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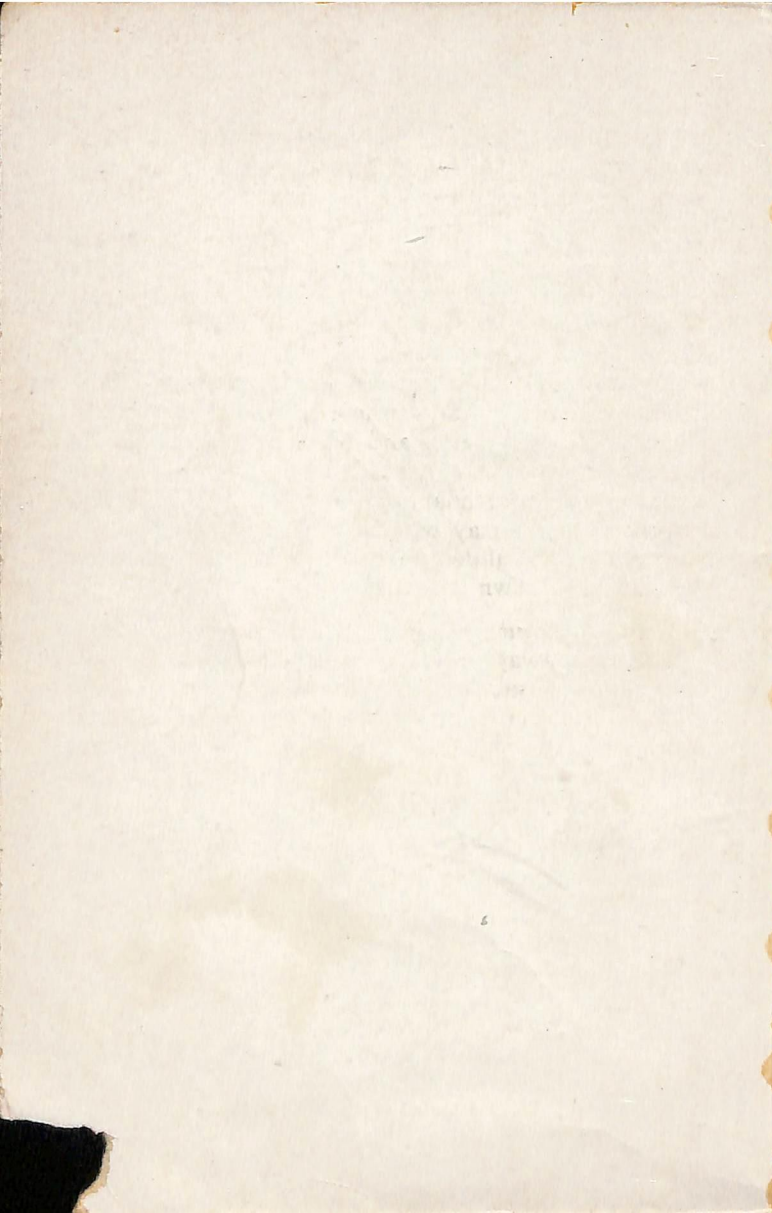
# Crime d'Amour

A vintage pulp magazine illustration. A man with dark hair is shown from the side, leaning in to kiss a woman on the cheek. The woman has blonde hair with red highlights and is wearing a white, low-cut, long-sleeved dress with a yellow sash. She is looking towards the viewer with a surprised or intense expression, her hand raised to her hair. The background is dark and moody.

**PAUL  
BOURGET**

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"TAKES US INTO AN ATMOSPHERE OF SENSUAL JEALOUSY WHOSE GOD IS THE FAMILIAR UNHOLY TRINITY."

—Benjamin W. Wells

In this acute and sensitive study of infidelity, Paul Bourget reveals that rare insight, of which the best French novelists alone seem capable, of being able to describe moral depravity without at the same time making it either "glamorous" or merely "wicked." Helen Chazel, inciter and victim of Armand de Querne's *crime d'amour*, has been described by critics as a literary descendant of *Madame Bovary*. While Armand himself may well be recognized as that embodiment of moral decay which appears to be so much with us in our own times.

*Crime d'Amour* is more than a bold story of a woman who turned away from her husband to seek the fullness of love elsewhere. It is also an intense, dramatic glimpse into the very dark center of the human mind where depravity and guilt hide. By this novel, Bourget joined those great writers who have dared to look upon shame and tell truthfully of it.

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*About the author of this novel:*

Born in Amiens, France, in 1852, the son of a mathematics instructor who wanted him to become a teacher, Paul Bourget turned his talents instead to literature, and achieved world-wide recognition as a novelist, dramatist, and critic. A friend of such poets as Coppee and Barbey d'Aurevilly, his first book, a collection of poems, was published in 1875. Turning gradually from poetry to criticism, his essays on Baudelaire, Flaubert and Stendhal brought him his first real acclaim. His first novel, *A Cruel Enigma*, appeared in 1885, and its success led to other best-selling novels, including the one here reprinted.

In the same year, 1895, that Bourget visited the United States, he was admitted to the French Academy, the highest honor that an intellectual can dream of in France. His novel, *The Disciple*, marks an important date in the moral history of French literature. Although he lived to 1935, most of his great works were completed before the turn of the century. He is buried in Montparnasse, not far from his friend Guy de Maupassant.



# Crime d'Amour

by PAUL BOURGET



**ACE BOOKS, INC.**

**23 West 47th Street, New York 36, N. Y.**



## CRIME D'AMOUR

Ace Books edition published 1953

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### DEDICATION

*To Gaston Crehange*

Days and days have passed, my dear friend, since our childhood, but they have passed without altering in the slightest our affection of that time. As a souvenir of an intimacy of heart and mind which has never known a cloud, it is very agreeable to me to write your name at the head of that one of my books which you have preferred to all the rest. It is also the one in which I have the most sincerely said what I think concerning certain essential problems of morals of our epoch. May this absolute sincerity, which doubtless has pleased you, the most loyal and true of my friends, plead in favor of this work with readers who may be startled by certain audacities of portrayal and certain cruelties of analysis. Whatever may be the verdict of opinion regarding this minute diagnosis of a malady of the soul which I have called *Crime d'Amour*, this romance will have for me at least one great merit! It will have given me the opportunity, my dear Gaston, of calling myself once more your faithful friend.

PAUL BOURGET

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Printed in U.S.A.



## CRIME d'AMOUR

### CHAPTER I

A FAIRLY young man, one of three persons assembled in the drawing room, rose from his chair, set down his empty cup on the tea-tray with a sigh, and looked at the timepiece.

"Ten o'clock. Must I really go to see the Malhoures this evening? What a disaster it is to have a sensible wife who thinks about your future! Never get married, Armand. Listen to that wind! I was so comfortable here with you. Look here, Helen," he went on, leaning on the back of the easy chair in which his wife was seated, "what will happen if I do not put in an appearance this evening?"

"We shall be discourteous to some very kind people, who have always behaved perfectly towards us since we came to Paris a year ago," replied the young woman; she stretched out to the fire her slender feet, in the pretty patent leather shoes and mauve stockings, the latter being of the same color as her dress. "If I had not my neuralgia!" she added, putting her fingers to her temple. "You will make all my excuses to them. Come, my poor Alfred, courage!"

She rose and held out her hand to her husband, who drew her to him in order to give her a kiss. Visible pain was on Helen's handsome face for a minute, during which she was forced to submit to this caress. Standing thus, in her mauve-colored, lace-trimmed dress, the contrast between the elegance of her entire person and the clumsiness of the man whose name she bore was still more striking.

She was tall, slender, and supple. The delicacy with which her hand joined the arm which the sleeve of her dress left half uncovered, the fullness of this arm, on which shone the gold of a bracelet, the roundness of her dainty waist, the grace of her youthful figure—all revealed in her the blooming of a bodily beauty in harmony with the beauty of her head. Her bright chestnut hair, parted simply in the centre, half concealed a forehead that was almost too high—a probable sign that with her feeling predominated over judgment. She had brown eyes, in a fair complexion, such eyes as become



hazel or black according as the pupil contracts or dilates; and everything in the face declared passion, energy, and pride, from the rather too pronounced line of the oval, indicating the firm structure of the lower part of the head, to the mouth, which was strongly outlined, and from the chin, which was worthy of an ancient medal, to the nose, which was nearly straight, and was united to the forehead by a noble attachment.

The pure and living quality of her beauty fully justified the fervor depicted on the face of her husband while he was kissing his wife, just as the evident aversion of the young woman was explained by the unpleasing appearance of her lord and master. They were not creatures of the same breed. Alfred Chazel presented the regular type of a middle-class Frenchman, who has to work too diligently, to prepare for too many examinations, to spend too many hours over papers or before a desk, at an age when the body is developing.

The little drawing-room was illuminated by the soft light of three lamps—tall lamps standing on Japanese vases and bearing globes upon which rested flexible shades of a pale blue tint. The door was hidden by a piece of tapestry; two walls were hung with another piece, which was covered with large figures. Both windows were draped with curtains—drawn just now—of deep red color and heavy of fold.

The apartment thus closed in had a homelike air. The wreathing foliage of an evergreen plant showed in one corner. Close beside it, an open piano displayed its white keys. An English screen stood in folds on one side of the fire-place. The fire burned with a peaceful crackling noise which formed an accompaniment to the sound coming from the tea-pot as the latter received the caresses from the flame of its lamp on the low table designed for such service.

The furniture of the somewhat crowded drawing room presented that composite appearance which is characteristic of our time, together with the peculiarity that everything in it seemed to be almost too new. At a first glance, certain slight indications would have seemed to show that its Parisian aspect had been voluntarily aimed at. The feeling would have become still more perceptible to one visiting the other rooms and finding everywhere evident tokens that the persons dwelling in them had lived but a very short time at Paris.

This small-sized drawing room belonged to a small-sized house situated at No. 3½, Rue de La Rochefoucauld. The lower part of this street, which descends in a very steep slope to the Rue Saint-Lazare, comprises several private houses of



very varied build, and a few retired dwellings surrounded by gardens.

The house containing the little drawing room was built for an actress by a celebrated financier under the Empire, at a period when the Rue de la Tour des Dames harbored many princes and princesses of the footlights. Too small to suit a wealthy family, too inconvenient, owing to certain deficiencies in accommodation, for tenants accustomed to the completeness of English comfort, it must have proved quite seductive to persons accustomed to a semi-country life by its attraction as a "home," as well as by the quiet pervading the end of the street, which is rarely affronted by vehicles on account of the difficulty of the ascent.

Although Alfred Chazel was scarcely thirty-two, the first tokens of physical wear and tear were abundant with him. His hair was thin, his complexion looked impoverished, his shoulders were both broad and bony, and there was an angularity in his gestures as well as an awkwardness about his entire person. His tall figure, his big bones, and his large hand suggested a disparity between the initial constitution, which must have been robust, and the education, which must have been reducing. Chazel carried an eyeglass, which he was always letting fall, for he was clumsy with his long, thin hands, as was attested by the tying of the white evening cravat, so badly adjusted round his already crumpled collar. But when the eyeglass fell, the blue color of his eyes was the better seen—a blue so open, so fresh, so childlike, that the most ill-disposed persons would have found it hard to attribute this man's weariness to any excess save to that of thought.

His still very youthful smile, displaying white teeth beneath a fair beard, which Alfred wore in its entirety, harmonized with this childlike frankness of look. And, in fact, Chazel's life had been passed in continuous, absorbing work, and in an absolute inexperience of what was not "his business," as he used to say. Son of a modest professor of chemistry, and grandson of a peasant, Alfred, having inherited aptitude for the sciences from his father, and tenacity of purpose from his grandfather, had, by dint of energy, and with but moderate abilities, been one of the first at the entrance to that École Polytechnique which, in the estimation of many excellent intellects, exercises, by its overloaded and precocious examinations, a murderous influence upon the development of the middle-class youth of our country.

At twenty-two, Chazel passed out twelfth, and three years



later first from the School of Roads and Bridges. Sent to Bourges, he fell in love with Mademoiselle de Vaivre, whose father, having married a second time, could give her only a very slender dowry. The unexpected death, first of Monsieur de Vaivre, then of his second wife and of their child, suddenly enriched the young household. Appointed the preceding year to a municipal post at Paris, the engineer found that he had realized a hundredfold the most ambitious hopes of his youth. His wife's fortune amounted to about nine hundred thousand francs, to the returns from which were added the ten thousand francs of his own salary and the small income which had been left by his father. But this competency, instead of blunting the young man's activity, stimulated it to the ambition of compensating in honor for the inequality of position between himself and his wife. He had, accordingly, gone back to mathematical labors with fresh ardor. Admission to the Institute shone on the horizon of his dreams, like a sort of final apotheosis to a destiny, the happiness of which he modestly referred to his father's wise maxim: "To keep to the high road."

Add to this that a son had been born to him, in whom he already discerned a reflection of his own disposition, and it cannot fail to be understood how this young man would congratulate himself daily for having taken life, as he had done, with complete submission to all the average conditions of the social class in which he had been born.

Did these various reflections pass through the mind of the third individual—the man whom Alfred Chazel had called Armand, as he contemplated the conjugal tableau through the smoke from a Russian cigarette which he had just lighted—a liberty which revealed the extent of his intimacy with the family? The same contrast which separated Alfred from Helen separated him also from Armand. The latter looked at first younger than his age, though he too had passed his thirty-second year. If Alfred's carelessly worn coat revealed rather the leanness and disproportion of his body, the frock of the Baron de Querne—such was Armand's family name—fitted close to the shoulders and bust of a man, small but robust, and evidently devoted to fencing, riding, tennis, and all the sporting habits which the youths of the richer classes have contracted in imitation of the English.

The quiet jewelry with which the young baron was adorned, the delicacy of his hands and feet, and everything in his appearance, from his cravat and his collar to the curls in his



dark hair, and to the turn of his moustache, drawn out over a somewhat contemptuous lip, disclosed that deep attention to the toilet which assumes the lengthened leisure of an idle life. But what preserved De Querne from the commonplaceness usual to men who are visibly occupied with the trifles of masculine fashion was a look, in a generally immovable face, of peculiar keenness and unrest. This look, which was not at all like that of a young man, contradicted the remainder of his person to the extent of imparting an appearance of strangeness to one who looked in this way, although a desire to evade remark, and to be above all things correct, evidently influenced his mode of dress.

Just as Chazel seemed to have remained quite young at heart, in spite of the failure of constitution, so the other, if only in the expression of his eyes, which were very dark ones, appeared to have undergone a premature aging of soul and intellect, in spite of the energy maintained by his physical machine. The face was somewhat long and somewhat browned, like that of one in whom bile would prevail some day, the forehead without a wrinkle, the nose very refined; a slight dimple was impressed upon the square chin. It would have been impossible to assign any profession or even occupation to this man, and yet there was something superior in his nature which seemed irreconcilable with the emptiness of an absolutely idle life, as well, too, as lines of melancholy about the mouth which banished the idea of a life of nothing but pleasure.

Meanwhile he continued to smoke with perfect calmness, showing every time that he ejected the smoke small, close teeth, the lower ones being set in an irregular fashion, which is, people say, a probable indication of fierceness. He watched Chazel kiss his wife on the temple, while she lowered her eyelids without venturing to look at Armand; and yet, had the dark eyes of the young man been encountered by her own, she would not have surprised any trace of sorrow, but an indefinable blending of irony and curiosity.

"Yes," said Alfred, replying thus to the mute reproach which Helen's countenance seemed to make him, "it is bad form to love one's wife in public, but Armand will forgive me. Well, good-bye," he went on, holding out his hand to his friend, "I shall not be away for more than an hour. I shall find you here again, shall I not?"

The young Baron and Madame Chazel thus remained alone. They were silent for a few minutes, both keeping the



positions in which Alfred had left them, she standing, but this time with her eyes raised towards Armand, and the latter answering her look with a smile while he continued to wrap himself in a cloud of smoke. She breathed in the slight acridity of the smoke, half opening her fresh lips. The sound of carriage wheels became audible beneath the windows. It was the rolling of a cab that was taking Chazel away.

Helen slowly advanced to the easy chair in which Armand was sitting; with a pretty gesture she took the cigarette and threw it into the fire, then knelt before the young man, encircled his head with her arms, and, seeking his lips, kissed him; it looked as though she wished to destroy immediately the painful impression which her husband's attitude might have left on the man she loved, and in a clear tone of voice, the liveliness of which discovered a free expansiveness after a lengthened constraint, she said:

"How do you do, Armand. Are you in love with me to-day?"

"And yourself," he questioned, "are you in love with me?"

He was caressing the hand of the young woman who had thrown herself upon the ground, and, with her head resting on her lover's knees, was looking at him in a fever of ecstasy.

"Ah! you flirt," she returned, "I have no need to tell you so to have you believe it."

"No," he replied, "I know that you love me—much—though not enough to go all lengths with the feeling."

The tone in which he uttered this sentence was marked with an irony which made it palpably an epigram. It was an allusion to oft-stated complaints. Helen, however, received the derisive utterance with the smile of a woman who has her answer ready.

"So you will always have the same distrust," she said, and although she was very happy, as her eyes sufficiently testified, a shadow of melancholy passed into those soft eyes when she added: "So you cannot believe in my feelings without this last proof?"

"Proof," said Armand, "you call that a proof! Why the unqualified gift of the person is not a proof of love, it is love itself. It is true," he went on with a more gloomy air, "so long as you refuse to be entirely mine I shall suspect—not your sincerity, for I think that you think you love me, but the truth of this love. Too often people imagine that they have feelings which they have not. Ah! if you loved me, as you say, and as you think, would you deny me yourself as you do? Would you refuse me the meeting that I have



asked of you more than twenty times? Why you would grant it as much for your own sake as for mine."

"Armand——" she began thus, then stopped, blushing.

She had risen and was walking about the room without looking at her lover, her arms apart from her body with the backs of her hands laid on her hips, as was usual with her at moments of intense thought. Since she had begun to love, and had acknowledged her feelings to Monsieur de Querne, she was quite aware that she must some day give up her beautiful dream of an attachment which, though forbidden, should remain pure. Yes, she knew that she must give her entire self after giving her heart, and become the mistress of the man whom she had suffered to say to her: "I love you." She knew it, and she had found strength for the prolonging of her resistance to that day, not in coquetry—no woman was less capable of speculating with a man's ungratified desire in order to kindle his passion—but in the persistence of the duty-sense within her.

