitative of German scholars: long hair, little peaked cap, turned-up collar, black frock coat, spurs, Nuremberg pipe. The other, Albert the Prattler, exuberant, gesturing, with his gray cap over one ear, red kerchief around his neck, black velvet frock-coat with metal buttons, a flower in his mouth, and an easy walk like a dervish. All this gave him the jaunty air they call can-can, which the Andalusian gallants possess to a marvelous degree.

II

The two students parted company abruptly, each pitying the other in his heart, each considering the other a fool, for opposite reasons. Each went his own way, sensing the blindness of his friend, and yet each was sincere—a rare thing at that age.

On the quay, Passereau jumped into a cab.

— Where to, Mister?

— Rue de Menilmontant.

— But that's a pretty long way.

Cracking his whip, the cabbie started to hum the bolero from *The Smugglers*: I've got a little bay horse that's dying for his mare. Passereau finished the stanza:

— And I'm like him, I'm dying for. . . .

— Senor, are you Spanish?

— No.

— You certainly seem like one.

— People often tell me that.

Passereau did indeed have the complexion of a southerner. The local police used to find him even dangerous-looking, and once during some civil disorder, he had several times been arrested just for the crime of taking a walk and of illegally possessing a sunburnt face.

— At least, senor, you're dressed like a Castillian.

— Neither one nor the other.

— He who hasn't seen Spain is blind, and he who has, is made blind. Have you ever thought of going there?

— I'm simply burning to go, but I don't dare. I'm afraid I might leave the rest of my reason there. After Seville and Granada and Cordova, I couldn't live anywhere else. Spain! Spain! Like a tarantula, its bite makes us mad. You're Spanish, and you left Spain?

— No, senor, I am Don Martinez de Cuba.

This man, Passereau recalled, was the so-called incombustible who had been exhibited in the Tivoli gardens in an oven. The public having grown tired of him, he had, as it were, failed to live, and the poor man was made a coach-driver. Passereau was surprised to see the famous salamander come to this low estate.

— Pardon my saying it, senor, he continued, but you have the sad and thoughtful air of one in love. I'm touched. . . .

— Love! Love! I'm dying for the girl.

— Watch out, young man. Listen to me: sometimes you can profit from the advice of men like me. Don't put too much faith in the love of such a fragile, mobile and perfidious thing as a woman, or you're lost. Don't let your heart be occupied by such passion, or you're lost. Don't build on the ruins of others. Don't deny yourself anything for someone who charms you and attaches herself to you: at the first shock you'll fall flat. Women don't really value our sacrifices. Love just the way you sing, or ride your horse, or read, or play, but no more. Don't depend on them for anything stable, or high-minded or pure, or you'll be bitterly deceived. Excuse me for talking to you like this: it isn't to snatch away your youthful illusions and to make you old and bitter, it's to save you from many missteps and falls. In a case like this, the advice of an experienced man who has been made miserable by the very things you place your faith in now may be of value to you. A man makes his own fate. Like you, I once believed, I once gave myself, and now, I am lost! I was young and bright like you. They threw me out like a clown and a flunkey.

— Oh, don't be afraid for me, my friend. When love, the only cable that holds my boat to the shore, is broken, all will be over: I will kill myself . . . but stop! You're passing the house. It's here, this door.

— *Viva Dios! Senor estudiante, es V. m.d. muy dadivoso, muy liberal!* . . . And will you remember the number of my coach?

The young student entered the house, and the jovial Martinez turned his horse around, chanting his little gypsy song. Passereau went up the stairs with the gravity of a senator or a bailiff.

— Oh, it's you, our handsome intern!

— Good morning, Mariette. Is your mistress gone out?

— My mistress? Isn't she yours too, a little? Call her our mistress. She left a minute ago. Too bad.

— Where did she go at this time of day?

— To riding school, for her lesson.

— Oh, does she ride horseback? I didn't know that.

— They say she's a delightful rider.

— You're laughing, you bad girl. Are you always acting like a soubrette in naughty comedies?

— Well, anyway, she won't be gone long; yesterday's lesson was long, so today's, I suppose, will be short. Come into the boudoir and wait for her.

— Quite right. But come keep me company there. It's boring to be alone in a boudoir. Anyway, it's anti-canonical. But come on, coquette, what are you afraid of?

— You're a medical student, you know. . . .

— Well, yes, med students are known for their philogyny: but I've never eaten a woman alive. . . . Sit down here beside me. It's about time. Let's talk. You know, I've really been fond of you for a long time.

— Well, that's a compliment that doesn't get me anywhere, Madame Philogene has the real usufruct of your love.

— Well, look, Mariette, after the five continents, and then Philogene, it's you, the seventh part of the world, that I prefer.

— Well, it's still an honor that doesn't get me anything. The seventh part of the world needs a Christopher Columbus.

— Have you no shame? Well, let me kiss your shoulder, your lovely ivory shoulder . . . your breast, like two hills . . . of Parnasse. . . .

— 'Tis in vain that to Parnasse our reckless man goes. . . .

— So you know our fire-fighting poet, Boileau, too? But what are you afraid of? Don't be childish. You don't know how much I love your mistress. When I love a woman, I love her completely, and I am really faithful only to Philogene.

— While she takes her riding lesson, too.

— I am as faithful to her as she is to me.

— Ah, that isn't too reassuring. But Heaven help me, sir, I am leaving for a moment. If someone rings, will you open and ask them to wait?

— I'll open, even it's for the thunder in person.

As soon as he was alone, his expression changed suddenly and became its customary grave and somber self, even more so perhaps than usual, for, without a doubt, the little malignancies of Mariette, though they seemed only to be said in playfulness, had really cut him to the quick, and despite himself, had awakened conjecture in his trusting nature. A tomb had hardly ever contained a living body more gloomy than this boudoir. Suddenly freeing himself from this immobile concentration, this interior life, this invisible thing that seemed to obsess him now, he got up, like a phantom, and his face lit up suddenly like a silent lantern in the night. He rushed into the salon, running up to the miniature of a girl fastened to a mirror, and covered it with kisses. After having paced

the floor with long steps for awhile, he stopped at the piano, and with a kind of frenzy started to sing in a muffled voice *Estudiantina . . . Ay no, ay si, Morena muero por ti! . . . Bahoum! . . . Bahoum! . . . Bahoum!*

— Heavens, what lout is breaking down the door? . . . What kind of racket is this? Don't you see the door-bell?

— Sir, I ran for six minutes.

— Don't give me that. I didn't hear anything.

— Well, I heard you very well, singing Latin. Sir, are you Miss Philogene? If so, I have a letter to you from Colonel Vogtland.

— From Colonel Vogtland! Give it me.

— He told me specially to give it only to her.

— You're drunk!

— Drunk? It's possible. But I'm French, from the Calvados where they make the cider. I ain't got no medals, but I got some distinction: making turds for Prussians, there now!

— Oh go away, you walking funnyman.

— Mustn't do any selling here, no showing off, or I might get a rough handling! . . . I'm telling you, for a mortgage . . . only try to put a little more circumcision in your words . . . and don't forget a tip, just for a drink, for a bachelor.

— A tip? So you can stain your stomach again, or shrivel your intestines? Go away, you're drunk!

III

So here is Passereau, alone, with death in his heart, and the fatal letter in his hand. What is he going to do? Doubt and suspicion overcame him. All is lost! Conviction is like an old building: it collapses as soon as one touches it with a hatchet. This Colonel Vogtland, who is he, what connection has he with Philogene, and why this letter? After a long indecision and struggle, to nullify his anguish, he is going to break the seal of this letter which contains either the condemnation without appeal or the solemn acquittal of his mistress, ignominiously suspected, sullied under the weight of an infamous accusation to the tribunal of his heart.

— I . . . break this seal? Ah no, I must be mad. Once I break it, what could I do if it shows that Philogene is innocent? I would have debased myself in her eyes as a jealous and treacherous man. It is a treasonous act to break a sacred seal and enter, spurred and booted, a decorous secret. Yes, but if I were mistaken, who would tell me? Who would tell me that I am the vulgar dupe of a licentious woman? Must I wait to hear it shouted in the streets? When I wait to hear it laughed from doorways when I pass with her on my arm? Or to hear whispers all around me:

Today she's with her student. . . . I prefer him to her last one. . . . He must have little shame, such a well-born young man, to go out in broad daylight with such a likely harlot, shame on him! It would be atrocious! I must know what's in it, I must know what to believe. . . . Let me see. . . . But no! It's madness to go so near the brink. He who digs, digs his own grave. For, if this letter upholds the love and esteem I have for this woman, or if it calls upon me loudly to crush and hate her, Ah, what a frightful awakening. I will die of it. For I have need of Philogene, I have need of her love in my life. It is the oil of my lamp, to overturn it is to extinguish it and kill me.

Passereau, Passereau! How ungrateful and cruel you are to this woman! Why are you accusing her, why are you besmirching her? . . . Do you really know what this missive contains? No! What right do you have then? . . . I am beside myself. . . . No, no, surely, this sweet girl, this good and naive child who has overwhelmed me with vows of love, and whom I watched over, and to whom I swore eternal faith . . . she could not, she would not dare to betray me. No, no, Philogene, you are too pure and too constant. . . .

Then Passereau, drawing near to a window, broke open the letter, searching the paper with fiery eyes. At each word he gave a deep groan.

—God: my forebodings were indeed thy voice, for thy voice alone never lies. . . . What horrors are these! Ah, Philogene, this is too terrible. I, who this very morning would have answered for you with my life, who would have denied God himself had he accused you. Horrible and infamous. But mark me: no one knows what remains in my heart now that it is emptied of love. Take notice! . . . And well, for you, Colonel Vogtland, I shall be there, too, at your rendezvous; there will be three of us!