Where is the married woman who has not fondled this chimera of a reconciliation between the infidelity of heart and the faith sworn to her husband? The renunciation of the delights of complete love seems at first to her a sufficient expiation. She engages in adultery believing that she will not pass beyond a certain limit, and she does in fact keep within it a longer or a shorter time according to the disposition of the man she loves. But the inflexible logic that governs life resumes its rights. Soul and body do not separate, and love admits of no other law than itself.

Yes, the fatal hour had struck for Helen, and she felt it. How many times during the last fortnight had she had this horrible discussion with Armand, who always ended by requiring from her this last token of love? She was sensible that after each of these scenes she had been lessened in the eyes of this man. A few more, and he would lose completely his faith in the feeling which she entertained towards him, a feeling that was absolute and unreasoned; for she loved him, as women alone are capable of loving, with such a love as is almost in the nature of a bewitchment, and is the outcome of an irresistible longing to afford happiness to the person who is thus loved. She loved him and she loved to love him. Pain in those beloved eyes was physically intolerable to her, and intolerable also mistrust, which betokened the shrinking back of his soul.

She had taken account of all this, she had looked the necessity for her guilt in the face, and she had resolved to



offer herself to her "beloved," as in her letters she always called him, because "friend" was too cold, and the word "lover" purpled her heart with shame—yes, to offer him the supreme proof of tenderness that he asked for, and now, when on the point of consenting, she was impotent. Her will was failing at the last moment. Was she going again to begin what she used to call, when she thought about it, a hateful contract? Ah! why was she not free—free, that is, from duties towards her child, the only being whom she could not sacrifice to him whom she loved—free to offer this man not a clandestine interview but a flight together, a complete sacrifice of her entire life.

All these thoughts came and went in her poor head while she herself was walking to and fro in the room. She looked ag in at her lover. She fancied she could see a change come over the features of the countenance she idolized.

"Armand," she resumed, "do not be sad. I consent to all that you wish."

These words, which were uttered in the deep voice of a woman probing to the inmost chamber of her heart, appeared to astonish the young man even more than they moved him. He wrapped Helen in his strange gaze. If the poor woman had had strength enough to observe him she would not have encountered in those keen eyes the divine emotion which atones for the guilt of the mistress by the happiness of the lover. It was just the same gaze, at once contemptuous and inquisitive, with which he had lately contemplated the group formed by Alfred and Helen. But the latter was too much confused by what she had just said to keep cool enough for observing anything.

Then, as she had come back and was crouching on Armand's knees, and pressing against his breast, a fresh expression, that, namely, of almost intoxicated desire, appeared on the young man's face. He felt close to him the beauty of this yielding body, he held in his arms those charming shoulders of which he had knowledge from having seen them in the ballroom, he drank in that indefinable aroma which lingers about every woman, and he pressed his lips upon those eyelids, which he could feel quivering beneath his kiss.

"You will at least be happy?" she asked him in a sort of anguish between two caresses.

"What a question! Why, you have never looked at yourself," he said, and he began to extol to her all the exquisiteness of her face. "You have never looked at your eyes"—and



he again drew his lips across them—"your pink cheek"—and he stroked it with his hand—"your soft hair"—and he inhaled it like a flower—"your sweet mouth"—and he laid his own upon it.

What answer could she have given to this worship of her beauty? She lent herself to it with a half-frightened smile, surrendering to these endearments and to these words as to music. They caused something so deep and withal so vague to vibrate throughout her being that she came forth half crushed from these embraces, like one dead. It was not for the first time that she was thus abandoning herself to Armand's kisses. But no matter how sweet, how intoxicating these kisses, which she found it impossible to resist, she had on each occasion been strong enough to escape from bolder caresses.

No, never, never would she have consented, even if there had existed no danger of a surprise in this little drawing room, where the portraits of her mother, her husband, and her son reminded her of what she was nevertheless ready to sacrifice. Ah! not like that! And again at this moment, when she saw on Armand's face a certain expression of which she had so deep a dread, she found courage to escape, seated herself once more in another easy chair, and opening and shutting a fan which she had taken up in her quivering hands, replied:

"I will be yours tomorrow, if you wish."

Armand seemed to rouse himself from the sweep of passion in which he had just been tossing. He looked at her, and she again experienced the sensation which had already caused her so much pain, and which was that of a veil drawn suddenly between herself and him. Yet, what could she have said to displease him? She thought that he was wounded by the fact of her shrinking from him, for was not the uttering of the words that she had just uttered equivalent to giving herself to him beforehand, and how could he be vexed with her for desiring that their happiness might have another setting than that of her everyday life? But he had already answered her by the following question:

"Where would you like me to meet you? At my own house? I can send away my servant for the whole of the afternoon."

"Oh, no!" she replied hastily, "not at your own home."

The vision had just come to her that other women had visited Armand, those other women whom a new mistress always finds between herself and the man she loves, like the menace of a fatal comparison, like an anticipated discrediting



of her own caresses, since love is always similar to itself in its outward forms.

"At least," she thought to herself, "let us meet in some other place."

"Would you like me to request one of my friends to lend me his rooms?" Armand asked.

She shook her head as she had done just before. She could hear by anticipation the conversation of the two men. She was a woman, and hitherto had been a virtuous one. She was only too well aware that the manner in which she regarded her own love would have little resemblance to that of the unknown friend to whom Armand would apply. In her own eyes passion sanctified everything, even the worst errors; spiritualized everything, even the most vehement voluptuousness. But he, this stranger, what would he see in the affair but an intrigue to afford matter for jesting. A shudder shook her, and she looked again at Armand. Ah! how her lover's thoughts would have horrified her had she been able to read them. It was very far from being De Querne's first affair of the sort, nor did he believe that it was a first act of weakness on her part. She had, indeed, told him that he was her first lover, and it was true.

But what proof could be given of the truth of such vows? The young man has himself deceived and been deceived too often for distrust not to be the most natural of his feelings. He had provoked this odious discussion concerning their place of meeting only for the purpose of studying in Helen's replies the traces left by the amorous experiences through which she had passed, and mere curiosity led him to dwell upon a subject which at that moment was stifling the young woman with shame. The scruples that she displayed about not yielding to him in her own house seemed to him a calculation due to voluptuousness; those about not yielding to him at his house, a calculation due to prudence. When she refused to go to the rooms of a friend: "She is afraid of my confiding in some one," he said to himself, "but what does she want?"

"Suppose I furnished a little suite of rooms?" he said.

She shook her head, though this had been her secret dream, but she was afraid that he would see in her acceptance nothing but a desire to gain time, and then—the necessity, if their meetings occurred always in the same place, of enduring the notice of the people of the house, the thought of being the veiled lady whose arrival is watched! Nevertheless, although such a contrivance also involved a question of outlay



which horrified her, she would have consented to it had she not had another feeling, the only one which, shaking her head with its rising fever, she uttered aloud.

"Do not misjudge me, Armand; rather understand me. I should like to be loved by you in some place of which nothing will afterwards remain. What would become of the rooms you furnished for me if ever you ceased to love me? Why, I cannot endure the thought of it, even now. Do not wrong me, dear; only understand me."

Thus did she speak, laying bare the profoundly romantic side of her nature, as also her heart's secret wound. Although she did not account fully to herself for Armand's character—a character frightful in aridity beneath loving externals, for in this man there was absolute divorce between imagination and heart—she perceived only too clearly that he was inclined to misinterpret the slightest indications. She saw that distrust was springing up in him with an almost unhealthy suddenness. She had been quite aware that he suspected her, but she had believed that this doubt proceeded solely from her refusals to belong to him.

It was on this account that she was consenting to give him this last proof. "He will doubt no longer," she thought to herself, and the mere idea of this warmed her whole heart. If only he did not give a guilty construction to her replies? She rose to go to him, and leaning over the back of his armchair, encircled his forehead with her hands.

"Ah!" she said with a sigh, "if I could know what is going on in here. It is such a little space, and it is in this little space that all my happiness and my misfortune are contained."

"If you were able to read in it," the young man replied, "you would see only your own image."

"I shall read in it tomorrow," she said subtly.

"Tomorrow," he returned with a smile; "but what about the place of our meeting? There is nothing left but furnished rooms or a hotel."

Furnished rooms! A hotel! These words made Helen shudder. Something of impropriety appeared to her to be comprised in their syllables. There was the hiring of a cab, with the driver's cunning smile; there was the entry into one of those houses, whose thresholds have seen the passage of so many furtive, trembling women; and, as a setting for her divine passion, there were the surroundings that had, as it were, witnessed similar scenes. Yes, but there was also an element of anonymity, of impersonality, of never-ending strangeness. And since all was pollution, the former of the



two alternatives carried with it the least. She was too certain of Armand's refinement to think that he might take her to a place which he had visited with others. She would have to endure personal loathing, but nothing that would touch the very essence of her feeling. It was accordingly with courageous resolution that she replied to her lover.

"Will you have time enough to find them in one morning?"

"Yes," he said, after a moment's reflection. "I have in my mind a very convenient house, where one of my English friends always used to stay. See," he went on, "between eleven and twelve o'clock I will send you some books and a note. I will give you the address of the house and the number of the room, just as though you had asked me for the address for one of your country friends. Don't let that prevent you, however, from burning the note immediately. You will come at whatever hour you can; I will spend the whole afternoon waiting for you, and, if you do not come, I shall not be put out; I shall think that you have not been able."

She listened to him with a mingling of pain and enchantment—pain, because it would cost her so dear to keep her promise; and enchantment, because all the trouble that he took to point out these details to her, instead of enlightening her concerning the man's heart, appeared to her a sign of his love, and their talk proceeded in the quiet drawing room, in front of the expiring fire, until the stopping of a carriage at the door announced Alfred's return.

"Good-bye, my love," said Helen, taking Armand's hand and kissing it, as she sometimes did with sweet coaxing; and she had already begun a piece of work when Chazel came in, with a cheery "Well!" He looked at once towards his wife with his loyal, honest gaze.

How well Armand knew that gaze, one which had not altered from the days of their childhood, when they were both at the Institution Vanaboste, where they followed the courses of study in the Lycée of Henri IV. The establishment stood behind the Panthéon, at the corner of the Rue du Puits-qui-Parle, now the Rue Amyot. Yet it was not remorse for deceiving the man whom he had known from quite a child that suddenly made De Querne feel uncomfortable. It was the thought that Helen was deceiving this confiding nature. Masculine egotism has such monstrous ingenuousness. A seducer engaged in enticing a woman despises the woman for yielding to him, and forgets to despise himself for seducing her. Meanwhile Alfred had taken Helen's hands.



"I have bored myself conscientiously this evening; what will you give me in reward?" he asked.

How this familiarity hurt her! How willingly would she have cried to this unsuspecting husband:

"Do you not see that I love another? Let me go away. I do not want to lie to you any more."

But two rooms farther off stood a little bed, beneath the white curtains of which slept her son, her little Henry. Why was it that the picture of this curly head was something too weak to arrest her on the fatal high road to adultery, and yet strong enough to prevent her from seeing her passion through to the end. She had a glimpse of the child while her husband was speaking to her. It did not occur to her to scorn Armand for having gained her love, although she was the wife of his friend. She scorned herself for not loving him enough, since she did not love the sufferings of which he was the cause, and, sustained by the thought that she was doing it for him, it was with something like an impulse of pride that she held out her forehead to her husband's kiss, and said gracefully:

"That's just like men; they must be paid, and immediately too, for doing their duty."



## CHAPTER II

It was half-past eleven o'clock when Armand de Querne left the house in the Rue de La Rochefoucauld. The wind had swept away all the clouds, and the sky was filled with stars. "What a beautiful night!" said Armand to himself; "I shall walk home." It was a long way, for he lived in the Rue Lincoln, in the upper part of the Champs-Élysées. Here, on the second floor of a wing projecting upon a garden, he had rooms which he had once amused himself with furnishing in quaint and exquisite fashion with all kinds of old-fashioned trifles. But how long had he ceased to spend the evening in this "home"?

He was following the pavement of the Rue St.-Lazare, which, after quite a narrow and slender beginning, suddenly, like a river swelled by tributaries, widens after the Place de la Trinité, when it receives, one after the other, the flood of passengers and vehicles drifting through the Rue de Chateaudun, the Rue de la Chaussée-d'Antin, and the Rue de Londres. Cabs were plying, omnibuses were changing horses, the crowd was surging. Sometimes a girl came out from the corner of a doorway, and with obscene speech accosted the young man, who put her away gently with his hand.

Was it the contrast between the intimacy of the little drawing room and the swarming infamy of the pavement? Armand felt deeply melancholy. He could not help seeing Alfred's face again in thought, with Helen's close beside it. Yet, was he jealous? No. Pictures of childhood came back to him as they had done just before, but with increased precision, showing him Chazel dressed in the uniform of the "Vanabosteans"—a small jacket similar to that of Barbistes. They always went side by side in the ranks. Poor Chazel! he was not rich. The head of the establishment had taken him as a foundationer, with a view to making a show-pupil of him—a machine for winning prizes in competitions. How many times had Armand paid for him at the little wicket, when the porter sold to the pupils sweetmeats, fragments of



iced chestnuts, cakes, and Parisian creams—tablets of chocolate having a thick and oversweet liquid inside!

They had gone through all their classes together from the fourth up, and had together passed through the evil days of the Commune, when, on returning both of them from the country, after the siege, they found themselves blockaded in Paris. Alfred had afterwards entered the École Polytechnique. And when he came on Wednesdays and Sundays to visit his old schoolfellow, who had already crossed the Seine and begun to lead the life of a rich and idle young man, how ludicrous he was in his military dress, embarrassed by his sword, not knowing how to set his hat upon his head, and invariably scarred with clumsy razor-cuts.

While Alfred was at the School of Bridges, Armand was travelling. He had gone round the world in the society of an amateur artist. On his return he found that his friend was no longer at Paris. The letters passing between them became rare. Could they have told why? Armand perhaps might. There was only one point left in common between Alfred's life and his own. Alfred had married Mademoiselle de Vaire. They had made a trip to Paris, and Armand well remembered how he had been deliciously surprised by Helen's distinguished demeanor, when he had expected to find her awkward, pretentious, and a fright. But at this period he was taken up with another woman, little Aline, a mistress of his for whom he had cherished the only genuine passion of which he was capable—painful jealousy blended with delirium of the senses.

Later on, some one had spoken to him of Helen Chazel, and told him ugly stories about her. And who was it that had done so? Another schoolfellow—big Lucien Rieume, who had been educated at the Vanaboste establishment like Alfred and himself—during one of these *tête-à-tête* luncheons when an opening of the heart usually accompanies that of the oysters between two college companions; and Lucien—cordial, indiscreet, intolerable—had talked a great deal, pouring out pell-mell whatever he knew concerning former friends. Armand could again hear him chuckle, leaning forward somewhat with kindled eye and humid lip:

"Poor Chazel, he hadn't a head worth a fig! It seems that his wife is tricking him. I heard the gentleman's name: Marades, Tarades—just wait a moment—yes, De Varades, an artillery officer. It was the talk of Bourges. He was never out of the house."

It was an unfortunate trait in Armand's character that he was unable to withstand the tempting of mistrust. When



evil was asserted to him, he preserved an indelible impression of it. He did not altogether believe in it, and yet he believed in it sufficiently for a suspicion, and a busy suspicion, to be planted within him. When the Chazels had come to settle in Paris, ten months perviously, and Armand had begun to interest himself in Helen, the scruples of an old friendship might perhaps have been stronger than his freak of curiosity if big Rieume's words had not risen before his recollection.

"Really," he had said to himself, "it would be too foolish,"—a criminal phrase which serves men for the justification of many a dastardly action. Helen had not been slow in displaying towards him a kind of passion which he had attributed to the natural exaltation of a provincial. "I am the first Parisian who has paid her attentions," he had said again to himself, and as she possessed charming gracefulness of gesture, so sweet an expression of countenance and such an air of complete refinement and nobility about her entire personality, he had taken a pleasure in completing her education in elegance, thinking to himself that she would be a delightful mistress.

But for many days she had refused really to become his mistress, and her resistance had made him obstinate. He had become bent upon overcoming her, recollecting the officer and telling himself that the officer had not been the only one. A few skilful conversations with Alfred had taught him that at one time Varades had really been a constant guest at the house; was he not the same year's student at the École Polytechnique as Alfred himself? Armand had lost his doubts, and in Helen's refusals to be his, he had seen nothing but coquetry. Now, in this respect like all men who hold the strange ethics of seducers, Querne considered coquetry in a woman a justification for the worst behavior. At last the long siege was about to issue in the coveted result. Madame Chazel had granted him an appointment for the following day. Twenty-four hours more and he would have a new mistress, as desirable and as pretty as those whose memory was the most flattering to the pride of his recollection. Why then did he, instead of being happy, feel so deeply melancholy? Was it remorse for the treason to his friend?

His friend? Was Alfred really his friend? Yes, that was understood between themselves, as well as in the eyes of others. But a friend is a man who knows you and whom you know, to whom you show your heart and who shows you his. Would he ever bring the tale of one of his hopes, his joys, his sadnesses, to the calculating machine that bore the name



of Chazel? Had the latter ever confided a secret to him? So much the better, too, for the ideas of this worthy schoolboy who seemed to look upon life as the prolongation of a college task, must be silly enough. It was their college life that continued to link them together, and the recollections of their childhood. Their childhood? Turning down the Rue Royale and arriving at the Champs Élysées, Armand suddenly recalled the ranks of Vanaboste's school, on Thursdays, as they walked three and three under the superintendence of a poor wretch of an usher who strove to hide himself among the groups of people, so as to seem a passerby like the rest and not a watchdog charged with the duty of looking after a flock of schoolboys.