Exhausted, he let himself fall on the sofa, weeping bitterly. For here was the fatal letter:

My dear Philogene, I have been called back to Versailles by some trouble among the men in my regiment, so don't expect me tonight. I won't be able to see you for a few days. I will meet you Sunday around five o'clock in the Tuileries, under the chestnut trees, near the marble boar. As soon as you get out of your carriage I will run down to meet you and we'll go to dinner together. Three days without seeing you—such a long time! But you know my duties come first. Love me the way I love you. Kissing you all over . . . Vogtland.

Was it possible to find anything less ambiguous than this? After a period of anguishing doubt, Passereau now had real conviction. He was now convinced. But all these sufferings were not enough, and the knowledge

of her lying, base and vile self were not enough. He was destined from that day forward to fall lower and lower, and to lose everything, forever. She whom he had believed so chaste, innocent, and modest, she whom he had approached so fearfully, she whose virginity he had thought it a crime to question, had come at last to appear in his eyes in all her hideousness: as a wanton, dirty, lascivious, vile.

Ransacking a drawer to find ink with which to write a note, he found, shameful to tell, a gilded and illuminated leather copy of the licentious Aretino. His consternation could be imagined. He curled his lips in disgust. . . . And at that moment Mariette came back, and he sought to recover himself.

— Has Madame Philogene returned?

— No, my dear.

— She seems to enjoy riding. . . .

— She's crazy about it. . . . But . . . you laugh as if you were chagrinned and upset. My dear sir, believe me, don't suffer on account of her. . . . Poor man, so you know? . . . But has someone . . . been here in my absence?

— No. Only someone came with this letter from Colonel Vogtland.

— From Colonel Vogtland! . . . Well, I'm not surprised to see you so troubled. Poor man, you've been badly taken in!

— Well, goodbye, Mariette.

— I beg of you, don't take it so hard, you distress me. . . . Shall I tell her you were here?

— Yes, but no more than that.

Ashamed, he slipped out of the house like some lecher leaving an evil place. At the cab stand on the boulevard he found Martinez again and to the amazement of the passersby, threw his arms around him.

— Oh, my friend, but you were so right! . . . Treacherous as the waves of the sea! . . . Let's go, let's leave at full speed. I need to take my mind away from all this.

IV

When he returned home Passereau fell once more into a kind of cold and silent apathy. His handsome face did indeed habitually carry the imprint of a deep melancholy, but a kindly one. But now, there was nothing of benevolence there. His eyes seemed to have sunk into his head; his mouth seemed to laugh in pain and to close as tightly as that of a haltered horse; his nerves seemed taut. He came and went, his fingers nervously scratching everything they touched. He bent and crouched this way and that like a wounded beast. He turned his head right and left like a long-

sighted eagle searching for prey to strangle. All his mimicry seemed devilish and grim.

Suddenly he opens the casements, leans out, savagely closes the outside shutters, and then closes the inside shutters and windows again: and, with a burst of glee, stands there in the profound darkness. Then he lights the lamps, the chandeliers, the girandoles, the candles, and, despite the heat, makes a fire in the chimney; and then he rings. One of the house-servants comes running in.

— Lawrence, come up to my room with a bowl, sugar, lemons, tea, and five or six bottles of rum or brandy. Then go right away to my friend Albert's house, and have him come back here at once to me. Tell him that I am in one of my null-and-void days.

The servant was not at all surprised at all these preparations, and the lights and the speed: this was of regular occurrence, as if it were a daily task. It was, indeed, one of the thousand oddities of Passereau. Impressionable and irritable, he suffered as soon as the air was less than exhilarating, when the sun was not warm and brilliant, and when the sky was unsettled. What suited him best was a hot climate, pure air, and a fiery sun: Marseilles, Nice, the Antibides, a Spanish sunshine, an Italian existence. It fretted him to be forced to put up with the big city's foggy, wet, muddy, cold, dirty, stinking, shivery air; and he sought his doctor's degree only in order to leave this forever: his dream was to exile himself to Colombia or Panama. And when the days were heavy and rainy and low-skyed, and the weather was wintry and misty and drizzling, he fell into a depression, and wept in a despairing apathy, and all he thought of was that life was bitter, and that the grave alone was calming, and living was an accursed thing.

It was then that he acclaimed nothingness, oblivion. There are only three things one can do to finally settle all this: to drink oneself to death, to sleep dreamlessly on and on, or to kill oneself at once: so let me get drunk and sleep. In order to kill myself, it will take rather more effort than I am disposed to take right now; we'll see later on how I feel about it. I don't want any more of these stupid days. . . . More fire, lamps, tobacco, punch! Lawrence, I want you to keep me going, keep me alive somehow, and look in on me every now and then. Soon as the sun shines again, and everything turns lovely outside, come open my windows and notify me.

Sometimes, when the bad weather continued, he stayed nearly a month shut up like this, surrounded perpetually with lamps and other lights, inundated with a splendid artificial daylight, reading, writing now and then, but more often drunk or asleep. His door was forbidden to everyone

except Albert, who, willingly enough, would come and imprison himself with his friend, not impelled by the same delirium, suffering and desolation, but for the originality of doing it, rubbing life the wrong way, making a parody of the rectilinear bourgeoise, and, above all, enticed by the drinking and smoking for which Albert had a religious veneration.

These null-and-void days of Passereau were not always the result of fog and rain and gloomy weather; just as often, as now, they proceeded from ennui, wretchedness, and frustration.

Suddenly, hurrying footsteps and a burst of laughter on the stairway foretold Albert's arrival.

— Well, my dear old man, we are in another one of our null-and-void days, eh? . . . I might have guessed it this morning. . . .

— Albert, I had an experience this afternoon that nearly killed me. . . .

— What do you mean?

— You gave me a month, remember? Thanks. I give you back thirty days.

— Delightful receipt! Now what do you think of female virtue? What do you have to say now of Saint Philogene? Don't you want to tell me all about the farce?

— Don't talk to me about it. You'll make me sick. Pour me another drink . . . and another. . . .

— You aren't very sociable, Passereau. You could have waited for me to come instead of drinking alone. You've been sucking on that bottle by yourself like a hermit.

— Life is bitter, and the grave alone is serene. Another drink, Albert. Pour it, another one. I'm still in my right mind, I'm still able to think, I'm still feeling low. So pour again, Albert.

— Really, you would make me grieve, if I were easily afflicted, to see you take these things to heart so much. But, after all, what is it all about? Just a disagreeable mischance, vulgar and trite. You want to love in an entire, and unconditional way: give it up, I tell you. You'll find only despicable beings, everywhere. And everywhere, under an innocent enamel, there is only a cheap and coarse clay. Young, we have deceiving mistresses, mean and false; old, we have adulterous wives and lowminded mothers. Don't go prowling around for women to make a romantic love, but only for your health, just for fun, when nature urges you on.

— Albert, under your unfeeling heart, who would recognize a doctor? Take your scalpel, talk muscle and phlebotomy, or be quiet.

— Of course, don't you see? Reasoning plainly, it's absurd to insist upon fidelity in women; it's absurd to call for complete virtue when that's so antipathetic to her constitution. It's a woman's nature to be flighty, fickle, careless, changeable; she has to be, it's necessary, and that's all right. She

doesn't need to be deep, or to analyze, or think, or subtilize; she just needs to be scatter-brained, swept along from one thing to another, and thus it is that she never has an inkling of the mean state to which she has driven society.

— *La vie est bien amère et la tombe sereine!* Pour me another drink, Albert, another one. I'm getting dizzy at last. I feel reality passing from me.

— You'll always be a pretty unhappy man if you are always going to insist on digging and getting beneath things, instead of viewing just the surface. Excavations of thought and reason are always deadly, and always followed by a landslide. We can't both live and think too much; we must renounce either one or the other. How could one support existence if, like you, he were always reflecting on things? For, only a little thought is needed to urge us on to death. Look at a star in the sky and ask what it is: then our misery, our low estate, our limited and thin intelligence, appear in all their splendor. In disgust, we pity ourselves; weak and ashamed of ourselves, who were once stupidly arrogant, we call for the relief of oblivion, even more incomprehensible. We must fix things so that they glance off us, like so many strikes off an armor. Accept everything cheerfully. Laugh at it all.

— Please. . . .

— We must laugh at everything, fly from flower to flower, from pleasure to pleasure, from joy to joy. . . .

— But first, what is pleasure, what is joy? I hardly know.

— To gratify one's dreams, one's fantasy.

— I have done that!

— To play, spend, lust, lie, to be insouciant, lazy and a charlatan.

— Some drink, Albert, more. Enough of moralizing. Believe me, but death lives in my heart; I wasn't made for this life.

— It's a pity to see a man like you, among the brightest in his field, gifted with a superior intelligence, whose thinking can take in the whole world of the sciences, deteriorating, cowering, besotting himself, coming to nothing, and all on account of a girl's treachery, isn't it? Then wake up, Passereau.

— I tell you, death dwells in my heart, life is not for me.

— Is there a shortage of women in the world? Aren't there other places on this earth if you're sick of this one? Go away, take a trip somewhere, see everything, hear everything, touch everything, taste everything; and if, on your way, you haven't found anything that attracts you, nothing under the sun that you can approve of, not a single being who charms you and whom you can love, and if you haven't found a shore of beauty

on which to spread your tent, come back. Only then will it be time to destroy yourself, you'll be doing right, and I'll commend you for it!

— *La vie est bien amère et la tombe sereine.* Pour another, Albert. Give me another glass of nothingness. Tell me, don't I always cling to the truth?

— Not in the sight of other men.

— At last. . . .

Passereau crawled to his bed and threw himself down heavily upon it. Albert finished a fresh glass and withdrew, making diagonal strides, sprawling stiffly and perpendicularly like the tower of Pisa or the spire of Saint Severin.