And what a flock it was! The majority had pale complexions and hollow eyes, and displayed an enervated exhaustion of their whole being that spoke of the excesses to which they gave themselves up. How much ignominy and baseness was there in that community, the eldest members of which were nineteen years of age and the youngest eight! Within the walls of their prison, as within the walls of the great Lycée to which they duly repaired twice a day, the principal things thought of and talked about were the too often degrading connections formed between the elder boys and their junior associates. And of the French youth confined within similar colleges, what numbers of them had corresponding vicious inclinations, while the rest defiled their imaginations, even if they shrunk from the things that were worse. Among these college boys there were, nevertheless, some elevated and chaste connections. The perusal of a certain eclogue of Virgil's, a dialogue of Plato's, and a few of Shakespeare's sonnets had excited the more literary of them, and Alfred Chazel, being then in the third class, had one day received a piece of poetry written by a sixth-form boy, beginning with the following astonishing line, which had made them laugh like mad creatures:

"Alfred, my pale Alfred, my love, my sweet."

"Ah! what a horrible, horrible place!" thought the young man, as he recalled this blending of turpitude and puerility.

Alfred and he had belonged to the small number of those who had remained untouched by any infection. But to him at least, all the advantage due to this disgust was that it had led him when quite young into associating with loose women,



and to his initiation into pleasures that conduced to his moral degradation.

"And these are the youthful recollections that I should respect," said Armand to himself. "What duty do I owe him because we were galley slaves together?"

No, it was not on Alfred's account that he felt so melancholy as he hastened his steps and, this time with semi-brutality, repulsed the love-beggars who accosted him with their unvarying phrases. Ah! he knew this unconquerable melancholy only too well. Only too often had it visited him, gnawing him in the diseased portion of his heart, from the time that the income of thirty thousand francs coming to him at his majority had permitted him to live according to his fancy; and this fancy had immediately taken the direction of sentimental experiences. Such melancholy, sharp and severe, he had experienced, even when quite a youth, every time that he had found himself on the eve of a first love-meeting with a new mistress, even though she had been the most coveted. It was like an anguish-stricken apprehension—a dull, dim agony of soul.

At first he had attributed this strange phenomenon alternately to physical timidity, to remorse at his own unworthiness of the feelings that he might inspire, and to hankerings after purity. Now he knew the true explanation of these momentary sorrows, these keener crises of the great sorrow which formed the gloomy background of his life. It was, alas! the more present and palpable certainty of his impotence to love. At this very moment he was asking himself:

"Am I really in love with Helen?"

He gathered and heaped together the whole of his inmost sensibility, like a physician seeking with his fingers for the painful spot of a diseased limb. But the spot of love, which it would have given him such sweet pain to meet with, Armand could not discover.

"No," he answered himself with terrible sadness, yet courageously—for, with all his failings he had energy enough to venture upon self-knowledge—"no, I am not in love with Helen. I admire her because she is beautiful; I have paid my addresses to her because I feel bored; I have grown obstinate about it because she denied me. Pride, sensuality, and romantic twaddle—that's the top and bottom of the whole affair. Then what is the good of it? What is the good? Why renew such an intrigue as that with Madame de Rugle?"

And of all those amours into which the gratification of his passions—the fatal vice of his youth—had impelled him,



came back into his memory, with the monotony of their pleasures, the bitterness of their ruptures, the sickening void of their duration. What was the good of this one or of that? What was the good a year or two ago of amusing himself by winning the love of Juliet, governess to the children of a house at which he was received? What was the good of that comedy played to little Maud, the pretty Englishwoman whom he had met at a watering-place?

"I dreamed of being a man of gallantry—a Don Juan. It looks as though fate punishes us for the evil dreams of our youth by bringing them to pass. I have had intrigues that might flatter my foolish vanity—and what wretchedness!"

Among all the women whose faces and kisses he distinguished in his thought, there was not one who had made him happy, even for a single day, and—strange anomaly of a distempered heart—there was not one who had not in some sort made him suffer. Through what moral disorder did it come to pass that he was devoted to this continual inward calamity—to the endurance of all the tortures of love, the jealousy of the present, the intolerable loathing for the past, the bitter vision of the treacheries of the future, and never, never, aught but physical intoxication, without that ecstasy of soul which, notwithstanding, existed, for he had seen with envy the heavenly expression due to it on the countenances of a few of his mistresses?

One especially came before him—one whose conquest had not been effected for the flattering of his fatuity, for Aline was but a girl who had died of consumption in the autumn of 1880. He could again see her with her hollow eyes, her delicate cheek, and the blending of native purity and corruption that was in her. He could see her nursing a little sister whom she had taken to be with her, a child four years of age. What affecting kindliness in vice, and what innocence in infamy! Yes, Aline loved him, although she had three or four lovers at the same time as himself. His chief pleasure used to consist in taking this pretty, ruined creature into the country to enjoy the childish outbreaks of rusticity that prompted her to pick flowers, to listen to the birds, to lean upon his arm, as though she had never exercised her hideous profession.

What a mysterious thing is memory! He was on the eve of his first assignation with Helen, and here he was growing tender over poor Aline, evoking her as she was when he had so often sought her in her rooms in the Rue de Moscow; as she was at certain moments when he had loved or nearly



loved her—on a summer evening, for instance, when she was seated in the stern of a boat rowed on the Seine by four oarsmen of their acquaintance. Yes, she was seated in a bright dress, looking at him over the heads of the youths as they alternately stopped and rose. A stillness was falling upon the river. A line of orange was trailing along the margin of the sky. What unspeakable emotion had bathed his soul as he was sensible of the passing hour, the quivering water, the living creature, and the dying light!

He ascended his staircase with these thoughts. Why this fatal incompleteness in all his passions? Why was he incapable of attaining to that absolute of tenderness which he conceived, of which he had glimpses, towards which he sprang at every new intrigue. And then—nothing! And yet how many chances had been combined for him; and while his servant was relieving him of his overcoat, and he was passing into the drawing room, in which he often read at night before going to bed, he mentally enumerated these chances: a fortune which enabled him to pursue his fancies without much need of calculation; a genuine and ancient title; ability to maintain a position in society that pleased him; a robustness of health that could not recall a week of sickness; a taste for intellectual things just sufficient to occupy his attention without annoyance, for, absolutely free from personal ambition, he had never ceased to be interested as an amateur by the attractions of literature and art.

Added to this, he had an appointment for the following day with a charming woman whom he desired, and the fire of sense had not been slackened within him by the excess of his life. Why, then, was it inevitable that the perception of an indefinable insufficiency in his life should make him so melancholy just at this moment? He put on a lounging jacket, dismissed his servant, and settled himself beside the fire in his drawing room. He again evoked Helen with an exactitude of recollection which made her present to him from her mauve stockings to that little mark which she had there at the right corner of her mouth. Well! he did not love her, and he would never love her. If he had hoped to experience at last, through her, that supreme surprise of the heart which continually eluded him, he might tell himself that this hope was abortive like the rest.

Like the rest! He felt a desire to convince himself that it had always been so with him. He went and opened a box, in which were piled six or seven notebooks of different sizes. Some were made of sheets of school paper. There were



two of Japanese paper. These notebooks were journals of his life taken up repeatedly at unequal periods. In them he came upon pages scrawled on the desk of the study room at school, pages blackened on the sides of boats, in hotel rooms, in this very drawing room. He took up these notebooks, and began to turn over the leaves, finding in them a former ego perfectly similiar to the present ego in premature misanthropy, sudden and fleeting ardors of sensuality, murderous analysis, impotent hankering after unattainable delight, indolent languor and incapacity ever fully to feel anything, whether real or ideal. The whole had combined to make of him a sort of child of the century, of the year 1883, but without elegy, a Nihilist of gallantry and without declamation.

The following is one of the pieces which his eyes, now gloomy and dull, dwelt upon, and which would have broken Helen's heart if, gifted with the magic faculty of second sight, she had discovered the melancholy torpor which even the gift of her person, followed upon the gift of her entire soul, was inadequate to disturb:

"PARIS, May 1871.

"Terrible days. Vanaboste comes and tells us yesterday, at one o'clock, that we must get ready to leave, and that the pupils at Sainte Barbe have gone already with their head. The Panthéon is full of powder, and will soon blow up. Since morning the firing had been slowly, slowly drawing nearer—a strange noise! It was as though some one had shaken millions of nuts over the town in a gigantic cloth. Alfred and I spent the morning in the attic watching the flames of the conflagrations writhing against the sky. He was quite depressed, and I fiercely gay, with a nervous gaiety that forced me to the utterance of outrageous paradoxes—but were they paradoxes?—concerning the fine theories of our professor of philosophy last week. O vision of fate! His last lesson turned upon progress!

"We are packing up hastily in order to leave, when one of the masters comes in in a state of terror through the little door opening upon the Rue Tournefort, which he bolts behind him. He tells us that the Federales would not allow anyone to pass their barricades. It was with great difficulty that he himself has been able to return. We were a long way from the good-natured National Guardsman who said to us on Monday, at the doors of the Lycée: 'Shout "Long live the Commune!" boys, and you are free.' Vanaboste was as white as my paper when he heard this news. The usher hit on the plan of having



mattresses spread over the middle of the courtyard, so that if the Panthéon blew up we should fall with less violence. We remained for about two hours in this distress, we pupils fourteen in number, the two assistant masters, and the head master. Alfred and I, who, by an odd contradiction, were almost calm, talking together in a corner.

"In spite of the firing, which was constantly drawing nearer, and the bullets cracking against the walls, perhaps a hundred paces off, we had neither of us a perception of reality; the danger appeared to us to be something distant, dim, almost abstract. And we were talking—of what? Of our childhood. 'It has been a happy one,' he said to me, 'even here.' For once I emptied my heart to him, and let him see what I thought of the scholastic lupanar in which, owing to my guardian's selfishness, I have been obliged to grow up. After all, I prefer even this bagnio to his house.

"Through this useless talking the firing can be heard coming nearer. The Panthéon does not blow up. Suddenly a loud shout comes down from one of ourselves in the upper story, where, at the risk of receiving a bullet, he had stationed himself at the window. 'The Chasseurs are at the end of the street.' That was the most trying moment. My heart beat as though it would burst, my throat was choking in the expectation of what was going to happen. Undefined danger had left me calm. Exact, brutal, and present fact affected me unpleasantly. Some shots are fired quite close, then furious summonses with the butt-ends of guns shake the gate. The same usher who had shown his coolness in conceiving the precautionary measure of the mattresses, rushes forward in time to strike up the levelled guns of two chasseurs, who, blackened with powder, and with eyes gleaming in frenzy, would have fired at random into the crowd of us if the other had not been there. A lieutenant comes up, a little man in yellow boots, with strap on chin and pistol in fist. Vanaboste speaks to him, and we are saved.

"All this was yesterday. To-day we are again at our studies, a symbol of our childish life in the midst of this tumult of action. I turn over the leaves of an old book of spiritual philosophy with the pleasure of contempt, and after reading official phrases about God, the immortal soul, refinement of manners, moral liberty and innate reason, I close my eyes and see the Square of the Panthéon as it was last night: the dead lying with naked feet, because their shoes have been stolen; and with battered skulls, because their deaths have just been made sure of by blows from butt-ends of guns; the splashes



of blood, that feel sticky beneath the soles of our boots; the flames of the conflagrations in the distant sky; and on the footpath, lying on the same straw, and sleeping like wearied brutes, the little chasseurs who have taken the quarter. *Homo homini lupior lupis.*"

"DIEPPE, July 1874.

"The daughter resembles the mother. She is only twelve years old, and already I can catch the coquetry, the glances, the premonition of the woman in the presence of the man; and it will end as it did with her mother, in a marriage of convenience, first acts of thoughtlessness, a first lover, then a series of lovers down to some young Baron de Querne, whom there will be an attempt to persuade that none was ever loved but he; and, more foolish or more intelligent than myself, he will perhaps believe it.

"Yes, more intelligent; for in love the great thing is to have as much emotion as possible; and the real deception is to paralyze one's heart by clear-sightedness. Whether was it Valmont in the 'Liaisons'—dear Valmont—or the President's wife that was deceived? She who felt or he who calculated? Whether was it Elvire or Don Juan, who does not understand that Elvire, seeing that she has been able to intoxicate herself with love, is alone to be envied, while he himself is not? I know all this, but the inward demon is the stronger, and as soon as I begin to pay my addresses to a woman I am at pains to procure all such information concerning her as can render me incapable of loving her.

"At my age, ought I not to write in this book: 'O divine fate! that has caused me so speedily to light upon the unique, the ideal woman, the sister-soul,' etc. 'It would call for some of Gounod's music.' Not exactly, Monsieur de Querne, but rather a lady of experience, who has had five or six lovers, who has retained sufficient taste to give the title of 'sentiment' to what belongs to fair and fitting and the most brutal sensation; a lady of tact, who has given herself a good deal of trouble to persuade you that you have seduced her. And the deuce take me if I am angry with her for such charming hypocrisy! Besides, what is the good of being angry with anyone for anything? Every human being is a pretentious little watch, which, seeing its hands go round, fancies that it is itself the cause of the motion. Foolishness and vanity! There is a delicate mechanism inside, and this mechanism has it that Madame —— shall be a sentimental prostitute, her daughter a future jade, and I a mirthless debauchee, who



parch my soul by setting forth all this instead of enjoying what is granted to me."

"PARIS, 22nd May 1877.

"An evening of folly yesterday and debauchery, but debauchery that was gay and healthy which is undoubtedly the truth. Nothing but this remains to me that does not leave disgust behind.

"I went to see Duret, the painter, with that sad dog René W——, who first stopped in the Rue de la Tour-d'Auvergne to ask for Marie, a tall brunette.

"'I have a Marie here,' said the doorkeeper, 'but she is a tall blonde, red even,' and in fact at a window in the first floor I saw a head of warm, golden hair, a dress of clear, bright blue, and a made complexion as extravagantly pink as a doll's. In my dark hours I have had sufficient knowledge of the degrading and consolatory fascination of these painted charms, of these slain bodies, of these ringed eyes, of all this lying!

"At Duret's found Léonie, the model who stood to him for his *Delilah* in the last Salon: a somewhat wearied face, with a refined and arched nose, eyes of gleaming blackness, a strongly marked chin, with a slightly masculine appearance in the profile—the masculine appearance of theatrical women who act in burlesque—and a long countenance. But that is but the skeleton of the face. The slight moustache was tinged with black, the patch on the cheek underlined with black, the eyes made still larger with black, the complexion covered with powder; and the powder blending with the pale pink of the blood gave the woman an extravagant and sophisticated look which was completed by the brilliantly nacreous teeth that twinkled with the splendor of moist imitation pearls.

"The toilet completed the woman. She had some black, gauzy material round her neck, a hat trimmed with gauze and flowers, a dress of variegated and friezed material, with a huge, red rose blooming on her left breast.

"'She's a luxurious woman,' said René ironically, and, indeed, with the material of her dress, her gauze and her flower, she looked like a creature that lived on nothing but superfluity. I paid my addresses to her, pleased her, and did not leave her house until this morning.

"O enchantment of the senses when the surcharge of thought comes not to mar physical intoxication! O enchantment of prostitutes, seen thus as dispensers of pleasure free from disquiet of heart! No asking whether or how one loves or is loved, no measuring of sensation with an ideal type of



feeling that is perceived, and striven after, and that never can be felt! I write these lines, and see! already my enjoyment has evaporated. I write these lines and yet would that on a solitary terrace fronting a landscape of trees and waters a woman might appear having the eyes of which I long have dreamed—eyes which I know without having ever met them—and might swear to me that this life has been nothing but an evil dream! And she should tell me *all*, and by that all be made the dearer to me;—and then I should love!”

“PARIS, June 1879.

“Luncheons and dinners; dinners and luncheons. Assignations and evening parties. Ah! how empty my life is! I do nothing that I like; nothing; for I like nothing.

“In presence of the living creature, nothing at heart but pity for him who suffers, if he does suffer—who will suffer since he endures the evil of existence.

“If death, inevitable death, were neither physically painful in the passage thither from life, nor terrible in its sequel to our imaginings, ah! how I would seek that which has prompted thoughts to mar my life!

“We live on—and why? We think—and why? Why between two glasses of delicate wine and amid naked shoulders does there come to me ceaselessly at table the image of the grave, and the insoluble question concerning the meaning of this deadly farce of nature, and the world, and life?

“I muse on the sweets of mutual love, an absurd dream that civilization grafts upon the simple need of coupling. Ah! for a simple passion that might apply my entire sensibility to another being, like wet paper against a window-pane.

“And all this declamatory philosophy due to the fact that yesterday I saw Madame de Rugle again at the Théâtre Français, and that the sight did not move me one whit. What does logic say? That a man should not force himself to tenderness when his lack of feeling is self-admitted, but turn on his heel, whistling that polonaise of Chopin’s which she used to play to me sometimes in the evening with so much intention and sentimentality. And of that passion this is all that is left.”

“PARIS, January 1881.

“I am aware that I have become horribly, fiercely egoistic, and the external manifestations of this egoism are now offensive to me, whereas formerly I used to surrender myself to it without scruple, at a time, however, when I was of more



worth than I am now by reason of the dream that I cherished concerning myself.

"Philosophizing truthfully about oneself is as great a relief as the vomiting of bile. I look for the history of my temperament from the days of my childhood. I see that my imagination has been excessive, destroying my sensibility by raising a fore-fashioned idea between myself and reality. I expected to feel in a certain way—and then, I never did so. This same imagination, darkened by my uncle's harsh treatment, has turned also to mistrust. I have always dreaded every creature. The loss of my father and mother prevented the correction of this early fault. College life and modern literature stained my thought before I had lived. The same literature separated me from religion at fifteen. Impiety, to my shame, acted like refinement to seduce me! The massacres of the Commune showed me the true nature of man, and the intrigues of the ensuing years the true nature of politics. I longed to link myself to some great idea—but to which? When quite young I had measured the wretchedness of an artist's existence. There must be genius or far better leave it alone. To rank as fiftieth among writers or musicians—thank you, no. My fortune exempted me from the necessity of a profession. Enter a Council of State for foreign affairs, or a public office—and why? There are only too many officials already? Get married? The thought of chaining down my life never tempted me. I should have done the same as B—— who, on the day of his wedding, took train to return no more.

"Then what? Nothing. I have not even grown old of heart; I am abortive. My sentimental adventures, which have been pursued in spite of everything, for women are even yet what is least indifferent to me, have, alas, convinced me that there are no kisses that do not resemble those already given and received. It is all so short, and superficial, and vain. How desperate I should be rendered by the thoughts of myself—of that self which I shall never be able completely to renounce—did I often indulge in them! What else but the damnation of the mystics is *non-love*?"

Such were a few of the pages among many others, and the abominable monograph of a secret disease of soul was continued in hundreds of similar confidences. Often simply the date was written, together with two or three facts: Rode, paid visits, went to the club, the theatre in the evening, or a party, or ball, and then came a single word like a refrain—*Spleen*. At the beginning of the last of these notebooks,



Armand, when he had closed it, could read a list of all the years of his life since 1860, and after each date he had scrawled—*Torture*, and at the end, these words:

"I did not ask for life. If I have committed faults, frightful ones, too, I have also known sufferings such as, set over against the others, might say to the inconceivable Power that has created and that sustains me, if such a Power possess a heart: 'Have pity upon me!'"

The young man thrust away with his hand the heap of papers wherein he encountered so faithful an image of his present moral aridity. Slowly he began to walk about the room. Everywhere in it he recognized the same tokens of his inward nihilism. The low bookcase contained but those few books which he still liked: novels of withering analysis—"Dangerous Liaisons," "Adolphus," "Affinities"—moralists of keen and self-centred misanthropy, and memoirs. The photographs scattered over the walls reminded him of his travels—those useless travels during which he had failed to beguile his weariness. On the chimney piece, between the likenesses of two dead friends, he kept an enigmatic portrait, representing two women, with the head of the one resting upon the shoulder of the other. It was the present, life-like remembrance of a terrible story—the story of the bitterest faithlessness he had ever endured. He had been cynical or artificial enough to laugh over it formerly with the two heroines, but he had laughed with death in his heart.

At the sight of all these objects witnessing to the manner of his life, he was so completely sensible of his emotional wretchedness that he wrung his hands, saying quite aloud. "What a life! Good God! what a life!" It was owing to experiences such as these that his lips and eyes preserved that expression of silent melancholy to which he had perhaps owed Helen's love. It is their pity that leads to the capture of the noblest women. But these crises did not last long with Armand. In his case muscles were stronger than nerves. He took up his journals, and threw them, rather than put them, away in the box.

"That's a rational sort of occupation," he thought to himself, "for the night before an assignation."

Immediately, his thoughts turned again to Helen. The charming air of distinction that she possessed returned to his recollection, and suddenly softened him to an extraordinary degree.

"Why have I entered into her life," he said, "since I do not love her? For eleven little months she did not know me,



and she was at peace. There would still be time enough to act the part of an honest man."

He was seized by the temptation to do what he had done once already—to renounce, before any irrevocable step had been taken, an intrigue in which he ran the risk of taking another's heart without giving his own in return.

"Perhaps she loves me," he said to himself; and he sat down at his table, and even got ready a sheet of paper in order to write to her. Then, leaning back in his easy chair, he reflected. The recollection of Varades suddenly beset him, as also of the serenity with which Helen had deceived her husband that evening. "Innocent child," he said aloud, speaking to himself, "if it were not I, it would be someone else. When a fast woman meets with a libertine, they form a pair."

He began to laugh in a nervous fashion, and recalled the boundless contempt with which he had formerly been covered by the lady whom his scruples had led him to give up. She was the only enemy that he had kept among all the women with whom he had had to do. The clock struck.

"Two o'clock," he said, "and I have to get up early in order to visit worthy Madame Palmyre, and reserve one of her little suites, as in Madame de Rugle's days. I shall be tired. Monsieur de Varades will be missed."

Half an hour later he was in bed, and, head on arm, sleeping that infantine sleep which, in spite of his life, had still been left to him. So he was represented in a drawing by his father, which hung on one of the walls of his bedroom.



### CHAPTER III

It was about half-past ten in the morning when Madame Chazel received a small packet from the Baron de Querne. It contained two books—two new novels—and a letter, the last being similar to all those that a man of the world may write to a woman with whom he is on friendly terms. But the postscript pressed as with a hand upon her heart. It ran as follows:

"If your country friend decides to come to Paris, the best furnished apartments that I have seen are at 16, Rue de Stockholm. They are on the second floor, to the right."

Yes, Helen was seized with inward trepidation on reading these simple lines. In proportion as her action drew closer to her—the action that would forever separate her future and her past—the fever which had been preying upon her since the previous evening had increased still more. She had just left her bath, and, wrapped in a dressing gown of pure white, was crouched on a low chair beside the fire, her naked feet in slippers, her form unconstrained by the flexible material, and her hair rolled in a great twist about her neck. She shivered in her wool-lined robe, and, with Armand's letter in her fingers, gazed now at the paper, the mere touch of which overwhelmed her, and now around the room—a refuge which she preferred even to the little drawing room, as enabling her to retire into a domain that was all her own.

She had been so pleased at the time of their settling in Paris to obtain this room all to herself! She had during so many nights known the torture of sleeping beside a man whom she did not love, and if sleeping side by side, almost breath to breath, forms the delight of blissful passion, physical aversion, on the other hand, is augmented by such intimacy, until it becomes a species of animal hatred. Alfred's movements, the sound of his breathing, the mere existence of his person, angered her, and hurt her, in the hours that she spent thus beside him, when silence hung heavy upon their rest, and she lay awake quivering and in revolt. When requesting this sepa-



ration of rooms she certainly had not foreseen that the solitude of her couch would one day avail her as a weapon against material partition, that terrible ransom for adultery which prudent women accept as a security. It is a rare thing for those who deceive their husbands to sleep apart from them. They would rather not have to carry with them to their lover the anxiety due to a watchfulness but little reconcilable with complete pleasure.

But Helen was not capable of such calculations. The most charming trait in her character was a spontaneity that might draw her into very great perils, but that at least always preserved her from a foulness which is more degrading than anything else—reflection in the midst of error. At this very moment, as she sat crouching upon her low chair, she did not think about the consequences of her approaching action, nor did she reason—she felt. The presence of Armand's letter caused her to be visited with excessive emotion. She scarcely so much as listened to the noise that her little boy made in playing beside her bed. The child was shaking his flaxen ringlets, and shouting and running about. He had two chairs beside each other, and was creeping between them, pretending that he was a railway train passing through a tunnel.

Since she had been in love with Armand, Helen had experienced strange feelings of sadness in the presence of her little Henry, and she had reproached herself for them as for a lack of tenderness, attributing them to remorse. In reality, her sorrow was due to the discovery in her son of an astonishing likeness to her husband. Even in his games the child recalled the conversation of the father, who from principle gave him for books nothing but scientific works, and then he had Alfred Chazel's eyes and his awkwardness in using his hands, and had only his mother's mouth and forehead. She spoiled him all the more for her consciousness of what she had taken from him to give to another! The child continued to play, looking sometimes towards his mother. The latter, at one moment, heaving a deep sigh, crumpled up the paper that she held in her hand, and flung it into the fire.

The note had grown intolerable to her. She told herself, indeed, that it was more prudent on her lover's part to write to her in this tone of formal politeness, but it was such prudence as freezes, and in Helen's then unnerved condition she had need of a letter whose every phrase acts upon the reader's heart like invisible and caressing lips. The crumpled paper, letter and envelope together, rolled into the fire, and the child



left the two chairs with which he was playing to come to his mother's side and watch it burn.

"What are you looking at there, darling?" Helen said to him.

"At the nuns, mamma," he replied. So he called the luminous dots that run across the black surface of paper consumed by fire. These dots were in his eyes nuns distractedly traversing their burnt cloister. "How they hurry," he said; "how frightened they are! Oh! that one, mamma, look at that one! The convent is falling down. They are all dead."

Madame Chazel felt herself incapable of enduring this merriment. The whole odious nature of her moral situation had just been rendered palpable to her by a pretty, insignificant fact, that of her son making a plaything of the letter in which her lover made an appointment with her for their first secret meeting. She would have been so glad to have held her home life, the maternal obligations of which she would fulfill to the utmost, distinct from the other, from that life of passion upon which she was entering, carried away by something stronger than her reason, something so obscure to herself and yet so real. Was this distinction, then, altogether impossible, seeing that on the very first day all that she would have wished apart were being blended together?

"Go and play with Miette," she said to her son, "I have a slight headache."

Miette was the little boy's nurse. A lady's maid, a cook, and a man-servant completed the personnel of the household. Miette, who had come from the country with her employers, had taken care of Henry from his earliest infancy. At night, to send him to sleep, she used to sing canticles to him, one especially of which delighted and terrified him:

"Come, divine Messiah."

"What is Messiah?" he would ask his nurse.

"He is Antichrist," she used to reply.

"When will He come?" asked the child.

"At the end of the world."

"In how many years?"

"Seven," said the nurse.

"Then I shall be twelve years old," Henry would calculate.

This astonishing prediction had so struck him the night before, that at the mere mention of his nurse's name, he began to tell it to his mother. At any other time this confidence would have amused her, but while speaking he had in his bright grey eyes a look that the young woman knew only too well.



"Don't be frightened," she said, "for you are good, and go and play."

The little boy cast a glance at the fire where the black residue alone marked the site of the burnt convent; at the chairs whose backs were no longer the walls of a deep tunnel; at his mother, to know whether he might not remain. Unconsciously he was affected by the sadness overspreading her face. By one of those almost animal intuitions peculiar to extremely sensitive children, he discerned that his presence was vexing to his mother. He kissed her hand, and then suddenly burst into tears.

"What is the matter, my angel, what is the matter?" said Helen, pressing him in her arms and covering him with kisses.

"I thought you were angry with me," he said. Then, warmed by her caresses, he said: "I am going, mamma; I will be good."

"Have children presentiments?" Helen asked herself when she was left alone. "One would think he were conscious that something unusual is taking place." And with her elbows on her knees and her chin resting upon her closed hands, she relapsed into the state of fever that had kept her awake the whole night. The nacreous bruise that encircled her eyes too clearly revealed this sleeplessness. On rising, she had looked at herself in the glass, and said to herself:

"I am not pretty—I shall not please him."

What had been preying upon her had been neither prudish reasoning nor moral reflection. It was a sort of ardent languor. She could see Armand in her thought, and as it were a wave of blood, but having greater heat, surged to her heart, her throat choked a little, and her will tottered. It was not only her first intrigue, in the sense in which the world understands the term, but it was her first love. Helen Chazel, while still Mademoiselle de Vaivre, had endured one of the most painful trials that can weigh upon youth. She had been persecuted by a stepmother who hated her, while believing that she was only bringing her up well and correcting her. The De Vaivres lived in a kind of château, four miles from Bourges, and this had been a prison to the young girl. The father, a weak man, who cherished an innocent mania for an archaeological collection, patiently and complacently gathered together, had never suspected the mute drama played between stepmother and stepdaughter for twelve years.

Madame de Vaivre loved her husband, and, without herself comprehending as much, was jealous of the dead wife, that first wife whose grace she saw renewed in the features of the child, in her smiles and in her gestures. Nothing is so dan-



gerous as an evil feeling of the existence of which we are not quite aware. To gratify it we discover all kinds of excuses which enable us to feed our hatred without losing our self-esteem. It was thus that Madame de Vaivre, having taken Helen's education in hand, made every lesson and every admonition a means for torture.

This woman, pretty and refined, but unfeeling, very solicitous about propriety in consequence of the lengthened sojournings at Paris with her father, who had been an official deputy under the July monarchy, was withal minutely devout, and instinctively unkind, like all persons who are accustomed never to admit the just sensibilities of others. When Alfred Chazel had come to be intimate with Monsieur de Vaivre, owing to their common taste for excavations and antiquities, she had with joy perceived that he was falling in love with Helen. It afforded her a secret pleasure to marry her stepdaughter to a man who had no fortune, and, the dowry being very small, to condemn her for years to a middling existence. Death, which takes as little account of our evil calculations as of our great intentions, had taken in hand to render abortive this woman's hateful anticipation, through which poor Helen had seen no more clearly than Monsieur de Vaivre himself.

All that the young girl understood on the day that Chazel asked her in marriage was that she would be free from her stepmother's tyranny. She had a plain perception of that from which she was escaping. As to marriage and its physical realities, what could she have known of them? Thus, on leaving the church, she found herself in a moral situation that was full of peril. Her childhood spent, as it had been, beneath continual oppression, had to an excessive degree developed within her a taste for the romantic—a power, that is, of fashioning beforehand an image of life with which the reality is subsequently compared. Through her joy at deliverance, her future marriage showed to her like a paradise of delight.

Misfortune had it that Alfred Chazel should be one of those men who, with all kindness, all delicacy even, at the bottom of their hearts, are forever ignorant of a woman's nature. The consummation of the marriage was to Helen something as hateful as it had been unexpected—like a tribute paid to clumsy brutality. The result was that she received her husband's endearments with a repugnance that was imperfectly dissembled, and that added to the timidity of a man already timid by nature and awkwardly impassioned, as those who have not slackened the initial ardor of their youth in facile



intrigues often are. Alfred was secretly afraid of showing his tenderness to his wife, and he concealed from her the intensity of a love that would perhaps have touched her had she been able to perceive it.

Moral divorce between husband and wife has nearly always physiological divorce for its first and hidden cause. If community in voluptuousness is the most powerful agent for the fusion of temperaments, the torturing possession of a woman by a man remains the certain origin of unconquerable antipathy. It came to pass in the Chazel household, as in all similar households, that this first antipathy was heightened from week to week by reason of the fact that two beings, condemned to live side by side, unceasingly afford each other grounds for more love or greater hatred. Do not all the petty events of life render them every minute more present to each other? The divergence in tastes, ideas, and habits that parted Alfred from Helen would have provided the latter, had she loved her husband, with pretexts for a loving education. Not loving him, she found in them only reasons for separating from him still more.

Alfred Chazel was in fact a son of the people, and in spite of the intellectual refinement of two generations, his peasant origin showed itself again in him in clumsiness of gesture and attitude. He was not vulgar, and at the same time he was lacking in manner. Helen, on the contrary, came of a noble family, and her step-mother's continual superintendence had developed to an extreme in her a sense of detailed particularity concerning her person and everything about her. Her husband's manner of eating shocked her; his manner of going and coming and sitting down—a certain slowness in grasping all that constituted the material side of life. When it was needful to accomplish a rapid and precise movement, during a walk, or at table, or in a shop, he would pause for a moment, with lips slightly gaping, and with a startled demeanor, like a peasant passing through a terminus in a large town.

Alfred, moreover, was fond of saying that he was an absent man, and that the external world had no existence for him; and it was true, for two influences had contributed to uproot him from the said external world—the sudden transition of his family from one social class into another, and the nature of his mathematical studies. His wife had never been able to ensure that the cord of his eyeglass should not be broken, and then knotted in several places, that the collar of his overcoat should be kept down, his silk hat brushed, and his cravat



properly tied. The carelessness characteristic of men of thought was visible in his entire person.

Helen would have blushed with indignation and shame had she been told of the part played by these trifles in her conjugal aversion. But is not the life of the heart, like physical life, a summing of the infinitely little? Moreover, these minute facts, which formed a mass in their totality, symbolized an essential ground for dissociation between the husband and wife, namely, the absolute distinction between the minds of both. Helen's instruction had not been of a very solid kind; she had not been fortified by that sum of positive learning which alone is able to balance intense development of thought. Thus, all her reading as a girl and as a young woman had been directed towards those works of imagination for which Alfred professed the innocent contempt of a scientist whose literary culture is almost non-existent. It appeared extraordinary to him, and he used ingenuously to say so, that in an age of chemistry, steam, and electricity, intelligent beings should occupy themselves with the composition of such trash. Hence, in conversation, husband and wife had not a single opinion in common. Alfred was quite sensible that an abyss, growing constantly more impassable, was yawning between Helen and himself, and he was pained by it, but in the way that he would have been pained by an incomprehensible misfortune.

"What does she want to make her happy?" he would ask himself, and then he would in thought draw up a list of the conditions for happiness that were realized about his wife: "We have money, and a dear child; she wished to live in Paris, and here we are; I give her every freedom; I have the most absolute confidence in her; I do her honor by my position; everything smiles upon us and flatters us—and she is not happy!"

No, Helen had not been happy, and on the morning of this winter day, which was to prove to her a date that could never be forgotten, she felt her whole melancholy past surging back upon her. A thousand scenes showed themselves, and she discerned that through them all she had been advancing towards the hour at which, as she believed, her true life would begin. Often at Bourges, while walking with her husband along the Seraucourt promenade, she had asked herself whether she should ever, ever be acquainted with happiness, with the warm radiancy within her of a light that might illumine the cold darkness in which she languished. Her husband conversed with her about his plans, his college life, and his companions, with the calmness which he displayed in all



matters, holding it a principle that a man should look at life on its good side, should be submissive, and accept.

These talks prostrated her with sadness. She sighed vaguely after an infinitude of emotion which she conceived to be possible, and the tokens, the reflection of which she discovered in a few phrases in the novels of her reading when they treated of love. Of all the emotions of life this was the only one with which she was unacquainted. She had been a daughter, and had loved her father, but her affection had been cruelly deceived. She had been a sister, but little Adèle, Monsieur de Vaivre's daughter by his second marriage, resembled her mother, and Helen had never been able to become unreservedly attached to her. She had had friends, but it had always seemed to her that these friends did not feel as she did, and she had never ventured to speak to them of what touched her most closely, of what was dearest to her heart. She would have been pious had not the sight of her step-mother's piety given her an aversion to religious practices which, as she saw only too clearly, might be made a justification for the worst egotism. She was a mother, and she loved her son; but, as formerly, in the case of her little sister, a resemblance checked her in her feeling. Little Henry recalled Alfred too much at certain moments.

Then it was, when she had fathomed the bankruptcy of her first youth, that her imagination pictured to her the dawn of a reparative feeling; and what could this mysterious feeling be if it were not that one with which she was unacquainted, and the sweetness, power and happiness of which were celebrated by all?

"But no," she said to herself, "it is a crime to love when one is not free."