V

Very early the next morning some candles were still burning in a sinister fashion. Pale and haggard, Passereau stormed and cursed on his bed, pulling the bell-rope. Dumb ox! He won't come up here. If he needs some morning music, I'll give him some. The dummy, is he dead? Am I the bellringer for all the defunct? The scoundrel must be making love to some tramp of a girl.

— My word, sir, how impatient you are this morning!

— Lawrence, you drive me crazy. I rang for you for three hours, and what were you doing? Waiting for the resurrection of the dead? Hurry up, get my clothes ready. I have to go out.

— I didn't think you'd be so early today, after the goings-on last night. The weather's awful, it's raining buckets, you can't go out.

— Get me my clothes, I say. I have to get away from here, even though the gods themselves think it's too awful to be outdoors.

Lawrence had to help him dress, so preoccupied and absorbed he was to see what he was doing.

— Excuse me, sir, but your pants are inside out, like your head!

— A royal absentmindedness, Merovingian!

— I really am worried about you, sir. You really seem more upset and sadder than ever. You are in one of your black humors.

— Very dark, that.

— Will you be back for lunch, sir?

— I hardly know.

— It's coming down in torrents, enough to give everybody pleurisy.

— Let it pour.

— Wait awhile, or at least take a cab or an umbrella.

— An umbrella! Really, Lawrence, that's an affront. Umbrella, indeed! Sweet poison of our civilization, a talking coat-of-arms, the incarnation, quintessence and symbol of our epoch! An umbrella! Really, Lawrence, you are insulting.

Lashed by squalls and rain falling without interruption, like a real stockfish getting soaked from the open sky, there is our young medical student knocking on the door of a house alongside of a cramped and deserted little street below Saint John and Saint Nicholas streets and near the boulevard Saint Martin. The poor devil dripped like an overturned pot. He had tramped all the way across the hydrophobic city with his head down, paying no attention to the dousing he was getting. Passersby burst out laughing to see him out marching like this with the solemnity and unconcern of a dervish, but he did not hear them. He walked through the torrents and the puddles with a firm step, his bent body freely swinging, every now and then declaiming in a transport some well-known lines from Hernani: *Ah, when jealous love is seething in our heart. . . .*

After a long interview with the door it was finally opened.

— What do you want, sir?

— Senor Verdugo.

— What did you say?

— Pardon me. Is M. Sanson at home?

— Yes, he's at lunch; come in. . . .

— Sir, I am very glad to know you.

— At your service. What urgent business could bring you out in such stormy weather?

— Urgent business, as you say.

— We'll see.

— I must ask your pardon for my boldness in bothering you here in this retreat; I must ask you for service in one of your functions.

— One of my functions? The only purpose of my office is a cruel one.

— Cruel to cowards, yes; but sweet to the brave!

— That is true.

— I have come to ask you . . . but I know it's very demanding on my part, seeing that I'm completely unknown to you; but I am ready to pay you all costs and fees necessary that will be due you.

— Explain yourself, please.

— I have come to humbly beg you. . . . I shall be very appreciative of the kindness . . . if you would be willing to do me the honor and favor of guillotining me?

— What's that?

— I am most eager to have you guillotine me!

— This is carrying jokes pretty far, young man. Have you come here to insult me in my own house?

— Far from it, please believe me. Listen, my purpose in coming to you is entirely serious.

— If I were not afraid of being discourteous, I would tell you bluntly that you seem to me to be a lunatic.

— I would easily seem to be so to others, sir. I swear by all the throats you have cut that all my faculties are sound and entire. This service that I am asking you for is, I know, not among the customs of our country, that is to say, it is not among the customs of the mob, and whoever does exactly what the mob does is mad.

— I can see you are honest about it. I wish that I could believe that you have no intention of insulting me, nor of reminding me of my mortal mission, that I would forget. I wish to believe for certain that you are not insane at all.

— That is doing me justice.

— Are you not an artist? By your dress. . . .

— I'm one if you are one, for we are colleagues, in a way: my studies have much affinity with yours: like you, I am a surgeon, but you are my master in the science of amputation. My operations are less solemn and less certain than yours, and that's what brought me here to you.

— You do me honor.

— No, for from you to me, there is the harmony and closeness of a spinning-wheel to a distaff: I operate simply with my two hands, while you, an industrialist, amputate mechanically.

— Yes, but, once again, in what way can I serve you?

— I wish, as I just told you, that you guillotine me.

— Oh, come now, let's talk seriously, let's not come back to that again, it's a bad joke.

— Believe it or not, it's the sole motive of my visit.

— You are an original wag!

— Without any more exordium, here is the case: For a long time I have wished to put an end to my troubled and wearisome existence, but I could live on from day to day because I always retained a little hope. But, at last, an unhappy bearer of human misery, I am breaking under the burden, and I am going to lay it down.

— You, so soon tired of living? And why?

— Life is optional, we can tolerate it under certain conditions, and we have the right to cut it when it brings only suffering to us. I was given life without my consent, just as I was baptized: I have renounced baptism and now, I demand oblivion, annihilation.

— Are you alone, without parents?

— I have neither.

— And no money?

— The golden calf is not my god.

— But haven't you at least some love for science?

— Knowledge has naught but pretension, it is vanity.

— And haven't you any feeling of passion, or sweetheart?

— I have lost both, forever.

— It isn't at twenty that one loses one's passion; and the loss of a loved one, great though it may be, is not irreparable.

— I am fed up with everything.

— No, you are not: your eyes shine, and your heart beats.

— I see through everything. I see things as they are.

— Even love?

— Love! What is love? It's been poetized to nothing by simpletons. A stupid period necessity, a nagging law of nature eternally multiplying and reproducing, a brute propensity, a meeting of flesh, an orgasm, nothing more! Passion, kindness, honor, are all summed up thus.

— What hateful words!

— Yesterday I could not have spoken like this, for yesterday I was still being fooled, but since then veils have fallen from my eyes. Nobody had more illusions and beliefs than I had, nobody was more loving. The lovelier the dream, the more bitter the awakening. Yesterday I was tender, today I am savage. I loved a girl with all the power of my being. I believed that she loved me, but she was just playing with me. I thought her without guile, she was base and mean. I thought her unspoiled, heavenly, pure: she was a prostitute. And it was only my love for her had kept me going in the world.

— I can understand your affliction, but it's nothing too grave. It's one of the thousand experiences that happen to young men; don't get into the habit of killing yourself at each one. I don't see anything in your story that should drive you to suicide. I know that deception is often grievous, but a smart and strong man like you should surmount these misfortunes. It's childish not to do so. And if you recover from it, and live again after an extinguished life, you would be ashamed that you sacrificed so much for so little.

— But it isn't solely from this catastrophe that I have resolved to depart from life; my love just postponed it. Today, all is changed. I have sworn to put an end to my life, and it is irrevocable.

— I was right: you are deranged.

— Deranged! . . . Tell me then, you who are so right, what are we doing on this earth? What is the good of it? Why are we here? And why are we proud and arrogant and miserable people here if not to be just the means of reproduction and destruction?

— You are mad.

— But all this is just a digression. Let's get back to the subject of my visit. I beg you again to accede to my request. I will pay you for all the expenses you incur.

— What request? Just what do you want?

— No much. I simply want you to guillotine me.

— Never, my friend, never. This is pure folly. Even if I wished to do it, I could not. May God prevent me from even bruising you!

— Why not? Haven't you the right and the liberty to do the good for which you exist? Society has given you an instrument, and aren't you the one and only fiddler on it? Can society keep you from doing a service to a friend?

— It's true that society has given me a scaffold by inheritance, or rather, that my father has bequeathed a guillotine to me among his real estate and personal property; but society has told me: You will play your instrument only for those we shall send to you.

— She has sent me to you.

— Not at all.

— Yes, it is my loathing for her.

— You come directly to me on the main highway instead of a side road. Come back here again, and pass by the police, the prisons, the jailers and the judges.

— So you positively won't do this friendly favor for me? You are ungracious to me. But Heavens, I do not ask you to do it in broad daylight, in sight of all Paris, at the Place de la Grève! Let it be a private affair, a household chore, there, in a corner of your garden, or anywhere you wish, it doesn't matter. You see, I am easy-going about it.

— No, it's impossible: to kill an innocent man!

— But isn't it customary?

— I am not an assassin.

— How cruel you are to refuse such a little thing!

— I am not a murderer.

— Perhaps I have offended you, but it was in spite of myself. I know you aren't a cut-throat, a criminal. Your humanity and your philanthropy are celebrated.

— If you sincerely wish for death, suicide is easy: the first thing at hand, a pistol, your scalpel. . . .

— No, I would not like that: there is no guaranty of success: one could misfire, one could be disfigured, or mangled. . . .

— Well, I'm sorry for all that.

— But your method is so quick and sure; I beg you, to make up for all the men you have decapitated by force, behead me amicably.

— I cannot.

— But this is absurd.

— Do not be insulting!

— All right then: you don't want to do it the way I want it done, you want to do it by force. If I must pass through the hands of police and judges, very well then, I will!

— And then, I shall be your most humble servant.

— You won't do it. Why? Because I am innocent: a pretty feeble reason. After all, if all I must do is commit a crime, well, a crime is an easy and simple thing. We don't lack victims like Kotzebue in France, what we lack is murderers like Carl Sand. So glory to Sand! Mister Executioner, I shall see you in a month at the latest. Get ready, polish up your cutlass with your grinders. I don't want it to fail me.

— May God keep you from me, young man!

VI

— Lawrence, mail this letter at once. Will it be received before five o'clock?

— No, sir, it is too late.

— Then have someone deliver it by hand.

— To Mademoiselle Philogene, Rue de Menilmontant. . . . I guessed by your manner that you are in love, my dear sir.

— Oh, very much. . . . At the same time, take this letter to the Chamber of Deputies, and leave it at the secretary's office.

In the first letter, Passereau asked Philogene not to leave her house after dinner, because he wished to visit her at six o'clock that evening. The other was a petition to the Chamber, and part of the contents read as follows.