Then she recalled conversations heard on her friends' "days" at Bourges, and the manner in which people spoke of a doctor's wife who had eloped with a young Conseiller de Préfecture. And then she met with men who had so little resemblance to the image that she had formed of him whom she might have loved! She remembered the painful surprise which had been caused her by that very Monsieur de Varades, of whom De Querne had heard. She had believed in the genuineness of his sympathy. He came to see her. They used to have a little music together. Then, had he not offered violence to her one evening when they were alone in the house? She had said nothing to her husband from dread of a scandal and a duel; but she had never received the young officer again



when alone. She did not suspect that he had revenged himself upon her by saying that she had been his mistress.

By what familiarities had she challenged the audacity of this garrison Don Juan? Yet she was not a coquette. The feeling that sprang up within her in the presence of a stranger was rather an apprehension of offence than a desire to please. She had been as little of a coquette with Armand de Querne. If there was a man whom she would have refrained from approaching with a desire to seduce, it was assuredly he. Her husband had so often extolled him to her.

"When we were at college, Armand and I" or, "Armand used to say to me," or, "Armand wrote to me." And so on.

Helen had anticipated another and a more pretentious Alfred. She had told herself that some day, if ever she left the country, she would be obliged to endure in her home the presence of this friend, who would be a hostile judge, and would raise fresh difficulties between her husband and herself. If they were separated for so many reasons the one from the other, her own reserve and Alfred's good nature at least prevented the separation from breaking out in scenes and disputes. What would be the outcome of the intrusion of Alfred's old chum into their home, she almost anxiously asked herself on the occasion of her first visit to Paris.

Her rapid interview with Monsieur de Querne had modified the coloring of these fears. He had come to take the Chazels to their hotel, and all three had dined together in a restaurant on the Boulevards. Helen had been surprised by Armand's outward appearance, and by the contrast that he presented to the carelessness of Alfred; but further, the young man's questions, his keen way of looking, the irony that tinted his slightest expressions, together with an indefinable shade of contempt for Alfred, which a woman's acuteness could not but remark, had disconcerted her, causing her a slight shiver of mistrust. She would have wished never to see the man again. She had been unable to refrain from mentioning this antipathy to her husband, and he had replied: "He looks like that, but he is such a good fellow, and then he has been so unfortunate." And he told his wife about Armand's childhood, his guardian's selfishness, his youthful melancholy, and he commiserated him for other mysterious sufferings.

"He has not understood life well. He was rich. He has not employed his fine powers. He has said nothing to me, but I always believed that he had experienced a deep passion."

Helen would have been much astonished if any one had



revealed to her that the species of agony with which her thought rested upon the probable secret nature of this disquieting personage comprised that form of anxiety which often precedes love. The settlement at Paris had taken place, and Armand had begun to visit them, at first in their furnished rooms, and then in the little house in the Rue de La Rochefoucauld. It was he who had found it for them, he who courteously offered his assistance in the countless goings and comings necessitated by the furnishing of the new home. In the constant interviews thus brought about, whether in a shop, or while walking together from one tradesman's to another, or when driving in a carriage, as often happened, Helen learned to know all the delightful outward qualities possessed by Armand. Unlike the men, all of them occupied with science or self-advancement, who met at her husband's house, he appeared to attach only a secondary importance to acquired merits or positive learning. Questions of feeling alone interested him.

In all the men that she had seen, Helen had encountered the same idea about love, namely, that it pertained to youth, was to be relegated to the background, and that rational people should never weigh it against family or professional interests. Her discussions with Armand revealed to her a man who had reflected a great deal about the mutual relations of the sexes. He possessed that imagination of heart which women so readily confuse with genuine sensibility, together with that experience of amorous life which lends to libertines their prestige even with the most virtuous. The expression of melancholy which was familiar to him seemed to say that this experience had been purchased at the cost of cruel deceptions. It was these unknown griefs that completed the work of seduction which had begun in timorous astonishment, and had been continued in the admiration of the provincial for the Parisian; for the superiority of judgment concerning life which distinguished the young man corresponded to too many stifled aspirations on Helen's part to leave her indifferent to it. It was he whose taste she perceived scattered over the walls of her little drawing-room; he who had chosen that old tapestry and hung it in its corner; he who had chosen this piece of furniture or that piece of material from among several others. This softened admiration, which led her to say to herself: "What a happiness it would be to comfort him for all that he has suffered," had soon ended in the hope that her presence was really sweet to him, for he was occupied about her with visible sympathy.



At different times she had heard him tell her:

"I had an invitation to Madame So-and-so's this evening, but I broke my engagement in order to spend the evening with you."

One day, on the occasion of one of those insignificant events which in the heart's darkness are as tiny lights revealing an immense gulf, she had confessed to herself that she loved him. Armand, who was to have come to dinner in the Rue de La Rochefoucauld, had sent a note of excuse to the effect that he was unwell. She had sent Alfred to see him, and Alfred had found nobody in the Rue Lincoln. By the sorrow that the young woman experienced, she recognized the extent of the interest that she took in Monsieur de Querne, and, to her misfortune, she recognized it at a moment when, upon one of those petty troubles, which are great disasters in love, she must inevitably doubt whether her feeling was returned. Instead of striving against this love, as she would have done had she believed herself loved, she said to herself:

"Why has he not kept his promise? With whom has he spent the evening?"

When she saw him again, he spoke somewhat hardly to her, and she allowed a disconcerted countenance to be seen. He gently took her hand, and she burst into tears. From that hour she ceased to be capable of concealing the disquiet with which the mere sight of Armand inspired her. She began to enter upon that stage wherein the soul finds itself ceaselessly divided between the sight of the direst misfortune and of the highest felicity. How is it possible to reason then? Armand, who knew love's halting-places too well not to perceive the progress that he was making in Helen's heart, was adroit enough to show her that he doubted her feelings towards himself, and that he was unhappy on account of this doubt.

He thus led her in succession to tell him that she loved him, to let him take her hands, her arms, her waist, and to lend her cheek, her eyes, her lips to kisses. Nothing could be more opposed than these progressive familiarities to the ideas that Helen entertained respecting the manner in which a woman ought to behave towards a man when she loves. She considered, as do all truly loyal natures, that a slight deception is morally equivalent to one that is complete. But she yielded to the faintest expression of pain in the young man's eyes with a weakness for which she reproached herself on each occasion, only to relapse once more.

"Ah! do not be pained; what does it matter if I ruin my-



self?" such was the translation of the poor woman's looks, the words that she uttered in a whisper.

She had not spoken falsely when putting to him the sorrowful question:

"You will at least be happy?"

And now, within a few hours of the moment when she would be entirely his, it was this hope and this uncertainty that floated above all else.

"Ah!" she thought, "if only I may see that light in his eyes! Afterwards I shall become what I may. What matter if I have given him that?"

She had reached this point in her reflections when a kiss made her start. Alfred had just come in to bid her good-morning. Having gone out before eight o'clock, he had not yet seen her, and finding her so pretty in the robe of soft material that showed the outline of her graceful shoulders, and bust, and the lines of her legs terminating in the white, blue-veined, naked feet in their black slippers, he could not refrain from approaching her and stealing a kiss from the sweet place on her neck, between the ear and the nape. This was such a surprise to her on emerging from the universe of ideas in which she had just been absorbed, that she gave a slight scream.

"Lazy, chilly, timorous creature," said Chazel, who strove to jest in order to banish the angry expression which his caresses had just called up upon that charming face. "Do you know what o'clock it is? A quarter to twelve. You will never be ready for breakfast. What are you reading?" he continued, taking up the two volumes sent by Monsieur de Querne which were lying on the table; "more novels—but they are not cut. What have you been doing all the morning?"

"I have been settling papers and making up accounts."

How many of these little falsehoods her lips had uttered, and not one, even the slightest and most innocent of them, that did not cost her a cruel effort.

"Will you ring for Julia?" she resumed. "I am going to have my hair dressed, and I shall be ready in ten minutes."

"I am not in your way if I remain here?" he said.

"Not particularly—for the present," she replied, and already she had passed into her dressing room. She had put on a light cambric wrapper, and was unfastening her beautiful chestnut hair, combing it herself. Alfred remained on his feet, leaning against one of the leaves of the door and reading a newspaper which he had taken out of his pocket. The mere rustling of the paper irritated Helen's nerves, because it



recalled this man's presence to her, and his presence appeared at this moment a profanation. Ah! if Armand had been there instead of the other, how charming she would have found it to associate him thus with the coquettish portion of the mysterious attentions to her beauty. But such familiarity in one whom they do not love is so displeasing to women, that even prostitutes are pained by it. In all, whether virtuous or not, modesty is the beginning and the ending of love. Alfred had never understood this. He was still in love with Helen; and these sudden intrusions upon her privacy procured him a dumb happiness that was composed of timid desires and furtive contemplations. Over the top of his open newspaper he watched the white hands passing backwards and forwards among the yielding hair, and the graceful shape of the arms which the wide sleeves, when thrown back by certain movements, allowed to be seen.

How he would have liked to handle that hair which she always denied to him! And she too looked at her hair with happiness, in spite of the pain which her husband caused her by remaining there, for she perceived that it was as long and as wave-like as when she had been a young girl. Every time that she paid attention to her beauty now, she studied herself with childish anxiety, spying out the slightest wrinkle on her temples, about her lips, around her neck, asking herself whether she was still pretty enough to intoxicate the man she loved, and she smiled at herself in the glass as she twined her hair, and leaning forward a little she saw in a corner of the same glass the reflection of her husband's face with a blaze in his eyes—that swift gleam of desire which she knew and hated well. She shivered as though she had awoke to find herself exposed naked in a public square, blushed violently, and said:

"I do not know why Julia is not here. Ring again, please, and leave me."

She got up, pushed Alfred away, shut the door, and when alone, felt the tears come.

"Ah!" she said to herself; "I do not truly love him. Ought not these annoyances to be sweet to me since I endure them for his sake?"

Such were her thoughts as she sat at the breakfast table, dressed now in a dark-colored dress, and wearing boots—the boots in which she was presently, and in a very short time, for the timepiece hanging on the wall was pointing to thirty-five minutes past twelve—to walk to that Rue de Stockholm which she had not known even by name before re-



ceiving her lover's note. Where was it? What would the house look like? At the mere thought of it, an intoxicating, burning fluid seemed to course through her veins. To remain quiet was a torture to her, and as for eating, she was unequal to it. It seemed to her that her throat was so choked that not even a piece of bread would pass through it. Little Henry was talking to his father, and the latter, on failing to receive even a reply from her to two or three questions, said:

"How strange you are to-day. Are you not well?"

"I?" she said. "Why, I am as cheerful and merry as possible," and she began to laugh and to talk in a loud tone. "Can he suspect anything?" she asked herself; "but what matter if he does?"

"What are you going to do this afternoon?" asked Alfred again mechanically.

"Will you take me with you, mamma?" said Henry.

"No, darling," she replied, evading a reply to her husband, "you will go to the Champs-Élysées, and I will wish you good-morning as I pass, perhaps. Is it fine today?" she went on, although she had watched both sky and pavement with impatient anxiety since early morning. And on his replying in the affirmative she said: "You can take the carriage; I will go on foot, it will do me good."

They had a brougham that was hired by the month, and that they used in turns, he for business expeditions, and she for paying visits.

"At last!" she sighed, when she found herself alone in the little drawing-room, Alfred having left for his office, and Henry for his walk; and the distresses of the morning were succeeded by a delicious feeling of relief.

Already even, in her drawing room, which was filled with recollections of Armand, she was surrendered unreservedly to her love. The recovery of her freedom overwhelmed her with joy such as the vision of the future could no longer take from her mind. She evoked in thought her lover's gaze, she kindled in it that gleam of felicity which was as the stars towards which her being was uplifted.

"I am sacrificing everything for him," she thought to herself, returning for a moment to the impressions of that painful morning; "but the more I sacrifice for him the more will he feel how much I love him. And how I love him! how I love him!" she repeated aloud in exultation. She looked at her watch. "It is past one o'clock. He is to wait for me from twelve. What a surprise for him if I arrive so soon. For he does not expect me immediately."



And she hastened to put on her hat, taking a thick veil with her at the bottom of her pocket to put over her face in the cab. He had the day before recommended her to do so. And now she was already passing down the Rue Saint-Lazare, like one walking in her sleep, not daring to look at anything around her. It seemed to her that everyone could see by her figure and gait where she was going, and her elation had given place to a sort of terror—but a resolute terror, like that of a man of courage when on the way to fight his first duel—when she ventured to hail a cab in the Place de la Trinité.

"The Rue de Stockholm," she said.

"What number?" asked the man.

"I will tell you when to stop," she replied.

To get out of the cab in front of the house had just appeared to her suddenly as an impossibility. Her hands shook when she fastened on her double veil in the vehicle, which began to move forward, heavy and slow; at least it seemed to her that every revolution of the wheels lasted a minute. She looked at the shops in the Rue Saint-Lazare, as they filed past, then at the courtyard in front of the terminus, and the sight of a traveller paying his cabman set her searching in her muff in agony. What if she had forgotten her purse? No, she had forty francs, in small ten-franc pieces. So much the worse; she would give one to the man, for to wait for the change on the footpath would be too much for her.

All these emotions were painful to her feelings. She would willingly have fixed her imagination upon her lover—her lover, for she was going to be his mistress. How contemptuous the tones of her friends at Bourges used formerly to become when uttering these words in reference to some compromised woman! Then her nervous emotion proved the stronger.

"If only he does not guess what it has cost me! Ah, may my cowardly fears not spoil his happiness!"

The cab having meanwhile climbed the beginning of the ascent of the Rue de Rome, was turning down past the wall of a private garden which forms the corner of the Rue de Stockholm, and the driver leaned down from his seat to ask Helen where he was to stop.

"Here," she said.

She got out, and placed the small goldpiece in the man's hand, saying to him:

"Keep it, keep it."

Then she was immediately afraid that he would guess why she did not wait for the change, and she stopped and busied herself with gazing, without reading it, at a placard affixed



to the wall, until she heard the cab wheels rolling away. She followed the sidewalk, lifting her head with a throbbing of the heart which seemed to be driving her mad. Eight, ten—two numbers more, and she had reached the house mentioned in the note. She entered the gateway, seeing nothing. She passed in front of the porter, thinking that her limbs would not support her. Her feet were giving way on the stair-carpet. One more effort, and she was at the door of the apartments on the second floor.

She leaned against this closed door. Not a sound was to be heard on the staircase; not a sound came up from the street. She could hear the beatings of her heart, and instead of ringing she remained where she was. She wanted to recover a little calmness before appearing in Armand's presence. Why had she come here? To make him happy! What, then, would be the good of letting him see how much she had suffered? Her heart beat less rapidly; she forced herself to smile; and the thought of the happiness she was about to give was already a happiness to her greater than her anguish had just been.

She at last made up her mind to ring. The tinkling was succeeded by the sound of footsteps, the key turned in the lock, and she sank upon Armand's bosom, and was immediately drawn into a little drawing room furnished in blue. Flames were burning in the fireplace. At the first glance Helen saw that there was no bed in the apartment. She had so dreaded the sight of this on first entering that she felt an infinite gratitude to Armand for having selected their place of meeting in such a way as to spare her this initial shock. He, meanwhile, had unfastened both her veils, taken off her bonnet, compelled her to sit down in an armchair beside the fire, and, kneeling in front of her, was clasping her almost madly, repeating again and again:

"Ah, my love! how sweet of you to come!"

And he gazed at her with eyes made very loving with the joy of anticipation that feels certain of fulfillment, but it was the joy of desire only, for on seeing her smile at him with that easy smile to which she had compelled her countenance, in order not to displease him, he had just told himself that it was not the first time that she had come to a like meeting, and a terrible duality had been set up within him between his sensations and his thoughts.

"She has a fancy for me," he reflected; "let us take advantage of it. But why have all women a mania for telling you that you are their first lover?"



His kisses were loosening the locks of her hair, which she tried to readjust above her forehead with her hand.

"Do not be afraid," he said to her; "I have thought of everything." And he led her through the bedroom to the door of a little dressing room, on the table in which were arranged all the articles belonging to his travelling dressing case.

"You will be able to comb your hair again," he said.

"Oh!" she said, blushing, "you make me ashamed."

Just then he had led her into the bedroom, and as she was taking off the jacket which she wore over her dress, a small object rolled out of her pocket. It was a pocket comb of light tortoise-shell, which Helen had taken up unreflectingly before going out, as she often did.

"She thought of that, too," he reflected.

Then with loving entreaty.

"Be mine," he asked of her.

"Nay, I am yours," she replied.

A twilight prevailed in the apartment, for Armand had already unloosened the window curtains, and Helen found strength to look around her for the first time. How gladly would she have bidden him to leave her to herself! And she turned her eyes appealingly towards him. He replied by clasping her in his arms, and she was about to say to him, "Go away!" when she saw in his eyes that expression of felicity of which she had so often dreamed, and she resigned herself to him, with that divine weakness whose sublime flattery so few men understand.

If a woman who loves wishes to be loved in the same degree, is it needful that she borrow something from the methods of those creatures devoid of true sensibility, to whom their persons are but instruments of supremacy, and who surrender themselves that they may the better possess? Helen did not suspect, while Armand, intoxicated with her beauty, was sweeping her away in his arms, after subjecting her to a passionate outburst of kisses—no, she did not suspect that, at that very moment, this man had just found in the absolute submission to his wishes that had cost her so dear, a reason for not believing in her.

"Are you happy?" she asked of him an hour later, lying on his heart, and giving herself up to the languid sensation that follows upon a lover's caresses; "tell me, are you happy? You see, *I am*."

And it was true, for she had just for the first time felt an unfamiliar emotion awakening in her beneath the caresses of the man whom she loved so dearly.



"Oh! very happy," replied Armand, and he spoke falsely, for reviewing in thought all the slight incidents of the first meeting—the smiling entry, the presence of the comb, the ready compliance of his mistress, and her burning susceptibility—he said again to himself that he was certainly not Helen's first lover.

And then, he secretly despised her because she had not denied herself to him in detail. The evident absence of remorse in the woman seemed to him a proof that she had no kind of moral sense. He did not tell himself that, if she had manifested remorse, he would have treated her as a hypocrite, and meanwhile she was speaking to him.

"See," she sighed, "as soon as I saw you, I loved you. I felt that you had not had your share of happiness here below, and it was my dream to impart it to you, and to do away with your troubles. There is a wrinkle in your forehead which I cannot endure. When you asked me to be yours and I said no, I saw that wrinkle between your eyebrows, there," she said, kissing the spot, "and then, when I said yes, the wrinkle was gone. That is why I am here, and proud of being here, for I am so proud of loving you."

"How strange it is," thought Armand, "that no woman has conscience enough to say to herself: 'I am acting disgracefully, lying, betraying; it amuses me, but it is disgraceful.' The cloth on the communion table and the sheet on the bed of a furnished room are all one to them. There, my angel, go on with your romances," and he closed her lips with kisses. "Ah!" he thought again, "she is very pretty. If only she had wit enough to hold her tongue!"



## CHAPTER IV

THE evening which succeeded to this day of fever, agony, and bliss, was spent by Helen in torturing and delicious yearning. Is not the regretting of one's happiness the thinking of it again? Why had she asked her lover not to come to the Rue de la Rochefoucauld that evening? When yonder, beside him, she had thought that to meet him again in her own home after an interval of so few hours would be distressing to her. Now she said to herself, while working after dinner at her crochet in the little drawing room, and seated in the armchair which Armand usually occupied—yes, she said to herself with melancholy that it would be very sweet if she had him there, close beside her.

She would touch her lover's hand sometimes with her own. She would breathe the faint aroma of the scent which she had asked him to use and which was the same as hers. In imagination she grasped that enjoyment at once severe and soothing to a woman's soul—the enjoyment of hearing the lips that have told you "I love you" between two kisses in the afternoon, employ "Madame" and similar formalities to you, so that the most insignificant phrase brings home the charm of the mystery that links you together. And Helen's delicate fingers continued their agile handling of the tortoise-shell crochet hook, while Alfred turned over the leaves of a book without speaking.

On her return, she had experienced a bitter moment when meeting her son again, she had been forced to allow little Henry to give her kisses—which she had not returned. She had contented herself with embracing him, with resting the child's cheek against her own, and then she had felt that she loved him even more than before. All these different kinds of emotion had left their traces in her face, which, usually rosy, was on this evening strangely pale, but of that toned and shrouded paleness that succeeds to complete voluptuousness.

A halo of lassitude hovered about her eyes, a softness about her smile, an air of suppleness and languor about her entire



person, and this lover-like appearance lent her such seductiveness as would have frightened her had she taken the trouble to watch Alfred. The latter never turned his eyes from her as she bent her tenderly wearied head over her work. Dressed in white, as was her custom, the faint brown tint of her eyelids was the better seen since she kept them downcast, apparently upon her wool, in reality upon the visions which were rekindling her soul. Alfred reflected with rapture that she was his wife—his wife.

He was more in love with her than ever. Only, ever since their settlement at Paris had brought with it a separation of rooms, he had felt himself seized, whenever he longed for her caresses, by an emotion which he could with difficulty subdue. He must ask his Helen to allow him to remain with her, or else enter her room when she was in bed. This need of acting, united to the torment of physical desire, is so painful to certain men, that timid youths experience an almost unbearable throbbing of the heart on merely crossing the threshold of those houses in which pleasure is sold ready-made. During the whole of this evening, Alfred, although he was satisfied of Helen's submission, endured that emotion which is not without sweetness, since it renders still more perceptible the keenness of desire. He looked at her, and the words which he was preparing beforehand to say to her, caused him a sinking of the heart. He kept silence with such persistency that the poor woman had almost forgotten his existence when she rose to go to her room and held out her forehead to him, with the words:

"Till tomorrow."

"Eh! what! till tomorrow?" he replied, trying to bring his kiss down to her eyes, and lower still. She shuddered, repulsed him abruptly, and looked at him. In the depths of her husband's eyes there was the same gleam of desire the reflection of which she had that morning surprised in her looking glass, while combing her hair to surrender it to the hands of the other.

It was an abrupt awakening from the dreams of that whole evening. The palpable sensation of physical partition was present in all its hideousness, and as Alfred approached her with a smile, and the words, "My little Helen," she passed quickly to the other side of an easy chair, and, separated from him, replied:

"Do you not see that I am quite ill this evening?"

She was so pale, and had such a ring of weariness about her eyes, that Alfred was moved by the sight.



"It is the last of my headache," she continued, touching her temples; "a good night's rest, and it will disappear. So, till tomorrow."

She smiled, made a graceful gesture with her hand, and left the drawing room. Alfred, when alone, could hear her going and coming in the adjoining apartment, which was her own room. He himself occupied a room on the floor above, opening into his study.

"How delicate her health is," he thought tenderly to himself.

"No; never, never!" said Helen, speaking aloud to herself, when her maid had left her; and leaping out of bed, she turned the key in both doors. Alfred, who was still in the drawing room, seated before the fire, heard the sound of the key turning in the lock.

"She is afraid of me, then?" he asked himself with singular sadness; and meanwhile Helen, stretched in bed, was repeating half aloud:

"Never, never again will I give myself to that man."

The reality of the situation had just been impressed upon her with frightful clearness. She could foresee the daily strife, the dispute for her person night by night, and hour by hour. If high life, as it is called, with its nightly engagements, its facilities for isolation in an immense house, and its social pleasures and duties, enables a husband and wife, not on good terms with each other, to live both side by side and yet apart, it is not so with those of the comfortable middle class. Conjugal interviews in private are there the rule, social engagements the exception, and husband and wife meet every moment, and in every detail of existence.

"Heavens, what can I do?" said Helen to herself. Then courageously: "I will find means. It will be so sweet to struggle for him."

Her soul became exalted by the impress of this thought, and suddenly she could again taste Armand's kisses upon her lips. All the circumstances of their interview showed themselves, from the anguish of arrival to that of departure. Ah, what a farewell! What a caress was that given on the threshold of the door before entering again upon life! Then, what a walk through the streets with its brutal tumult of passengers, vehicles, trains! Armand had remained alone in the little home. What had been his thoughts in presence of the disorder caused by her temporary sojourn there, and which she would herself have liked to have repaired.

"I am going to be grateful to my stepmother for making



me wait on myself when I was small," she said, with her tender gracefulness.

She knew by hearsay that men usually despise women when they have nothing more to obtain from them. But her Armand was not like the rest, since he had lavished upon her his most caressing kisses after their common ecstasy. "I was there," she reflected: "it was when I had left that he judged me. Judged?—and how? I deceived for his sake, but still I deceived." Then once more she saw him, full of such tender passion, that she fell asleep with a smile at his image, and at the thought:

"I shall see him tomorrow."

It was at the Théâtre des Variétés that they were to spend together that second evening whose hours were to Helen sweet of the sweet—the only true rapturous ones of those sad loves. As soon as she awoke, she had written her lover an interminable letter, and just as she was about to send it, she had received from the young man, who for once was faithless to his principles, an almost coaxing note. The nervous emotion of the night before had lost its keenness in her, leaving behind it an acuter susceptibility of heart with which to enjoy desired things with more of inward thrilling. Chance willed it that Alfred should breakfast away from home, and thanks to his absence the cruel impressions of the previous evening were not renewed. Thus, when she arrived at the door of the little stage box in the theatre, she was in that delicious state of soul in which there is, as it were, an inward voice that sings. At such moments everything soothes, just as at others everything wounds.

It was nine o'clock. Helen was standing then in the passage, and while the attendant was relieving her of her cloak she did not venture to ask whether there was anyone already in the box. The door was opened, her heart throbbed, and she perceived Armand rising to greet her. How she loved him for having got there before herself and her husband. Once seated, she at last ventured, after a few minutes, to look at him. He appeared to her to be rather pale, and she felt some anxiety about it; but he had such eyes as on his good days, those which rekindled all her soul, and not those others whose mystery terrified her. What piece were they playing on the stage? She could hear the music of the orchestra, the voices of the actors, the applause; but the interest of the play turned with her upon knowing whether Alfred would leave the box at the next interval. The curtain fell. Her happy destiny willed it that there should be a family of their acquaintance in the



house. Her husband went off to speak to these ladies. She was alone with her beloved—alone!—and turning towards him she asked:

“Are you in love with me to-day?”

Armand did not reply, but under pretence of picking up his opera glass, which had fallen to the ground, he bent down and took her foot in his hand. Through the silk she could feel a clasp which caused her to blush and cast down her eyelids, as though she were incapable of supporting the emotion that took possession of her. With a rapid gesture she seized a bouquet composed of a spray of fern and a little lily-of-the-valley, which the young baron wore in his buttonhole, and slipped her larceny into her bosom.

Alfred returned, the curtain rose again, scene succeeded to scene, and act to act, but she was aware of nothing save of the fact that she was almost too happy; and when, on the conclusion of the play, Armand gave her his arm to lead her back to a carriage, she leaned upon this arm with that absolute blending of motion, which is a surer token of love than any other. How gladly she would have had *him* to take his place beside her! But already he was departing, and she followed him with a prolonged gaze through the crowd. Then the carriage extricated itself from the confusion in the neighborhood of the theatre. “Good-bye, my love,” she said in thought, while her husband took her hand, and said aloud to her:

“You are better this evening?”

“Yes,” she said, freeing her fingers, “but it is the excitement of the play. I need rest so much. I have not slept for the last five nights.”

Chazel understood only too well what this reply meant. He remained silent in a corner of the carriage. Helen also refrained from speaking. But a plan had already ripened in her head. The very next day, brought by Alfred himself, she would visit their physician, whose consulting day it was. She would enter the doctor’s room alone, and relate to him some symptoms or other; then she would say that the physician forbade all intimate relations with her husband until further notice. She was too well acquainted with the species of timid modesty which ruled Alfred not to know that he would pity her without seeking to divine the mystery of suffering with which she would shroud herself. Supported by this plan—which would have been very repugnant to her had it not been calculated to assure the security of her happiness—with what delight did she suffer herself to be overpowered by sleep, by such a sleep as that wherein we appear to sleep with clearness



in our dreams! We sleep, and something wakes within us—a happy portion of our spirit—which ceases not to be sensible of the happiness that we shall find again tomorrow on our pillow. Do we not know that we shall learn this happiness anew by merely opening our eyes?

But neither on that following morning, nor on the morning which came after it during those few weeks of first intoxication through which she passed, did Helen open her eyes immediately upon awakening. For several minutes she kept her eyelids closed, that Armand's image might return to her perfectly clear and complete before any other impression. If the day about to be spent was an ordinary one, that is to say, without an appointed visit to the Rue de Stockholm, she rose indolently. The thought of her appointment was not present to make her feverish, and she could not think about her lover without anxiety.

On the previous evening, before going to bed, she had begun a letter to him, which she concluded as soon as she had risen, so that "good-night" and "good-morning" might meet upon the same scrap of paper—a visible symbol of the continuity of her love. Sometimes she found means to send this letter, sometimes she kept it about her, folded in two in her bosom, in order to deliver it herself. From Armand she expected no reply. He had explained to her the prudential reasons on account of which he did not write, and in this prudence she had not perceived the lack of impulse and politic calculation of a man of gallantry, who foresees approaching ruptures, and does not wish to leave any weapons in the hands of his future enemy.

She used to close her letter with a seal, on which she had had engraved a serpent in the shape of the letter S, because with an S began the name of the street which had been the asylum of her happiest moments. The laughter with which Armand had greeted this childishness, had indeed pained her somewhat, but she had said to herself: "Men have not the same way of loving that we have." Then, her task concluded, she addressed herself to all the cares of her household, cheerful, and finding no duty irksome. She was accompanied throughout her work by a phrase which she used to repeat in a whisper: "He loves me, he loves me." Especially did she occupy herself with her son, whom she now could kiss without remorse. "No, dear child, I have taken nothing from you," she said to him in her heart, and thanks to that power of sophistry characteristic of happy love, she came to think in like manner respecting her husband.



She had never done anything but esteem him, and she continued to esteem him as before. Since the pretense of the doctor's orders had freed her from all hateful advances on Alfred's part, she ingenuously extended to him the joy with which her heart was filled. She no longer made him any of those bitter replies which, in connection with the pettiest details, betray the unconscious animosity of a woman against the man to whom she belongs, and who has not been able to win her love. Did he at table utter, as he used to do, an idea that was not her own; did he allow an awkward gesture or a clumsy question to escape him, she had no capacity within her for becoming angry, all her faculties being employed in calculating the hour at which Armand would be with her, and in depicting to herself the happiness that his presence would bring to her. The hour struck, and Armand was there. She felt so fully satisfied that she no longer thought of watching him. He told her that he loved her; he proved it to her by sacrificing his life in society, the theatres, his club, and spending as many as two or three evenings in the week with her. What interest would he have in deceiving her, and how could she do otherwise than surrender herself to this divine felicity?

When the morning of a day selected for one of their secret meetings arrived, she had not the strength to superintend her household. The expectation of happiness was so keen that it bordered upon pain. On these mornings, as on the first of them, she was absorbed, feverish and prostrate by the fireside, in prolonged reflection, and in her excess of feeling experienced an anguish that relaxed to delight when she had reached the little suite of rooms in the Rue de Stockholm. These were still the same; for having been obliged at their third meeting to take other rooms in the same house, she had entreated Armand to return to the former ones, to those which had witnessed her first intoxication.

To do this it had been necessary to take the lodgings no longer by the day, but by the month. Armand had at first declined to do this, affirming that he had good reasons, but in reality because he knew by experience how greatly a movable place of meeting that is changed on each occasion facilitates ruptures, and then—although he was generous and rich, he felt, without fully acknowledging it to himself, that there was rather too great a difference between the twenty-five francs that Madame Palmyre demanded for an afternoon, and the four hundred represented by a monthly hiring. He had yielded nevertheless, just because a small money question



was involved, and because he thought himself shabby for having so much as thought about it.

"It will only last six months after all," he had said to himself.

But how delighted the confiding Helen had been by this concession! What quick work it had been with her to transform the commonplace rooms into a personal domain to which she brought all kinds of dainty feminine objects, slippers into which to slip her naked feet, a lace shawl to throw over her quivering shoulders, a few pieces of material for draping the table and the backs of the easy chairs, a frame in which to place a photograph of Armand. She had not suspected that each of these little attentions had had the double effect of disquieting De Querne with respect to the difficulty of future separations, and of proving to him that he had to deal with a lady of experience. Like all romantic women, Helen was occupied with the subtleties of the voluptuousness common to herself and to her lover, as though with an anxiety suggested by sentiment. What renders a woman of this kind perfectly unintelligible to a libertine is that he, on his part, has accustomed himself to separate the things of pleasure from the things of the heart, and to taste this pleasure amid degrading conditions; whereas a woman who is romantic and in love, having known pleasure only as associated with the noblest exaltation, transfers to her enjoyments the reverence which she has for her moral emotions.

Helen approached with amorous piety, almost with mystic idolatry, the world of mad caresses and embracings. This piety was centred upon the man who had taught her to love, as upon a being above the range of all discussion. It went for nothing that Armand, after the first days of a self-abandonment produced by the novelty of physical possession, multiplied the tokens of his egotism; his mistress found the means of loving him the more for them. If he came late to their interview in the Rue de Stockholm, she was so proud of having worsted him in the intimate joust of love that she was almost grateful to him for doing so. If at the last moment, and merely to suit his own convenience, he altered the hour of their meeting, the gentle woman experienced a further pleasure in feeling herself treated by her worshipped master as a slave, as a thing which belonged to him, and which he disposed of according to his fancy.

Was this paying too dear for the ecstasy which she felt in ascending the staircase of the house (ah, how little she cared whether she were looked at now!) in hearing the creaking of



the key (her own key, for she had now one of her own) in the lock, in walking through the three rooms wherein abode the whole of her passionate life, and above all in holding Armand beside her, close beside her? Evening was falling, the objects about them were growing dim in outline, and she lay in his arms, listening to the distant roar of the town, the noise of the neighboring railway, and, beneath their windows, the circles of little girls singing: "*Elle était une bergère.*" Then she would give her lover kisses so tender that he would ask her almost with anxiety:

"What have you got to trouble you?"

"Why, I have got you," she would reply.

Ah! why, why is passion not contagious? And what a monstrous thing it is that of two lovers one should be able to feel so much and the other so little!

So little! And yet the young man in these crafty interviews allowed himself to speak to his mistress as though he were madly in love with her. Was it in order to beguile with talk the real dryness of his heart? Was it that the vibration of his troubled nerves was completed in phrases as full of tenderness as he was lacking in it himself? If he had had less power of analysis, he would have believed himself in love with Helen, for when beside her he was seized with fits of the most violent desire. But he knew that once out of her presence he would experience nothing but a moral aching, an infinite weariness, a sense of the uselessness of things, and, to sum up, a renewal of that torpor of soul which the fever of the senses galvanized without dissipating. As for Helen, she drank in every word coming at such moments from Armand's lips, like a liquid that would enable her to traverse with intoxication the space separating her from the next meeting.

It was nevertheless, in the course of one of these talkings on the pillow, he leaning on his elbow, and she lying against his breast and watching him, that the first words of disenchantment were pronounced—words after which she began to see her Armand no longer through the mirage of her dreams, but such as he was, with the frightful, deathly aridity of his soul.

"Ah! how I should like to have a child by you!" she had murmured to him in the middle of one of these contemplations—"a child who has these eyes," and she raised her hand to touch her lover's eyelids; "who had these lips," and she brushed them with her fingers. "How I should love him!"

"I do not wish for it," replied Armand. "I should feel too sad to see him kissing as his father another than myself."



"But that would not be!" she exclaimed.

"It could not be avoided," he replied.

"I would go away with you," she said, "and I should be forced to do so. How could Alfred keep me, now that I never give myself to him?"

While she was uttering these words, he looked at her, thinking to himself:

"She, too! What strange desire is it that impels them to give out that they have ceased to belong to their husbands?"