Gentlemen:

You may perhaps find it very impudent that a mere cabin-boy like me, from the street, should take the liberty of addressing a very humble plan to the old pilots of the three-decked vessel of representative government.

At a time when the nation is in such a state of poverty, and the treasury is in the last stages of consumption, at a time when the charming taxpayer has almost sold the clothes off his back in order to pay off his taxes, surtaxes, contretaxes, re-taxes, supertaxes, imposts and counter-imposts, tolls, and what not; and at a time when your monarchy is burdened with debt and your pear-shaped monarch is so unsteady on his pins, it is the duty of every good citizen to come to his aid, be it by gifts and voluntary presents or be it by practical advice. Not being yet of age, it is to be the latter and unique means that I will use to help you.

God helps those who help themselves.

I am going to suggest a new kind of tax which won't ruin the nation; a new tax which won't burden the thoroughbred strains, the nobility, or the clergy any more than the riffraff; a tax that won't prevent the populace from eating something else besides bread, when it has any of that; an amazing kind of tax which won't be derived from gambling, lotteries, tallow candles, prostitutes, tobacco, nor from judges, nor from the living nor from the dead. In a word, it will be a new tax that exploits only the dying. Taxes must, as far as possible, fall only on luxury items.

For a long time now, suicide, harmless in our moral system, has become very widespread: some spiteful people, no doubt carlists or republicans, have attributed its rapid increase to the misery of our age. They are idiotic. Suicide has become fashionable, almost as much as it was in the third century. Like dueling, suicide is incorrigible, and instead of letting it go to waste, it would be much smarter to make a cow of it and milk a rich revenue.

This is what I propose. The government will establish at Paris and in each department of the provinces, a vast machine-works which will, after the manner of the guillotine, kill people in an easy way, people who are tired of life and desire to kill themselvs. The bodies, falling into a bottom-less basket, will immediately be swept away by the current of a river, avoiding the cost of hearses and gravediggers. In a riverless country the apparatus could be run by windmills. The machine would be managed and worked by the public executioner of each place who would live there, like a priest in his rectory, without any increase in salary.

There would regularly be put to death each day six people in each department, making 3,650 a year, and 3,660 in leap years. Total in ordinary years, 302,950 and 303,780. I imagine that 100 francs would be the standard price, but it could be graduated like marriage fees in church, from 302,950 to 100 francs a head producing a grand total of 30,295,000, certainly a very tempting profit to relieve the drains on the public treasury. This plan would entirely satisfy social requirements for health, morals, and other necessities, and the air would not be fouled by the odor of decay. Citizens wouldn't be hit in the face by the bodies of suicides hanging from trees in public parks, and they wouldn't be crushed by those hurling themselves from windows. This plan, in the third place, would make suicide certain and the country wouldn't be full of maladroits disfigured by their unsuccessful attempts. Moreover, morality would be served because these deaths would be both secret and legal. And, in addition, suicide would actually fall into disuse because it would become commonplace and mechanical; witness the profession of comedians who are no longer social

pariahs but respectable citizens. Lastly, this plan would pour enormous sums into the public coffers.

Civilization, gentlemen, as your eloquent government paper says, walks in giant steps; and France has been the drum-major with seven-league boots. It should, therefore, be France which should give to the world this example of initiative in the way of social amelioration and progressive philanthropic setups; and it is you, gentlemen, the lanterns of this century of light, who should wholeheartedly accept my project. So doing, you will pour riches into the treasury, and joy into the hearts of suicides who will no longer be reduced, as I myself am today, to basely gutting themselves with knives, laying their brains bare with a musket, or asphyxiating themselves. I have the honor to be, gentlemen, your very humble and obedient admirer, Passereau, medical student, 7 Rue Saint-Dominique d'Enfer.

VII

Exactly at the time agreed upon, Passereau arrived. Mariette opened the door to him, and cried in a surprised voice:

— What, it's you, the handsome student! Glad as I am to see you, I had really hoped that you would never set your foot in here again. You love her then, despite everything? You can't free yourself?

— I hope, Mariette, at least, that you didn't tell her anything that would make her the least suspicious about my changed attitude?

— Nothing.

— You didn't tell her I was here when Vogtland's letter came?

— No, I did not have to.

— Is she here now?

— I ought to say no. Heavens, you aren't very sensitive or you'd be complaining about your unlucky love affairs. You were trifled with, and yet you don't seem to be aware of it, or care.

— Instead of blaming me, you should know what I have in mind, what I've sworn to do. Save your reproaches, Mariette.

— Well, come in, she's in her boudoir.

Philogene rose from the table, lay down on her sofa, chewing her meal, sated and swollen like a cow that had eaten too much clover.

— Oh, there you are, you fickle man. I'm going to have to clip your wings. I haven't seen you at all for three enormous days.

— You made me fickle at little cost, my dear. When I come, nobody's here, Madame is out horseback riding. . . .

— Is horseback riding wrong? You sound as if rebuking me.

— Far from it.

— Come here, kiss me, let's make up. . . . Well, come, it seems like an eternity! . . .

— You don't study horsemanship only, do you? You have theory?

— I believe we do have that. . . .

— What vaulting-horse are you on now? What's the posing lesson?

— You seem a little vexed. Why?

— Vexed? Me? For what?

— How should I know?

— Isn't everything the same as ever? Aren't you still my good. . . .

— As ever, of course! You'd offend me to doubt it.

— Me, to doubt you? You'd offend me in turn.

— I love you, dear Passereau, for I see that you still love me.

— How could I help but to adore you? Lovely of body, lovely of soul. Who is more worthy of my love? Happy, thrice happy, is the man to whom Heaven has sent a pure and faithful woman. Life will be kind and easy to him.

— And thrice happy is the woman to whom Heaven sends a sweet and lofty love. . . . But you seem to smile at that, Passereau.

— It's a kind of intoxication. You are smiling too, my dear.

— Don't you see it's from joy? . . . But, anyway, you seem to be a little cold and sad today. I know you like to love and be loved. . . .

— What do you want me to do, then?

— I don't ask you for anything, Passereau. I am scarcely able to kiss you, it seems. When I touch your lips you seem to draw away; your eyes stare and make me a little afraid. You're not ill?

— Yes, that's it. I don't feel too well.

— You poor boy, shall I make you some tea?

— No, I need to go out in the fresh air and walk. Let us go out.

— But it's dark, it's so late. . . .

— So much the better.

— Well, really, I'm not disposed to go out.

— Well, just as you like. Don't mind me.

— No, no, don't be vexed. I'll go out with you.

They went out, and Passereau, silent, held his mistress to him like a remorseful bridegroom dragging his bride after the honeymoon.

— But why do you insist on going this way, down these shabby and deserted roads? I would rather go on the Beaumarchais boulevards.

— My dear, I need darkness and solitude.

— But what are you taking me through this boggy land for? The Amandiers road leads to the cemetery. Are you conducting me to the grave?

— I love the stillness of this neighborhood, here where I passed my early

years in the home of a gardener, whose wife was my nurse. . . . Yes, to be sure, over there to the right, do you see that sort of hut: that is the home of my foster father. Only a few days ago I clasped the hands of the good old man. . . . What happy memories all this wakes in me! . . . If it were not so late I would go in and hug them; but good people without vices and ambitions rise and go to bed with the sun, contrary to the corrupt, who want long nights and who, like the owl, take cover during the day. . . . And look at this lovely garden, these vegetable rows, all this is theirs. And look, down there, the path where I took my first steps. Here is a field, nearly wild, it used to be a thick nursery. . . . Here there's an opening through the hedge, let's go in and walk awhile under the lime trees.

— What a strange thought! Aren't you afraid we shall be taken for thieves in the night?

— Have no fear, dear one, no one is awake here in this place. Moreover, the neighbors and the owner of this field know me: I have often come here in the springtime for a solitary walk.

— How dark it is: if I were not with you, Passereau, I would be frightened!

— Would you? You're like a child.

— How easily one could have one's throat cut, in this lost place. . . . Who would come to your aid. You would have to scream loudly.

— To scream would be useless.

— Passereau, let's go down this path, through the raspberries.

— No, no, let's go under the lime trees.

— Passereau, you're making me trot like a mule. I am very tired.

— Let's sit down then. Is there a greater bliss than to be alone with someone in a deserted place, especially at night? To hear nothing in the shadows around you, to have only the rocks and the underwood with you, and, in the profound silence, to hear only the beatings of a heart that answers the pulsing of yours, a heart that beats for you alone! And, in the midst of this gloomy and indifferent world, to press in one's arms an ardent being for whom one has forgotten all others, who makes one drunk with the kisses of her mouth, bitter and forbidden to all others! . . . Lulled to sleep under her potent caresses. . . .

— Oh, Passereau, it is the very rapture of love. I forget all else, all the beauty of the silence of the fields. This is the first time that I have talked of love under the open sky, with one I love. This is better than to be held within four walls!

— If we grow old, faithful to each other to the grave, with what joy we shall count this night among our happiest recollections; for surely our liaison is not that of a day.

— Steadfast, throughout our lifetime!

— My uncle, my guardian, will shortly render me an account of all that is mine, and then I will be set free of his protection: and as soon as I am free we shall be married. . . .

— How happy you make me! What generosity to a poor girl like me who can give you only her love! Oh, may the day come soon! I long for the day when we can be together always. . . . But don't hug me like that, Passereau, I'm like to die, you're going to kill me.

— To kill you, why, what a beautiful homicide! But what a tragedy!

— Yes, a woman who loves you for yourself alone is a rare being.

— And you are that kind of love, aren't you?

— You make me blush. . . .

— Watch out, one should only blush from modesty or shame!

— Heavens, how brusque you are to me tonight, and how coldly polite. . . . And when I caress you, it is as if I touched you with a hot iron, you shudder. . . . Perhaps there is something wrong, have I wounded you in some way? You must tell me if I have displeased you in any way. Tell me. Hide nothing from me. I can comfort you. . . .

— Poison and medicine together!

— What do you mean? You see, you are indeed hiding something from me. I seem to be making you suffer, embarrassing you some way. . . . How mysterious it all is! Speak to me, tell me, I beg you. Tell me my mistake, I will make amends, even though I die for it. Do you want to know something? There are people so cruel as to slander me. . . .

— Yes, that is true. But I didn't believe them. Some mean persons have indeed blackened you to me, they said you deceived me, that you were unfaithful. I don't believe it at all, it's a lie.

— An infamous lie! It must have been such rumors. . . .

— They told me you were fickle, but I wasn't agitated about it.

— You have not too much trust in me, Passereau? . . .

— Yes, yes, I do, darling, I do!

— I love you, Passereau, I love you, above everything. You are like a god to me. We are bound one to another by a tie more sacred than all the oaths ever made by men. Can you believe that I would ever delude you? I am an honorable woman, and what infamy to believe otherwise! With such a sheltered life I have had, and with so little liberty, I am innocent of anything they could say of me. I am proud of you, I call Heaven to witness what I say. My conscience is clear. I would sooner die than ever betray you.

— Yes, better death than disgrace.

— But you frighten me. . . . Your eyes are like a tiger's. . . .

— Dear one, I am bored with Paris. I want to get away. Would you come with me on a trip somewhere?

— And when?

— The sooner the better. We'll leave tomorrow if you want to. Let's go to Geneva.

— Tomorrow, Sunday? I cannot.

— Why, who is preventing you?

— Nothing, only I promised to dine with my parents.

— Well then, Monday, or someday next week.

— No, no, I can't. I'm sorry. I promised to spend a few days with my parents next week. I can't excuse myself from it.

— Then you don't want to?

— I cannot. . . . Why, Passereau, why do you look at me so awfully like that? Why do you hold your head like that? You really alarm me. . . .

— Pardon me, I forgot myself; it's just nervousness. I really don't feel too well, I am thirsty.

— Let's return to my house. If you fainted here, what would I do? I would be in great difficulty.

— Look, dear, before we leave, would you get me something for my thirst? Pull some fruit off the tree there, by the wall, at the end of the path. I will feel better.

— Heavens, Passereau, how you are shaking! Are you in such great distress then?

— Yes! . . .

— This path here?

— Yes, go straight ahead. Don't be afraid.

A few steps and Philogene disappeared in the shadows. Passereau stretched himself on the ground, straining his ears to hear in an extremity of anxiety. Suddenly Philogene uttered a rending cry, and one could hear a heavy noise like that of a falling body, and then the sound of water being thrashed about and moans that seemed to come from underground. Passereau sprang to his feet with the force of a demoniac and flew down the pathway of the lime trees. . . . As he came nearer the cries became more distinct: Help me! Help me! He halted abruptly and knelt down, leaning over the edge of a large well on the level of the ground. Far down, the water was being churned, and from time to time something white appeared on the surface, the moans coming up fainter and fainter: Help me, help me, Passereau, I am drowning. . . . Bent over, silent, he listened without answering, as, leaning from a balcony, one hears a far-away melody. . . . Slowly, little by little, the sounds died away. And then, in a loud voice, made louder by the echoing well, Passereau yelled:

— You want some help, my beautiful one? Very well, wait! I am going to tell Colonel Vogtland to bring you a book by Aretino right away!

Philogene answered with a frightful sob. She still floated on the surface of the water, clawing the sides of the well with her fingernails. Then Passereau, with a great effort, pulled off and let fall upon her, one by one, the broken curbstones at the top.

Gradually, everything, the whole night, became silent again, silent as a funereal vision. He turned back again, disappearing under the lime trees.

VIII

The little red man had tolled half-past five from the clock of the Tuileries, for the little red man had reappeared a little before with a new host and his master stone-mason. Passereau walked up and down under the forest of chestnut trees: to kill time while waiting, he had grazed on two or three extremely indigestible newspapers. Our handsome scholar had been greatly annoyed in this evil place, constantly beset by certain peculiar unorthodox persons, importuned and forced to endure proposals of love from these citizens of Gommorah. At last he saw a man come up hurriedly to the pedestal of the marble boar, turning his head this way and that, looking everywhere with a furtive and surly air. This person, big and fat, was dressed in a blue surcoat, and had an insignificant face cut in two with an enormous moustache. He wore noisy spurs on his boots, and carried a long riding whip with which he rubbed his thigh. Passereau, after eyeing him a moment with the look one gives to a horse at a fair, went up to him.

— You're waiting for someone, sir?

— What's it to you, fellow?

— It matters very much to me.

— Your business here is a pretty low one. Do you think I haven't noticed you for the last few minutes spying on me?

— You're waiting for a woman, aren't you?

— No, for a hermaphrodite.

— You're going to disappoint the pretty thing.

— Why, you miserable little sneak!

— It's true, sir, that my corpulence doesn't equal yours, and in a butcher scale you'll weigh much more, but your big voice and your size don't scare me. Believe me, the only thing that sways me is intelligence, and yours seems to me very badly constructed.

— What's all this prattle for?

— You needn't be ashamed of it, you're waiting for a woman, a Madem-

oiselle Philogene, but you're waiting in vain, you're waiting for a miracle, and miracles are out of date, she won't come, I can positively assure you of that.

— At any rate, it won't be you who will prevent her from coming.

— Don't swear on it, you never can tell, Colonel Vogtland!

— Who told you my name? Hell's army! this beats me.

— You expected to find only a marble boar here, but you find two of them, one of them alive, and ready to give you battle.

— No, I find only a boar and a pig.

— I'll select the weapons.

— What, do you mean that you too have honor? Things are pretty mixed up here. You act like a big soldier; you're just a sword-rattling kid. You'll have a pretty rough apprenticeship with me.

— Don't take that patronizing tone with me, Mr. Big Sword.

— Hell's army! The rebellion of a ribbon-seller!

— Don't come near me, private, you stink like a stable.

— Why, you whipper-snapper! It's all I can do to keep from laughing. I ought to give you a good kick!

— Well, look at me, am I shaking? One man is as good as another. Just like me, you kiss your emperor's feet. But we aren't living any more in a time when old soldiers lord it over everybody and can cuff anybody's ears; the time is gone when you can take his pipe away from a tired sentry. You're going to have to fight me!

— You want to? I'll duel you. Literally translated, that means I'll kill you.

— Who knows? Only bad barbers make gashes. Very well. Tomorrow morning? Where? Boulogne or Montmarte?

— Montmartre.

— At what time?

— Eight o'clock.

— Good. Although one man is as good as another, as you just so elegantly said, I don't like anonymous ones. Would it be possible to know who you are?

— Passereau. A student.

— Hell's army! Poor pickings.

— If we are going to duel just to draw blood, I'll bring my kit and dress up your wounds. But if you want me to open you up and embalm you after you're dead, you can count on my doing that, too, at your service!

— Oh, you're a doctor? Why then, we are confreres!

— I am that to many people.

— But Hell's army! The hussy isn't going to come.

— I presume not.
— Perhaps she sent you to tell me she couldn't come? She's sick?
— Very sick.
— Perhaps you are her doctor?
— Yes, I am her doctor.
— A thousand pardons for treating you as I did. I didn't know.
— Tomorrow morning at eight. Montmartre.
— But tell me, please, how is she? What happened? Is she in danger?
— What kind of firearms do you choose?
— Please, please, I beg you. Answer me. Tell me how she is. I offended you without knowing, and I beg your pardon for it. Answer, is she in danger of death? Is she in pain? If you knew how I love her!
— If you only knew how I was loved by her!
— But she's my mistress!
— She's mine!
— She, Philogene?
— She, Philogene.
— Hell's army!
— God's great tribunal! . . . And having intercepted that witty little note you sent her, I'm here in her place to ask you by what right you have been meddling in my affair these last three months.
— And may I ask you, since I've been keeping her these last two years, what right you have to meddle in mine?
— You have been keeping her?
— And with plenty of money and gifts and things.
— Ah, the vileness of it! . . . I've done well then. . . .
— What have you done?
— Nothing.
— Will you swear to it? Have you really been her lover these last three months?
— I swear it by Christ. It's the truth. Are you willing to swear you've been keeping her these last two years?
— By Luther, it's the truth. I swear it.
— It's a slander.
— It's you who are lying.
— I'm not saying you didn't try your luck with her, but your suit was dismissed.
— I don't say you didn't make a gap in the wall; I just say the siege got you nowhere.
— Once and for all, what arms are we going to use?

— And once and for all, you definitely want to fight, to be avenged of what she caused you?

— No, of all the favors she gave me.

— Bragger!

— Pipe-dreamer! You think you can tear my love from my arms and get away with it? You couldn't be more in the wrong, you johnny-come-lately lover-boy. You were going to plant some thistles in my field, weren't you? You were going to beg for her love—with money. She is mine, I will keep her, I want her, I need her, I will defend her against all aggressors. Death to poachers on my land! You still want to duel with me, Colonel?

— I will kill you.

— We'll see whether your reputation is deserved. I do not know how to handle a sword, and besides I'm near-sighted, and can't even fire a gun. Would you be willing. . . .

— Just as you like, all the more so as I don't like murder, and it would be to kill you. Whatever courage you have, it will be an unequal fight. What can you do against an unerring shot? But it displeases me to have to go onto the field for such a trivial motive. Frankly. I don't have any great desire for revenge. I don't hate you a bit, and if you'll simply promise to give Philogene up, I'd take your word for it and let everything pass. Will you?

— You're just fooling me. I'll never agree to it. We are two men fighting over a woman: she'll go to the survivor.

— Later on, you won't blame me. I can be pretty tough, like you. So don't ask me for mercy and sympathy.