And in spite of himself, he smiled his evil smile, the smile with which he had greeted other analogous confidences made by other lips, and this smile had always been sufficient to prevent the women who had drawn it upon themselves from returning to the subject. They have such facility in changing a falsehood! But Helen, who did not speak falsely, could endure neither the smile nor the look which accompanied it. Was it not in order that she might never see them again that she had given herself to her lover? It was the first time since then that she had encountered the distrust which caused her so much pain at the beginning of her connection with Armand, and loyal as she was, brave and straightforward, she persisted:

"You do not believe me capable of belonging to two men at the same time? Say no, my dear love; say that you have not such an opinion of me. From the day on which I became your mistress, I ceased to be Alfred's wife."

"I am not jealous," said the young man; "I know that you love me."

"Say that you are not jealous, because you are sure that I am only yours."

"If you wish it, I will say so," he replied, rendered somewhat impatient by her persistence, and being especially but little anxious about the prospects of paternity, flight, and drama which Helen's sudden words had just opened up before him; and such irony was impressed upon his words that the unhappy woman became silent.

"He does not believe me," she thought; "he does not believe me!"

On returning home that evening, Helen felt sad, even to death. She withdrew to her own room, and, under pretense of a headache, went to bed instead of coming down to dinner. She wept much. She could see dimly through her grief what a difference there existed between Armand's love and her own. "Ah!" she said to herself, "of what has he judged me capable? He does not love me." And, seized again by the terrible dread



from which she had suffered on the very evening of the day when she had given herself to him, she said again to herself:

"He is right. What I am doing is so wicked. But he ought to understand that it is for his sake, and so excuse me." And she pressed her forehead upon the pillows, falling suddenly, as very impassioned souls do, from extreme felicity into extreme anguish.

This first perception was a very keen one, but it did not last. Upon reflection, Helen compared her grief with the reason which had provoked it. The sight of the disproportion between cause and effect sufficed to calm her, the more so that Armand's eyes, when they met again, expressed that ardor of desire in the fire of which her heart expanded. The young man had quite understood the pain caused to his mistress by his doubt, and had said to himself:

"Why torment her? She lies to me in order to please me the more, and I am angry with her for the lie. 'Tis too unjust!"

This reasoning, which was a secret flattery to his pride, had the result of making him more tender towards Helen. But when the period of lucidity has begun in the case of a heart that loves, it does not close so rapidly, and a few days after this first shock Helen was to endure a second.

This time her lover and she had met, as they sometimes did, to walk together in one of the avenues in the Jardin des Plantes. Helen was very fond of the peaceful, country-like park, with its fine trees reminding her of those in the grounds of the Archbishop at Bourges. She was especially fond of the place where she had been waiting for Armand, the long, slender terrace the parapet of which runs along the side of the Rue Geoffroy-Saint-Hilaire. She sat down on a bench, from which she could follow the hands of a large clock placed against one of the inner buildings of the Hôpital de la Pitié. The melancholy courtyard of this house of griefs, with its pruned and leafless trees, the gloomy bars on the windows, and the old and dilapidated coloring on the walls, pleased her as a contrast to the young and happy intimacy of the dear romance of her love. She was sensible of a delightful lethargy in bringing back her thoughts to herself, while the street omnibuses went heavily down the low street almost beneath her feet. Some children were playing in the grove of the labyrinth, and their shouts reached her, causing her to renew far-off impressions obliterated by the years.

At last she perceived Armand at the end of the terrace, and she rose to meet him, prettier than usual, as she knew from her lover's glance, thanks to the contrast between her



toilet and the humble landscape—between her pink complexion and the dark leafage of the cedars. Then they walked in the quiet portion of the gardens, that portion which is set aside for plants—near trees two hundred years old, whose aged trunks, plastered like walls, rested on supports of iron. Whether the winter sky were bluish or veiled with mist, there was always sunshine so far as she was concerned, when Armand was there.

They were wandering, then, side by side, in one of the avenues of this vast garden on a dull afternoon early in February, and Helen was telling her lover the story of the wife of one of Alfred's colleagues who had just been cast off by her husband, on his discovering that she had two lovers at once.

"The rest," said the young man, with his evil smile, "have them in succession. The difference is a slight one."

"The rest?" said Helen, who suddenly felt again the melancholy emotion of the previous week; "you do not believe that of all women?"

"Nay, I have no bad opinion of them," he replied. "I believe that they are weak, and that men are deceivers. They find many men to swear that they love them, and they believe one out of every ten. That makes a pretty fair reckoning in the end."

"Then you think that there is no woman in existence who has had only one love?"

"Few," said Armand. "But what does it matter?" he added gaily; "at each fresh intrigue they fancy that they have never loved before, and it is half true, like all truths—they have not loved altogether in the same manner."

A question rose to Helen's lips. She wished to ask: "And I? What do you think of me? Do you believe that I have loved before you? Do you believe that I shall love after you?" She dared not. Once more she was cruelly impressed by the unknown element in her lover's character. No, it was not she whom he doubted—not she, more than another. The man did not believe in any woman. But how is love possible without belief? Is there any sort of tenderness possible without trust? She did not answer herself on these too painful topics, but she prolonged an involuntary analysis of her relations with Armand, and suddenly light was thrown within her upon many of the details which she had not interpreted.

Reflecting upon the distrustful characteristics which alarmed her in this man, she in a retrospective fashion understood the silence with which on certain occasions he had greeted her



outpourings. She remembered him listening to her while she spoke of her country life, and of her moral solitude. "I was keeping myself for you beforehand, without knowing you," she had said. He had made no reply. He had not believed her. Another time she had talked to him of the future, and of the joy that she felt in thinking that they were both young and so had many years in which to love each other. He had made no reply. He had not believed her. When she told him that, but for her son, she would have gone far, very far away, that she might consecrate her entire life to him alone, he kept silence; he had not believed her. Ah! his incredulity, his horrible incredulity! She encountered it now even in a quite recent past, but where she had not suspected it! Or no, was she deceiving herself? Was it that Armand had believed in her so long as he loved her, and was beginning to believe in her no longer now that he loved her less?

Did he love her less? She did not admit for a moment that he had not loved her at the beginning of their connection. He was an honorable man, not a love criminal. He would not have asked her to be his had he not been drawn to do so by all the forces of passion. Then, to explain Armand's incredulity, she reverted to the young man's past, to the mysterious deceptions of which her husband had formerly spoken to her.

"A woman has spoiled his heart," she said to herself.

At the thought of this she was pained by a different pain. She pitied Armand more, and she was jealous with a dim, vague jealousy. Then she asked herself:

"Will my love ever have power to restore to him the faith that he has lost?"

Absorbed as she was in these thoughts, nothing of which she expressed to the man who was their object, she no longer studied the impression which she herself produced upon her lover. When Armand came to dine in the Rue de La Rochefoucauld, and all three of them—he, Alfred, and herself—remained to spend the evening in the little drawing room, she lapsed into abysmal silence. Alfred delighted, as a mathematician, in abstract discussions, and set forth social, political, and economic theories to the young baron, who listened to him with visible weariness depicted upon his features. Then a moment would come when Helen, emerging from her reflections, looked at him. She saw this expression of weariness, and failed to comprehend its immediate and trifling cause. "He is not happy with me," she would say to herself, and immediately afterwards, with even greater simplicity, "He is not



happy." So she reflected, she who had given herself to him to obliterate a wrinkle of melancholy upon his brow, she whose thoughts and feelings had but a single aim: his happiness!

At other times, Armand would come, and at the first glance she discerned that while away from herself he had passed through periods of sadness. Then she felt quite paralyzed. She trembled to speak to him, to utter a word that, coming from her lips, would displease him. An indefinable uneasiness took possession of her, a fear of showing her soul to the man she loved, that was all the more painful, for the fact that she had at first surrendered herself with such deep delight to the charm of feeling aloud in his presence, and this uneasiness with her now went even to their interviews in the Rue de Stockholm.

It was not that in the little home she would find her lover less distracted with her beauty, less passionate than in the days which had followed upon the complete surrender. But his kisses, and the sort of frenzy with which he embraced her now, made her afraid. She dreaded to feel the contrast between the ecstasy caused to her lover by physical possession, and the evident weariness of soul which he displayed in their almost daily interviews. It seemed as though the young man were striving to electrify his heart with the desire for her person. When Helen perceived this cruel truth, the enchantment of the hours of meeting suddenly ceased. Sometimes she longed for these meetings with the gloomiest ardor, that she might at least hear her lover's voice lavishing upon her those phrases of intoxication which, at the beginning of their intercourse, had been the adorable music that had exalted her. Then she dreaded these same interviews, and their caresses into which the senses perhaps entered more than the heart.

"Ah! my Armand," she had ventured to say to him, "you love my person more than you love myself."

"Do you not give yourself to me in giving me your person?" he had replied.

Heavens! how gladly would she have asked him: "And you, do you give yourself entirely to me?"

She had paused upon this question. Why interrogate him? Did she not know that he would coax her with these soft blandishments of speech which do not reveal the depths of the heart? Would she succeed in deciphering the meaning of this living enigma of a man's character, set thus before her for weal or woe? Cruel heart! would it never yield her its secret? Kisses, however, may be more tender than he who gives them,



soft looks may conceal a soul like a veil—and she was so thirsty for truth!

But from where came all this moral anxiety that preyed upon her? Nothing had to all appearance occurred between them, and already she was alternately asking herself:

“Does he love me as much as at first? Does he love me? Has he ever loved me? Can he love me?”

And every minute she struck upon some trifling fact that heightened her doubt. She ceaselessly encountered that mistrust which degraded her, that irony which bruised her, that dryness of heart which reduced her to despair. Some of their friends from Bourges would arrive in Paris, and Alfred would say to De Querne:

“Do not come to-morrow evening; you would be too much bored. We are having some acquaintances from the country.”

“When I am going to be in your way,” the young man would say to Helen next day, “why do you not give me notice yourself, instead of doing it through your husband?”

“To be in my way?” she would ask.

“Oh! why deceive me? You have had some flirtations over there for which you blush here. You do not want me to verify your familiarity with this man or the other. But what can that signify to me since you did not know me? What does signify is to see you deceiving me.”

Deceiving! always deceiving! This word recurred in Armand's conversation—indefatigably; she read it in his eyes, his gestures, his thoughts. Did she find herself obliged at the last moment to fail at one of their meetings in the Rue de Stockholm, she knew that he would not believe in her excuse. But a man of that kind—no, such a man cannot love.

“Ah, love me, love me!” she would murmur feverishly as she drew closer to him after passing through one of those crises of anguish in which she had felt how little her lover's heart belonged to her.

“Why, I do love you,” he would reply, without understanding the agony of which this agony was a last sigh. She understood that the word had not the same signification to him as to her, and the whole of the inward tragedy whereof she was the silent, grief-stricken heroine, burst forth one frightful day. Like a captive who, during his sleep, has been bound by his conquerors to a corpse, and awakes to discover himself chained to this horrible companion, she found herself, a living heart, a heart susceptible to love, and happiness, and life, fastened to a corpse-like heart, icy, moveless—slain!

When the reality of this came before her, she quickly flung



herself back. All that she had believed genuine was deceptive, all that she had believed full was empty; but she would not acknowledge this to herself. She treated as chimeras those almost indefinable tokens which enable a tormented soul to penetrate another to its remotest depths. She loved Armand, and she wished to love him. Was not her entire life staked now on this card? It was only four months since she had become his mistress. What! four such short months! It is a horrible thing that in so short a time one can pass, without any visible shame, from the sublimest hope—that of making amends for all the injustice in a man's destiny—to the bitterest conviction of impotence. Scarcely four months, and he was not happy, nor was she. Would she never again ascend the incline down which she felt herself falling?

She caught glimpses of the future with unconquerable anguish. Ah, if it were true that he could not love, what would become of her? She now existed only through him; she could not exist otherwise. And he seemed to have no suspicion of the crisis of sorrow through which she was passing. It was her own fault; why did she not show him all her soul? That again she was unable to do. Would she ever be able? And when her grief caused her excessive suffering she murmured: "Strange being, why have I loved you? And nevertheless I cannot regret that I have done so."



## CHAPTER V

ALFRED CHAZEL had been quite aware that a mysterious drama was being played in his household. He had been sensible of it, dimly at first. It has not been sufficiently remarked how much the peculiar nature of imagination, when developed by the habits of the mind, prevails over sensibility itself, and modifies it. Alfred had an altogether mathematical intellect, very skillful in abstract reasonings, very unskillful in the perception of the real. He was as little acquainted with his wife's character after several years of married life as he had been on the day he fell in love with her during a visit to Monsieur de Vaivre. But it was not only Helen's soul, with its depths, and complexities, and singularities, that was unknown to him; it was her whole life. Just as he had accepted the principles of conduct of the middle class to which he belonged, so had he accepted its ideas; and to the credit of the French provincial middle class it must be said that their morals are, relatively speaking, very pure. The men have, perhaps, in their youth low pleasures. But the married women who cause themselves to be talked about are immediately pointed at in such a way that the number of them is very small.

Alfred had on this point preserved the impressions received in his own family, impressions which no experience had corrected; for very chaste men are like very virtuous women, and no one reposes in them those confidences which illuminate the unclean depths of life, the grossness hidden beneath sentimental phraseology, the sensual egotism dissembled beneath the hypocrisy of pretenses. The notion of suspecting Helen of having a lover could no more occur to him than the notion of suspecting her of theft or forgery, and much less the notion that she had for lover De Querne, his own companion in childhood.

Towards the latter he entertained a feeling of friendship all the more intense that there was blended with it an element of admiration. When they were studying on the same form at school, he used to look at him, and the refinement of Ar-



mand's manners, his beauty, his intellect, his halo of social superiority, inspired him with a sort of fetichism. Himself so modest, so hard-working, so akin to the people, he had vaguely considered his friend as a being of a somewhat different species; and when a very clear vision of a difference of this kind produces neither hatred nor envy, it gives birth to an almost blind enthusiasm. Never had Chazel judged De Querne. He had become so habituated to taking him as he was, that he did not even ask himself what manner of friendship Armand was giving him in return for his own. When they had separated, and the young baron used to send about two hastily scribbled pages in reply to the interminable letters from his old companion, the latter would say to himself:

"Armand is very fond of me, but it is wearisome to him to write. It is only natural. He is such an agreeable fellow, and so much sought after"; and this was all the complaint of an excellent heart that was ever deceived by a trifling exhibition of sympathy.

At every visit that he paid Paris he met with the same reception from Armand—a clasp of the hand, an invitation to luncheon, to dinner, to the theatre. These tokens of comradeship, at once indifferent and cordial, appeared to him proofs of loyal affection. Not having observed Armand any more than, once married, he was to observe his wife, he could not measure the depth of the abyss which from year to year yawned still wider between his old classmate and himself. He knew not how to recognize the visible signs of radical indifference: the absolute dumbness of the young baron respecting himself, his looks of inattention during their conversations.

While Alfred, for example, was detailing to him the beginnings of his love for Mademoiselle de Vaivre, the innocent privacies of his furtive wooing and his hopes, Armand would smoke a cigar, and think of the loves which had crossed his own life, amid all the studied elegance and corruption which at Paris make a woman of pleasure so complex a thing, an extreme attained in the art of refining upon voluptuousness. He could by anticipation see in the young girl loved by his friend an awkward and undesirable creature, with red hands, badly-made dresses and white stockings.

Like all men in whom the source of sensibility is not flowing and rich, he discovered pretexts for disgust in the trifles of petty external fact, and he involuntarily despised Chazel for not being disgusted like himself. This contempt was even so continuous, that it prevented him from looking seriously on the life of this worthy student, this prize of social excellence, as



he used to call him in his absence. The astonishment caused him by Helen's distinguished appearance, had merely prompted him to say to himself below his breath:

"It's only ninnies like him that ever get hold of such a woman as that."

Alfred had trembled to know the judgment passed by his friend upon his wife, and had been enraptured to find that she pleased him. Armand's constant presence in their home, after they had settled in Paris, caused him intense joy. He became still more attached to his friend, because he appreciated the woman he himself loved so dearly, and to the latter because she appreciated his friend.

"I knew he would please you," he used to say ingenuously to his wife. "Hé is such an affectionate fellow, for all his skeptical ways."

And he would tell her how, in the days of their early youth, the elder Chazel had been in want of ten thousand francs to pay a brother's debts, and how Armand had immediately lent them.

For the first few months Helen listened to these praises with brilliant eyes, and a happy soul; she found in them reason for loving still more the man she loved. Since she had been the young man's mistress, these same praises darkened her countenance as they wounded her love. Did not the husband's trust degrade the lover? If Alfred's ingenuous sensibility discovered in this sign, as well as in many others, a metamorphosis in his wife's character, he was incapable of discerning its secret cause. It was just this too delicate sensibility which rendered it intolerable to him to think continuously of evil instincts, disgraceful actions, treacheries. There is hardness of heart in all distrust. The admission of evil tortured Chazel, and he forced himself not to think about it.

What, however, was the matter with Helen, for she was not the same? He had begun by believing her seriously ill, after the visit to the doctor, which had passed off as Helen had foreseen. He had accompanied her, had waited in the drawing room of the celebrated practitioner, who was a friend of Armand's, and had afterwards been too modest to ask her for any details. He was one of those men who shroud the feminine nature in a deep veneration, to whom the matters relating to the sex are confined within inaccessible mystery, who have never looked upon complete nakedness. Let him who will reconcile women's pretensions to refinement with the profound contempt which most of them feel for such men, while the purest have in them a slight weakness towards the



wicked fellow who has seen and done everything. Everything? They do not know what this is, and they dream about it.

Although deeply in love with Helen in the physical meaning of the term, Alfred had found a species of pleasure in sacrificing to the requirements of a health so dear, pleasures which she had never shared; but having scarcely any points of comparison, he had come to dream no more. Yes, this renunciation was sweet to him—sweet and yet useless, since Helen's countenance was shadowed every day, and she was evidently suffering. When Alfred saw her absorbed in indefinite silence, when he was aware of the thinness and paleness of the cheeks that he had known so full and rosy, he gave way to unexpressed pity.

"What is the matter with her?" he would then ask himself. "What if she is in serious danger, and dares not tell me, that she may not make me anxious?"

The result of these reflections was that his ingenuousness and trustfulness prompted him to venture upon exactly the same procedure that would have been dictated to him by suspicion. Helen had thought it necessary to speak to him on several occasions of fresh visits to the doctor, in order to avoid further attempts at intimacy.