— Let her go to the survivor! Blank or loaded, heads or tales?

— No. Too much like a schoolboy's way.

— We'll play a game. Then our chances will be equal. We'll play for our lives. Checkers or dominoes?

— All right. Let's go to that cafe yonder.

— No, not now. Tomorrow.

— Tomorrow! This kind of thing should never be put off.

— I must have dinner first.

— I won't let you go. I'm going to dog your steps all the way. You're going to mistreat Philogene. Let's settle this right now.

— I must have dinner first. . . . At that restaurant over there, at the corner of Castiglione street. You accept?

— Each one for himself.

Thereupon, they went down the Rue de Rivoli, our scholar and our soldier, or our soldier and our scholar: I leave it to each reader, according to his taste and his predilection, which should receive precedence. The

inn-keeper had never seen such a likely pair of newlyweds entering his place for a feast. One of them, a big heavy-boned sword-wielding killer; and the other, youthful and pretty as a girl, who would have made a good doctor for women, a refined killer like Broussais. As if for a very special little party, they shut themselves up in a private booth, and one could imagine that the younger man had evil thoughts about it. This goes to show that appearances are deceiving. In a case like this it is oftentimes easy to mistake the one who is going to cut our throats for the one who is going to hug us.

— For one of us this meal is going to be a last sacrament, said Passereau. So it's fitting that it should be big and hearty, without any regard for those regulations made by our late King Henry the Second, who often nullified his own orders in honor of Lady Diana. We have a better reason, we can break the law in honor of Lady Death.

— I understand: you want us to make, as we say in the barracks, a first-class chow. Suits me. To prepare the grand action that is to follow, to give yourself more nerve, you want to fire your brain. On my first campaign, when the days got warm, I recuperated with an internal armor of sparkling champagne.

— No, it isn't that. I am resigned to quitting this life. I will be almost chagrinned if it turns out that I'm the winner. . . . And I'm going to ask you, if it turns out in your favor, that you kill me without the least compunction.

— Agreed. . . . For life, as you so truly say, is beginning to weigh upon me too. The trooper sans a war, why, that's the desolation of desolations; it's like a doctor without diseases. . . .

In a corner of the booth they were calling their cemetery, the scholar and the soldier stacked their deceased bottles, and God knows how contagious mortality had been.

And now, off they go, down the streets, through the alleys, around the dead-ends, the plazas, the crossroads crowded with carriages and people. There they go, through the mud, over the pavements, the street manure, the stones, the gutters, the streetwalkers. How jauntily they tramped, our two men! There they go, like two cronies, like peacocks or members of the Academy with learned quotations, just like *Orchestre et Pilastre*. . . .

They arrived at the Regency cafe, and immediately asked for dominoes: the fatal moment has come. God, who doesn't take chances, even when playing dominoes, is going to decide, in his great wisdom, which one of these two men must die.

Vogtland seemed at times to be as arrogant as a sergeant, and then pleasantly exuberant.

— Six, twelve, eighteen twelve; the exact year I had the luck to lose my old father.

— Don't be silly, Colonel. Let's play seriously, and don't lay your dominoes upside down.

Our scholar was dreamy and self-absorbed, shriveled up in a ball like certain contemporary poets, or a little cold guinea-pig.

A gallery of onlookers soon surrounded their table. If these good men had suspected what was being decided here, they would have been badly frightened, taking to their heels at once, even if they had dropsy or gout. Vogtland, who, as if it were a duty, was accustomed to drink by the pint like somebody on a spree, had had his sixth or seventh cup, when the match ended with the score his. Passereau smiled pleasantly at this.

— Let's go, let's leave at once. I'm anxious to get it over with.

— What kind of death would you prefer?

— Blow me up.

— Good. I'll get my pistol from my hotel in the Rue de Rohan. Walk slowly ahead. I'll join you. Where shall we go, the Champs-Elysees?

And soon, Vogtland rejoined him. Silently they followed the great boulevard and went under the Etoile. At some distance beyond the tavern of the Neapolitan Graziano, where one can get such good macaroni, they turned down a street into a meadow below the highway. It was now night. There, having skirted the wall for a long time, they stopped.

— We'll stop here, said Passereau. This is far enough, I think.

— You are ready?

— Yes, load your pistol. Don't be squeamish about it, and if you fire in the air, you're a coward.

— Never fear. I won't fail you.

— Aim for my heart and my head, please.

— Lean against the wall and don't move. Count one, two, three and at the count of three I'll fire.

— One . . . two. . . . Wait! Have we gambled our lives for a woman?

— Yes!

— Listen to what I am going to ask you to do, and do it. The will of a dying man is sacred.

— I will do it!

— Tomorrow morning you must go to Rue des Amandiers-Popincourt. At the entrance, to the right, you will see a field ending in a row of lime trees that is fenced in by a wall made of animal-bones and by a hawthorne hedge. Climb over the hedge and then go along a row of raspberry bushes,

and at the far end of this path you will come across a well that is level with the ground.

— And then?

— Lean over the edge of the well, and look down to the bottom. And now, here is your signal. Do your duty. One . . . two . . . three!

CHAMPAVERT

I

To Jean-Louis, Plowman

I shall die alone, my dear Jean-Louis, I shall die alone! . . . And yet, I once received and made, a promise: a man once told me: I am tired of life, and you hate it too; when you are ready, we shall flee from it together. Jean-Louis, I am ready now, I tell you. I am ready to take to flight now. And you, are you ready too? How simple of me, to believe that promise of yours! For men change their minds. Yet, you could not have forgotten so soon. And I have often reminded you of that night when, after having wandered a long time in the forest, puzzling our brains over everything, evaluating all things, ransacking, dissecting life, passions, society, laws, past and future, breaking the deceiving optical glass and the crafty lamp that shines through it, so many lies and miseries gave us hiccups of disgust. And if you remember well, we wept at it all, yes, you wept! . . . We clasped hands and we swore an oath. If I recall all this to you now, it is not that I would ask you to retrace your steps, no, it is simply so that you will no longer find fault with my determination that once was also yours. Alas, no doubt but that your new way of thinking has killed all our old ideas, and pinned you down like an oyster to a rock. You have left the silly profession your father imposed on you; once a worker, you have renounced work for the smiles and tips of government office, depraved peasant that you are. You have had the vulgarity—since, as they say, a dog finally shows his true breed—to quit the town for an entrancing sojourn, as those impudent lickspittles call it, those foxes that eat the cheese of the proud and ignorant bourgeoisie parading on their dunghill like peacocks, in order to return to the fields your forebears left, to be a toadying menial. You have had the vulgarity and the foolishness to prefer the linen smock and the shirt and pants tightly laced as a vise, and the strangulating frock-coat, folded over like a windlass, a collar like an iron choker, boots washed with soapstone, and shiny kid gloves, a passing fad: a very comfortable style of dress, to be sure, in which you are wrapped

up so securely you can't use your hands nor your feet, nor turn your head, nor lean forward or back, nor kneel down nor sit down. You've swapped the big city for the town, the spectacles of vaudeville for that of nature and reality, the distant views of bluffs for the rolling streets of shops crawling with cabs and carts, you prefer this to lonely roads, and unspoiled fields bordered with hedges and woods, for there, in the open country, you have nothing for strollers but this, no pictures, in the windows, no jugglers on the milestones, no sirens smelling of liquor, nothing citified at all! A man, left like this to himself, in solitary silence, is reduced to thinking about it.

You are happy now, happy—what a scandal: a farm-boy happy! Can bliss ever be so prostituted? A ploughboy happy! Go tell that to the three-starred banker there, taking the air on her balcony. Disgusting, she will tell you, turning to spit: a farm-boy happy, a clodhopper like that! As for me, I can tell you, without flattery, that I understand you and your good fortune very well. But is it really good fortune? What a laughable word! I have never yet met anyone bareface enough to admit that he is wholly happy.

There was perhaps a time when I also dreamed of such a life that you experienced. I, too, believed in the pastoral, the idyllic rustics, Favart's villagers, Boucher's fake peasants. I told myself that, if bliss didn't reside in the big city, it was harbored in the country. I used to believe that, if one wore shoes and a plain shirt, a straw hat, and if one rose at day-break, steered a plough, hoed and watered fields, followed a loaded donkey, ate cabbages, beans and pork, and went to roost at nightfall like chickens, then one was happy, very happy, exquisitely happy. I used to believe this, but I don't believe it any more. . . .

Still, if I had to stay a long time among people, and nothing but people, I would chose this life that you chose; I would make myself a rustic boor like you, but I would be more savage, more like an animal. I would go and eat black bread in the Vivarais mountains; I would make myself a bear-hunter in the Pyrenees, a charcoal-burner in the Ardennes, or a wood-cutter in the Alps. But today, all this isn't enough. What good would it be? My heart would be made calloused like my hands. It isn't brutalizing that I need, it is annihilation, a return to nothingness! But you want something more than oblivion, you want to live. Live, then—I will die alone!

There is the solemn promise then that you made to me and which you have revoked.

And I will tell you of an oath of mine that I also will betray.

It is an oath sworn to a woman, a strong-souled woman I loved. One day, the two of us, exhausted and overwhelmed, my face hidden in the blonde hair I loved to nibble and veil myself in, went over the past. We

talked of our sorrows, our loves, for our love had been dreadful, and my love is fatal because I am baleful as a gallows! Poor girl, how she has suffered on my account. I have been so much in the wrong. . . . I could strangle those impostors, those rascals who sing of love with silly garlanding and cheap doggerel, like fat babies with fat joys. . . . To sing of love! To me, love is hate, wailing, crying, shame, mourning, tears, blood, cadavers, bones, remorse. I have not known other kinds. Come, pastoral rose, tell me of love, that bitter masquerade. . . . This poor girl, punctuating her phrases with the most stinging kisses, told me then, gravely: Champavert, I want you to promise me. . . . I want you to promise me that you will never die alone, never. That day in which you become weary of life, look for me, and tell it to me alone: I wish to end it. We shall go out together, and in a last embrace, we shall kill each other.

So I swore it. She kissed me twenty times . . . but within an hour, and the bushel of my loathing for life was still not filled: something still pinned me down to living. I knew how determined she was, she had fondled this plan for a long time. Thinking it might be carried out at any time, she carried with her a last will and testament, so that no one could be accused of her murder. I weighed everything for a long time. I have been indecisive, but now I'm going to reveal to her at last my belated wish: Flava, I am ready now. Come, get up, and we shall go out to die.

What a great joy it would have been to have perished with her, she is so deserving of it! . . . But, for all that, I do not want to do it now. I will not go now. So stupid the world is, it would say that we are . . . are . . . it would say that I was just love-stricken. So, I don't want to die now. The world cannot believe, so stupid it is, that life could be a burden that the strong might relieve themselves of; it cannot believe that anyone could loathe existence, and thirst for annihilation. No, the world has to vulgarize everything, cause and effect, an idea for it has nothing in it but the obvious, it must gauge and measure everything like this, even God! When the world views a suicide, right away it wants to give only commonplace causes, conspicuous marks: it was because of a woman, some love affair, gambling losses, some family disgrace, a mental aberration. No, no, I am not going to have it said of me, so I am going to die alone. I don't want them to say that Champavert and Flava killed themselves for love, an unhappy intrigue, thwarted, pushed to the edge of despair. It isn't because of despair, because I've never had hope.

But what folly, how foolish I am, that I should care that this world that I hate, that I spit upon, and for which I have such scorn, would think that I died for love. What weakness that I should care! When I am annihilated, what matter the vulgar conjectures of men? Their babbling

would trouble my dunghill no more. But no, this fear is stronger than I am, I cannot surmount this imbecility. Weak that I am, the thought of what the world would think still bothers me. So I will die alone.

Jean-Louis, you can live, since you have found happiness. . . . Destiny has kept me from dragging you with me down the stairs of the cistern of death. Your wings are still snared in moribund illusions that, when we were together, we tore off one by one. I thought you an unhooded falcon ready to take flight toward oblivion, but the world's light has blinded you again. Perhaps you are waiting for a kind of tranquillity at life's end. What you failed to get in youth you hope to get in decreptitude? You cannot believe that existence has only misery: if it were only like that, you tell yourself, if life never had a period of beatitude, a season of pure joy, in which we could be avenged of all former injury, how is it that so many can drag their bodies out to the bitter end, how can they consent to vegetate in misery, to wallow in society's foul waters? How can they do it? . . . It is because, like you, the mob lives in hope, believing itself always on the verge of obtaining its vanished dream, its mad desire, like the cat which tries to seize the passing objects in the mirror, and, at the instant she joyously throws herself on her prey, on this shadow, her claws hit and scratch the glass, while, amazed but not enlightened, she persists and keeps at it, still deluded. But you have gone behind the mirror and have grated some of the quicksilver with your fingernails, you know it is only glass and paint reflecting the passing world, and are you then always going to lie in wait for more blandishments?

The world is a theater: posters with enormous letters and bombastic titles, are fish-hooks, and the mob swallows the bait, gets up right away, washes, combs its hair, puts on its shirt and its Sunday dress, dons its calico jacket, and, umbrella in hand, there it is, ready to go. Brisk, happy, eager, it arrives, pays—for the mob always pays, sooner here than for its taxes—for the seat of its choice, enters the vast amphitheater, the elite locked into its boxes, and the rabble at its mercy. The curtain is raised, ears opened and necks stretched, the crowd listens, as always. For this is a complete illusion, this is its reality. It recognizes, it laughs, it weeps, takes a dislike to, loves, howls, whistles, applauds. Sometimes, but vainly, it feels that it's being fooled, and takes to looking at things with an opera-glass; but the mob is myopic, and nothing can destroy its illusions and the faith that exploits the comedians so good-naturedly.

But you, Jean-Louis, who have gone behind stage, and have seen the seamy side of the palace, the flat stage-sky, and the rear; you who have seen the kings naked and close-up, charlatans with trappings of spangles; you who saw the carcasses of duennas through the ochre and plaster in

which they are painted; you who have kept company with the leading lady, so fresh and chaste on stage, whose mouth breathes drugs; you who know that the genovines are only tokens; you, for whom kings, old soldiers, nobles, pretty girls and valets are only debauched clowns, and who have honor, pride and justice only according to their assigned roles, hypocrites who, away from the eyes of their audience, are steeped in depravity; you, Jean-Louis, who is less entranced and more free of error than you? . . . And are you going to listen to this farce up to the last act? Are you going to stay to the end with the rabble, a loudmouthed and indulgent spectator of this ignoble humbug? . . . Oh, Jean-Louis, you could not fall so low!

I don't hold it against you so much that you want to cling to life, no, but that you pretend to be unable to believe in the reasons I have for suicide. You ask me that, you! What changed you? What sweetened your heart at the same time that mine was made bitter? The doyen of my thoughts is the thought of death. To be sure, you have the right to live, since the scaffold isn't calling you. You can proudly carry your head on your shoulders, it isn't a rebellious head any more, the furnace of your heart contains little but cinders now, you can move that jaunty and pacific head of yours with the license of a king and the authority of a mayor. Besides, don't you live in the country, and the fields go on living. What could be more attractive? There are the cows, the haystacks, the croaking pond, the threshers, the braying donkeys, the rippling puddles, the beetfields. Entrancing, irresistibly charming. Only one thing displeases me, perhaps: the monotony, the sempiternal physiognomy of nature: always rain and sunshine, and rain; always spring and autumn, heat and cold, forevermore. Nothing is more tiresome than a sameness, a fixity, a perpetual almanack. Every year, green trees and more green trees. Fontainebleu park! Who shall deliver us from green trees? . . . Why isn't there more variety? Why don't leaves take the colors of the rainbows by turns. Fontainebleu! How idiotic all this verdure is! . . . You seem to ignore the fact that the thought of death is the chief of my thoughts. But it is too late, all that you could say about it is vain because I am going to end everything. I love you too much to fear your reproach; at least, as my friend, you will not berate me. At least you will say: He did well, he did a brave thing, in killing himself.

II

Concluding this statement of his case, Champavert wrote the address on it: Jean-Louis, Plowman, Vaudragon Chapel. He got up as if relieved of a burden, drank a pot of tea, smoked a cigarette, and seated himself by a window, smoking and staring vaguely into space. His cigarette finished,

he turned to the room again, and, walking from wall to wall, kissed the portraits of his friends hanging there, one by one, and one by one, smashed them on the floor. Following this, with a mocking laugh, and shrugging his shoulders in contempt, he tore up all his books and threw them into the fire; and, taking an axe that hung on the wall as a trophy, he smashed all the furniture in the room. The floor was covered with debris and the fire blazed up the chimney. A sense of wickedness, of destruction, made his heart beat with joy; he wanted nothing useful left after him, nothing; he did not want his belongings divided after his death; he did not want anyone to love the things he had loved, showing his castoffs for anyone to see. If he had had any gold he would have thrown it into the sea or buried it, so profound was his hatred for mankind and legacies. He was not the kind of man who would have planted a tree to shade the weary traveler at midday. He would sooner have dug a trap there to sink the lost coach-driver or the pedestrian gone astray in the high grass. Satisfied with all this destruction, he sat down in the ruins, as the architect Fontaine had sat down in the rubble of Saint-Germain-l'Auxerrois, and, opening a half-burned case, took out a little tortoiseshell box, pressed it to his lips in ecstasy.

—Edura! Edura! My first and most terrible love! Edura, my Warens! His hands were wet with great tears falling from his eyes. Edura, what a fatality you were for me! If you had desired it, you could have made of me something great, and with a word from you I could have been what I was predestined for. But you did not say the word, evil woman. You have wronged me, I have been ruined by you. You could have made a lion of me, the goodness in my heart could have increased under your love and voice and words, you could have drained off the venom which now overflows in me. Suffering has made a fierce wolf of me. So now I am breaking this jewel that came from you! . . .

And throwing the shell box down, he pulverized it under his foot.

—Die, die then, all memory of her! . . . She who put all this hatred into me, she who soaked my youth in gall when she could have made it a thing of beauty and wonder. You have made my life a sour thing, you are the cause of my hatred. It is you who put into me the germ of death, misery fertilized it. . . . Oh unimaginable passion . . . the years have quickly passed, and have made you old and stained and faded. . . . If you willed it, you could have gathered the fruit of my love, which, like an immortal amaranth that would never wither, that love would embellish you still . . . you would have a loving child in your arms to call back to you the life that was gone. . . . But now, what have become of your charnel lovers, where are they now? They scarcely recall your name, these

cossacks on horseback, these men to whom you gave your love. These transient lovers have despoiled you on their way onward. And I know that if you came back to me today, I would drive you away. For you stifled your love for me, for to love and be loved by an obscure nobody was not what your arrogant self wanted. I would drive you off, for I love you today as you were, not as you are. If you threw yourself at my knees, I would be pitiless, I would strike you down. . . .

He wept bitterly, silently, his head bowed on his arms.

— For life's direction is decided by its first step. Pour vinegar into the sweetest wine and it will become vinegar.

He picked from the debris the shell box and placed the fragments into his purse. Suddenly he rose, put on his hat, and went out.

— Here is my key, he said to the concierge as he passed. I am leaving for a trip, far away. If anyone asks for me say that I am going away for a long time.

— Are you going to Spain, that you love so much?

— Much farther.

— To Algeria?

— Much farther.

III

Towards evening, he was seen in the Rue Jean-Jacques-Rousseau. About eight o'clock in Rosiers street, in Montmartre, he rang the bell at a red wicket. A young girl opened the door to him: her blond hair floated down her white dress. Her skin was pale, her look anxious, her manner languorous and delicate. All this, with her inclined head and sunken breast, told of suffering that had ravaged and still ravaged a broken and weary soul. She uttered a cry of surprise.

— You, my savage one, at this hour! . . .

— I am here, not by chance, but on purpose.

— Champavert, I can hardly believe that.

— Dear one, you want to hurt me. . . . Are you alone? . . . Your father?

— All alone. He went to the village.

— At last, that's luck. I can see and talk to you without big eyes and ears spying on us.

— What has changed you so, Champavert? What sun has melted the ice of your heart? After being two months away from me, it suits you *to* come play lover with me.

— Flava, I am not playing at love with you. I am as I have always been to you. I deserve your scolding. I am not persevering, but you still reign in my heart, as his country in the heart of an exile, as life in the hearts

of the condemned. Should I come here oftener? To suffer? . . . Always keeping close watch like a criminal. I can no more than whisper, take your hand. . . . How often I could have struck your father and your jailers down. . . . If you were only free. . . .

— Ah, well, what difference? Seeing you again revives my courage. But you are cruel to disappear two or three times a year like a savage and then return to lie and say you still love me. . . .

— Flava, you are hard on me. Must I then, like a new lover, renew my promise that I will love you always. . . . Once, yes, when I was a boy, I was vicious, but hasn't my constancy to you made up for it? I love you, Flava, deeply, forever. Do you want me to swear it again? I swear it on his body. . . .

— Be quiet, Champavert. Say no more. Do not invoke his shade!

— Flava, do not weep, dear love. Your tears are bitter on my lips, mother that you are. . . . He's happier than we . . . for he is no more. . . .

— Happier than we are, for he is no more. . . . Champavert, how true that is: I love that thought. . . . Tell me, are you ready now? . . .

— No, my loved one, let us wait. Perhaps better days will come for us. Still young, we have many days to come. Let us wait: we drank wormwood before the feast. Let us wait. After the mourning of the night, day and dew. . . .

— Champavert, when a tree has been lightning-struck, no spring can make it green again. It withers on the earth, until the woodcutter puts his axe to it. Champavert, are we going to wait for the axe of Death, that most tardy woodcutter? It would be cowardice!

— It is reckless to prejudge the future. Love, let us strip ourselves of this melancholy. Let us not be so elegiac. . . .

— That's it, at your leisure, you are jesting. But you are forcing your smile, you are grinning, it does not come from your heart. It is the smile of a condemned man. Soon you will betray yourself.

And while they were talking in this room of shadows, the moon had risen from the horizon, and its rays, breaking through the wavering foliage of the chestnut trees, seeded the darkness with nacreous lights and the obscurity with silvery moths. The nightingale did not yet sing his nocturne, and one heard nothing in the immensity save the amorous sound of their voices murmuring like the sighs of gnomes.

IV

— The plain is dark and deserted. Get up, dear one, and let's go down to the field. Let us stroll down there, near the cistern. It has been a long

time since I knelt on the earth there; the holly shades his mortuary cradle; but perhaps animals have eaten it.

— No, see: the holly is green and thick and the grass is still high and fresh. Every night, like a fertile rain, my tears. . . .

— You come down here every night to the spring?

— Yes, every night, when everyone is asleep, I come here to pray by his grave, and then I feel becalmed. Nature seems then to have pardoned me for my crime. In the silence, a voice seems to come from the stars to tell me: Child of earth, you are guiltless, the crime is society's. . . .

— Strange, you never told me of these nightly visits. . . .

— But I felt that my father has, many times, suspected me. I am sure he has followed me here. I have seen him hiding behind the cistern wall. We may be discovered. I fear that he will come to understand why I pray. He has asked me many times, with a knowing smile, if I were a sleepwalker. . . .

They were now nearly at the end of the sloping footpath that led to the spring. The moon had disappeared, and the sky was black, but there were still a few stars that moved like matches. Flava leaned on the arm of Champavert, who crushed in his hand a branch of verbena.

— There is no sweeter odor than that of verbena, Flava.

— I love them.

— For you to love flowers, Flava, is to love oneself.

— I love its perfume.

— I have always been mad about the odor of flowers. They say that it ill becomes a man, but I do not care. I have not been made effeminate by my love for flowers. I could fill my rooms with aromatic plants, I could drench myself with scents like the most elegant whore. When I feel depressed a stalk of honeysuckle is a great consolation to me. Many a young man would climb to a balcony for a love, I would mount guard there for a flower. I would walk to Spain for an orangeblossom, to the orient for a benjamin tree. Many a man would sell his overcoat for a lottery ticket, I'd barter mine for a bottle of rosewater. . . . But Flava, to me, you are the loveliest mignonette, the most precious arabic balm. I would do more than any man for you, I would live, if you insisted. . . .

— You betray yourself already, Champavert. Don't you remember your promise to me? Are you ready?

— No, I meant that, if I had decided to perish, and if you wanted me to live, why, I would live!

— Champavert, you blaspheme when you speak so lightly of annihilation. You deeply wound me. . . . Look at the fields of the sky, this plain, these

mountains, and the majesty of all nature. Can you still believe in destruction then?

— Like you, Flava, I used to believe in poems and fine phrases.

— Alas, if we do not live again in a happy eternity, it would be too terrible! . . . A life of suffering and misery, and then no more?

— No more than that. Nothingness.

— Ah, you cannot believe that!

— Yes, I do believe it. It is cowardice that makes men recoil before the thought of oblivion. They fashion a future life according to their wont, swaying drunk on the lie they themselves invented, and then, pleased with this happy idea, dying like fools on their hard bed, with an inane smile on their lips, they say: Farewell! We shall meet again, I am leaving for a better world, we shall meet beyond. . . . And then, with an even sillier smile, the heirs, secretly exultant, answer: Farewell! Bon voyage! We shall meet again after while, make ready for us our place in the hostelry of paradise. . . . Well, you idiots, you are going where all things go, to oblivion, to nothingness, annihilation. . . . And I can tell you this face to face with death, and with my feet almost in the grave, you cowards. I want nothing of another life, I've had enough in living this one, and I call for extinction!

— Say no more, Champavert, be silent. Do not blaspheme against life thus. If you knew how terrible you look. What then will be the reward of all the unhappy tortured beings here below?

— And what recompense will the horse receive for all his sweaty labor, the forest for the axe, the scythe, and fire? Is there another life for horses and oak trees? A paradise? . . .

— You are mad, Champavert, be silent. God hears you; aren't you afraid of his thunder?

— If it were a god who hurled the thunderbolt, I would defy him! Were he to cast me into his thunder, this mighty god who hears everything, I defy him! I spit against his heaven. Look over there, do you see his poor thunder and lightning dying away in the distance? It looks as if he were afraid of me. Frankly, your god is not sensitive to honor: if I were God, if I had thunders in my hands, I would not let myself be insulted by anyone, not even an insect, or an earthworm! . . . And as for you, you other Christians, you hanged your god, and you did well, for, if he were truly a god, he deserved hanging.

— Oh, let me run away from all this, the jaws of hell are opening under your feet! Satan! you horrify me! . . . Leave me, Champavert, I made no pact with you. I beg you, be silent, say no more. I shall die if you blaspheme more. What must I do then?

— Up to now, I have kept myself calm, but too many miseries have driven me to madness. If I held all human-kind in my arms the way I hold you now, I would strangle it. . . . Yes, if I held my own mother who gave me my life, I would eviscerate her. . . . A mother is but an infamous thing. . . . Ah, if she had smothered me in her womb, killed me as we did our own child. This horrible thing, it has made me mad. This atrocious world in which a girl must kill her baby to save her honor! See, Flava, you have been an honorable woman since you killed your child. Flava, you still are virgin! . . . Help me clear this grave, so that I can dig with my nails. I wish to see my son, I want to see him in this my last hour.

— No. Do not disturb this sacred spot. . . .

Rain came down in floods, the thunder roared across the sky, and when the lightning threw out sheets of flame, one could make out Flava, dishevelled, her white dress like a shroud, lying on the bed of holly. Champavert, on his knees, was digging the black earth with his poniard. Suddenly he stood up again, holding a skeleton covered with rags.

— Flava! Flava! he screamed, look, look, look upon your son; This is what eternity is! . . . Look!

— Ah, Champavert, this is too terrible, this suffering. All this for one sin, only one. . . . It is too much. . . .

— Law, virtue, honor, take back your prey. Look, barbarous world. You wanted it like this. Look, this is your work, yours! Are you satisfied with your victim and all other victims? This bastard, it is an affront to you, isn't it, you who could not abide maternity without royal authorization, banns, a piece of paper. Law! Honor! What is this, then, only infanticide. As long as timid virgins are in their last stage, so long will virtuous girls count their springtime with murder. Barbarous law! Ferocious prejudice! Infamous honor! Men, and their society! Look upon your prey. I give it back to you! . . .

And, yelling these last words, Champavert took the corpse and threw it far down the slope where it broke on the stones of the road.

— Champavert, put an end to this, gasped Flava, cold and dying. Strike me, so that I die first. . . . There, at my heart! . . . Farewell!

— I am ready. To oblivion!

At this last word, Champavert threw himself to his knees, put the point of his dagger on Flava's breast, and let himself fall upon her, clasping her in his arms. The cold steel pierced her quickly as she uttered a last cry. Then he drew the knife from the wound, staggered down the hill again, disappearing into the rain and the fog.

V

At dawn the next day a driver heard a cracking sound under the wheels of his wagon: it was the remains of a child.

A peasant found the body of a woman near the spring.

And on the Montfaucon heights, a horse-skinner in a boneyard, whistling a tune as he rolled up his sleeves, noticed, among a pile of dead horses, the body of a man covered with blood. His head, upturned and drowned in the mud, revealed only his long black hair. In his chest a big knife was driven like a stake.

THE END