"Well," said Chazel to himself, "I will go to the doctor"; and one afternoon towards the end of that winter he again found himself, this time alone, in the waiting room, an apartment furnished like a museum with that wealth of knick-knacks which is characteristic of modern interiors.

The French windows opened upon the garden of the old house, the ground floor of which was occupied by Dr. Louvet. The latter belonged to that generation of society scientists who visit the hospital in the morning, receive their clients in the afternoon, and find means to be as witty as idlers in a drawing room at ten o'clock in the evening. Further, they are intelligent enough to prepare for the prolonged waitings of their fair patients an adornment wherein the latter may find something of what they have left at home, and an aspect of things similar to that to which they have been accustomed. Alfred involuntarily felt uncomfortable in this vast room, which with its tapestries and wainscotings and pictures, appeared to be intended rather for lordly receptions than for the use of suffering humanity.

He experienced a feeling of relief on entering the doctor's room, in which there was nothing but books—a contrast skillfully contrived by Louvet, who was as able in stage management as he was excellent in diagnosis. He was a man still!



young and very fair, with a face that suggested somewhat the traditional type of the Valois, and dark eyes of singular penetration. He was slight and pale, and when he placed his finger against his temple—a familiar gesture of his which was reproduced in a fine portrait, by Nittis, that hung in the room—he presented a strange blending of extreme delicacy and studied posture, which women especially found imposing.

"How is Madame Chazel?" he asked in the polished and detached tone which he always affected.

"Well, doctor," said Alfred, "it is precisely about her health that I have come to consult you."

"And why has she not come herself?" asked the physician.

"She does not even know of the step I have taken," replied the husband. "She causes me much anxiety. You know how she is wasting away; you have seen her several times lately."

Doctor Louvet listened in the attitude of his portrait, with his eyelids half closed. Although he was completely master of himself, as became a man accustomed daily to receive the confidences of many persons deprived of hypocrisy by the presence of danger, he was unable, on hearing these words of Chazel's, to restrain a movement of his eyelids. Rapid as was this movement and the glance which accompanied it, it could not escape poor Alfred, whose whole powers of attention were at that moment concentrated upon the doctor's face. Why did that glance cause him a little shiver, and tempt him to ask:

"When have you seen my wife?"

But it was a question impossible to put. Moreover, the physician was already making his reply.

"When Madame Chazel did me the honor to consult me last"—and this word expressed both everything and nothing—"she appeared to me to be suffering more particularly in the nervous system."

And he entered into lengthened details respecting the delicacy of the feminine organization, dwelling upon the contrast between the life to which his patient had been accustomed in the country and the life in Paris. Lacking in observation as Alfred might be, his habit of reasoning with precision forced him to recognize the vagueness of this talk, and he asked somewhat heedlessly:

"And you have no observation to make to the husband?"

"None," replied Louvet with a half smile, "unless it be to spoil our dear patient a good deal and to contradict her as little as possible."



Alfred's heart sank within his breast, and while the liveried servant, who waited fashionably in the physician's ante-chamber, was assisting him to put on his overcoat, he was already being gnawed by this thought:

"Helen has deceived me. It was not the doctor who ordered her to live apart from me. She has come to have a horror of me; but, what have I done to her?"

What had he done to her? A deep melancholy took possession of him from the time of this visit to Louvet, of which he was very careful not to speak. What was the use of adding another pain to those which Helen already felt? For she suffered, as he could see—but why? Ingenuously he made it his study to find out the wrongs that he had done her. What frightened him most was that he could almost palpably feel the whole mystery in his wife's character. This is one of the most cruel trials that can come to a loving husband. When she was beside him, and alone with him, drawing out the stitches in her tapestry, he used to look at her and ask himself of what she was thinking.

Of what? All his superiority of education availed him nothing in the presence of this silent creature whose mere presence troubled him in so obscure a fashion. The desire of her person, a desire the satisfaction of which he was incapable of demanding as a right, paralyzed him with a sort of nervous suffering which, united to natural timidity and to the anxiety respecting this increasing paleness, was growing into a veritable torture. And then, when Armand arrived in the middle of such a silence, a comparison was inevitably instituted on Alfred's part between his friend's easy manners and his own constraint, and especially between the difficulty which he found in talking to Helen and the abundance of words that came to the Baron de Querne. Helen, too, appeared to make the same comparison, for in Armand's presence she took an interest at once in what was being said.

These visits gave Chazel an uncomfortable feeling; he experienced a vague impression that he was in the way in his own house. He had several times noticed when it was he himself who interrupted a *tête-à-tête* between Armand and his wife, that the conversation suddenly ceased on his arrival; he recognized this by the brightness in Helen's eyes. On such occasions, that he might not give way to the vexation which he felt, he used to engage in those already mentioned abstract disquisitions. He saw that his old comrade had become more of a friend to his wife than to himself, he was hurt by it, he



reproached himself for feeling hurt, and by the mere fact that he reproached himself, reflected about it.

He thus grew accustomed continually to unite the thoughts of his friend with that of his wife. But when we depict to ourselves simultaneously the images of two living persons, it is not long before we depict them acting upon each other, and in spite of himself Alfred came to consider the relations which united Armand to Helen. To ascertain the cause of his wife's suffering he had proceeded by elimination, instinctively studying as a problem the data that he possessed concerning her, and every time that he dwelt upon the mystery, he always struck upon a thought which he used to drive away, and which came back again. At other times he asked himself whether she had not confided the reason of her grief to De Querne, was on the point of questioning his friend, and then abstained from doing so.

"It would not be delicate," he thought to himself; "if she says nothing to me, she has her reasons for it."

One day, however, he saw her so pale, so downcast, that he took courage.

"You are suffering, Helen," he said; "will you find a better friend than I am to whom to confide your troubles, whatever they may be?"

"No, I have no troubles," she had replied, and she spoke falsely once more.

Why were her eyes then filled with that moisture which speaks of suppressed tears? Ah! it was because the loving kindness of her husband was a torture to her in her torture, were it only by its contrast to the frigidity of another man, the memory of whom was then passing through her heart. Why did the same memory pass at the same moment through Alfred's imagination? She, however, kept this memory before her mind, while he repelled it.

"Helen," he said to himself, "is an honorable woman. Armand is an honorable man. What right should I have to insult them with suspicion? He takes an interest in her; did I not desire that it should be so? She is attached to him—and why not? Can there not be an honorable friendship between a man and a woman?"

Such were the habitual reasonings by which Alfred sought to stifle the growing viper of suspicion. But the more he reasoned in this way, the more his suspicion augmented, since by reasoning about his distrust he thought about it, and in consequence rendered it more present to his mind. He was striving against these inward thoughts one afternoon of that



same month of February, when returning on foot from the Orléans terminus, where a piece of duty had led him. The weather was fine, the pale, fresh azure of the cool winter days was floating over Paris, and although it took him out of his way, Alfred entered the Jardin des Plantes, in order to enjoy his walk a little. At a turning in one of the main avenues of the garden, his heart beat more quickly, for walking slowly under the bare trees, and talking together in an absorbed fashion, he had just perceived a woman who had Helen's figure and a man with the figure of Armand.

Yes, it was indeed they. He knew so well his wife's easy gait, and that other somewhat lagging step which reminded him of so many strolls in a college quadrangle, not very far from this spot. But why was he seized with acute pain at this meeting? What could be more natural than that Helen should walk thus with Armand, what more natural or more innocent? Do people who wish to do wrong come in this way into a public garden? They were not even arm-in-arm. Yes, but why had not Helen mentioned at luncheon that she was going to walk with Armand? Did she not know that he would think nothing of it? Hiding from him? Why?

"I will go up to them," he thought. "I will speak to them, and soon see whether she is confused. But no; it would look as though I had followed them. Perhaps they have met by chance? What if I were now to follow them?"

The thought of such espionage sickened him.

They were still walking in front of him in that vast avenue which runs beside the bison enclosure and the bearpits. Overhead, the gigantic trees curved their naked boughs, the blackness of which stood out sadly against the blue sky. Chazel felt his limbs shaking beneath him, and sank upon a bench. He told himself that he must either look upon this meeting as a most natural thing, and in that case it was childish not to speak to his wife and her friend, or else—and it was just this second hypothesis whose sudden thrusting into his mind paralyzed him.

"All," he said to himself, "will be explained on her return."

Some minutes passed away in this anguish and irresolution. The couple disappeared in the direction of the little hill that leads to the labyrinth. Chazel was almost happy at their disappearance. It provided him with a pretext for not acting immediately. And, in fact, he went out of the garden by the opposite gate, saying to himself, in vindication of the impotence of will to which he had just fallen a victim, that it was, moreover, the surest way of arriving at a certainty. If



Helen spoke to him in the evening about this walk, the walk was, as he believed it to be, innocence itself. If not—but what sort of ideas was he again taking into his head?

The shock had been so great that, instead of returning home, he walked about for part of the afternoon. The advent of the moment when he would see his wife again was now what he desired, and at the same time what he most dreaded. He was on the point of turning back and entering the garden again, but it was too late.

He stepped upon the deck of one of the boats that ply on the Seine, and there, mingling with the crowd of lower middle-class folks, he watched the water breaking against the arches, and shattering against the quays, the construction of which he mechanically examined; and he followed with his gaze the huge lighters, with the clean little painted houses standing in the centre. The air became keen, but he did not notice it until he had reached Auteuil. He landed under the viaduct, amid the din of the fair which every afternoon attracts such a strange tribe of prostitutes and their followers. He returned on foot along the interminable parapet. His anguish was so great that he could not remember having ever experienced anything analogous to it. His heart was paining him in his left breast, so that it seemed as though breath would fail him. Night was falling fast, the winter night, whose oncoming is so melancholy. The death struggle of the light is so cruelly like the agony of thought!

Here he was at last at his own street, in his own courtyard, in front of his own door. He did not ask whether his wife had returned, but he went straight to her room, and knocked modestly. Helen's clear voice said, "Come in." He was in her presence, and involuntarily he looked at her feet. She still wore her walking boots, with that trifle of dust on them which shows that a woman has gone on foot. Ah! how he would have liked to question her! But instinctively he grasped that which constitutes the powerlessness of all jealousy; what is the use of entering, with a woman who is mistrusted, upon a discussion turning upon this very mistrust? She will not destroy it by saying "No," seeing that there is no belief in her.

"Where do you come from so late?" Helen asked tranquilly. No, never had a being capable of falsehood such beautiful eyes, and such a beautiful smile.

"Guess," he said, with more calmness. She was, no doubt, going herself to tell him of her walk, and as she was silent he went on:



"From Auteuil. I walked because I did not feel well. And you?" he questioned, with an anxiety grown terrible once more.

"I have been shopping," she replied.

Ah! why had he not the courage to tell her that she had just uttered a falsehood? He sat down with the sharp point buried still deeper in his heart. She let the conversation drop, and resumed her book.

"A frightful novel that Monsieur De Querne lent me," she said. "It is the story of a woman who deceives her lover, and does so while loving him. Authors don't know what to invent now-a-days."

Her eyes shone as she uttered these words. She had pronounced the word "lover" with an intonation which distressed Alfred. She seemed to impart a mysterious depth to those two syllables. Ah! he would have given his blood at that moment to have her speak to him of her walk! After all, she had perhaps attached no importance to her reply. But neither then, nor at dinner, nor during the evening that followed, did she breathe a word about it. About ten o'clock Armand arrived in his dress coat; he was going out afterwards. She received him with the words:

"You have been quite well since yesterday?"

Ah, the deceiver! the deceiver!

Alfred had seated himself at the corner of a table under the pretense of having some papers to examine, and from time to time he watched them conversing, those two beings whom he loved best of all the world. Was it possible that a criminal mystery united them, and at the expense of himself, whom they had betrayed? This Armand, whom he had seen playing in his schoolboy dress—had he been his brother he could not have loved him more. What nobility of brow! what grace of gesture! And this was the man who was a villain, for to deceive such a friend as himself was villainy.

And she, with her medallion-like profile, with her modesty and proud reserve! No; it was he, Alfred, who was losing his senses. A walk in the garden—what could be more innocent? Perhaps—for he knew that she was charitable, and so did Armand—yes, perhaps, they were both going to visit the poor. But then, why this reticence? why this deception? And why did he himself keep silence? To this he could have given no reply, except that speaking was beyond his strength, just as acting had lately been.

And Armand and Helen conversed with tranquillity. He



listened to their voices uttering words of unconcern, and all his dim suspicions, all his repressed doubts, came back simultaneously to his soul.



## CHAPTER VI

WHEN Alfred Chazel had said good-night to Helen as usual and was left alone, he began to suffer with an intensity of which he himself could not have believed himself capable. He had now no longer any need to discuss the fact. His wife had lied to him. The clearness of this simple fact prostrated him. He could hear her say in that voice whose slightest inflections he knew so well:

"How have you been since yesterday?"

The last four syllables rang pitilessly in his ear and to the depth of his heart. He had just lost, never, never again to recover it, complete trust in that gentle voice, in these beloved eyes. There are no such things as petty insincerities; a person who has once deceived may always deceive. The perception of this natural law, the same perception which had prevented Armand from believing in Helen, was torturing Alfred at this moment. Liar! Liar! When he came to the utterance of this word, he gave forth an outbreathing of grief as he paced to and fro about his study, to which, as often in an evening, he had withdrawn.

On one of the walls was displayed a long blackboard, covered with a medley of algebraical formulae. Between the two windows stood a white wooden table constructed so as to facilitate writing in a standing position. Another low table, intended for correspondence; a bookcase filled with tall mathematical volumes; engraved likenesses of Lagrange, Fresnel, Cauchy, and Laplace; a leathern divan, and a carpet, completed the furniture of a room, the abstract, peaceful aspect of which presented contrast to the disturbed countenance of the man who was walking about in it at that moment; and the contrast symbolized only too well the drama that was being enacted in the existence of a man born for study, for prolonged and painful thought, for happy labor, and constrained to action by the sudden revelation with which he had just been visited.

Yes, the necessity for action was present and inevitable. To



rest at the suspicion which was tormenting him at that moment was what he could not do—neither morally, without losing self-respect, nor physically, for the pain of it was too great. As he raised his head with a gesture of despair, his eyes encountered the board; he perceived the signs of his calculations traced in chalk with that absolute equality of lettering, that absence of thick and thin strokes, which imparted an appearance of incomparable lucidity to his writing. The sudden sight of this changed the current of his grief.

“Let us reason out the thing,” he said aloud, and involuntarily he recovered for subservience to his passion all the methodical habits contracted by his intellect. “Yes,” he went on, “let us reason it out.”

He sat down beside his fire in an easy chair, and, with his forehead resting upon his hands, gathered together all his thoughts, which were not long in shaping themselves to the following dilemma:

“There are two alternatives. Either the walk and the falsehood are to be explained by some petty, innocent motive, a visit of charity or a chance meeting, and they have not spoken to me about it owing to a false dread of displeasing me; or else, the walk and the falsehood indicate that there is a mystery between Helen and Armand. Let us speak out and say that they love each other. There is no means of avoiding the alternative. In the first case, I should have to scold Helen for believing me to be so childishly jealous; in the second—”

Here his imagination paused, being taken unawares. There was within him no anticipatory prevision of a misfortune of the kind. The practical rules, received and accepted in his youth, upon which his whole life was based, did not afford an answer to this cruel hypothesis. On the other hand, he had for the determining of his will neither that dread of public opinion which serves to guide nearly all husbands in similar crisis, nor the startling physical vision, that besetting, unendurable vision which maddens a jealous man by showing him sexual union, fleshly abandonment, irredeemable pollution.

The fact that Helen and Armand loved each other did not for a moment signify to Chazel that she was the young man's mistress. It signified that she had given him her heart. But then, what was his duty as her husband? For lack of previously adopted principles, he suffered himself to be led away by the mania for absolute, ideal theories that is characteristic of mathematicians.

“My duty, if I am becoming an obstacle to her happiness,



is to sacrifice myself. She must be left free; all must be given up."

He thought immediately of his son; he could see the little gestures, the pretty face, the bright eyes of the child whom he had already moulded in his own likeness.

"Ah!" he said to himself, "I have no right to forsake him. But to take him with me—to deprive his mother of him?"

The tragic nature of this possibility disconcerted his intellect afresh, and like a timorous swimmer who has ventured a few fathoms too far, he speedily returned to the place where he could keep his footing, where his reasoning stood firm close to the facts.

"I am losing my head," he groaned. "The question is, does she love him? Does she not love him?"

He had risen once more, and was walking with a more hurried step than before.

"How can I find out? How? how?" he asked himself, and the emotion of uncertainty became so insupportable to him that he said to himself: "Let there be an end of it. I will come to an understanding with Helen—and at once."

He looked at the clock which was pointing to midnight. He had been in these throes for an hour. He left his study with the lamp in his hand. The narrow wooden staircase, which was covered with a red carpet, was devoid of sound and light. All the servants were in bed. He went down the steps of the staircase leaning on the banisters, his legs trembling, his lips parched, his throat choking. He was in front of the door of his wife's bedroom. He gave two slight knocks with the back of his hand. There was no reply. He turned the brass handle and leaned against it; the door was double-locked, and the key was inside.

"She is asleep," he said to himself.

The action of descending the stairs, and then of pressing against the door, had used up the feverish impulse produced by excess of uncertainty. Instead of knocking again, he paused motionless.

"She is asleep," he repeated to himself; "if I awake her, what shall I say to her?"

He remained standing against the wall, with the lamp at his feet, listening. Only the murmur of nocturnal Paris reached him, and he reflected. He could see by anticipation the manner in which Helen would receive him. She would be lying in her bed, her plaited hair rolled about her head, while the lace of her fine nightdress quivered at neck and wrist.

At the thought of this, Alfred experienced a thrill of amor-



ous emotion that restored to him the timidity with which the desire of his wife's person always overwhelmed him, and he continued to picture the scene.

"What shall I say to her?—'You have lied to me.' And what will she reply?"

He foresaw the countless pretexts that Helen could advance to explain her walk.

"I shall ask her: 'Are you in love with Armand?' "

He felt himself incapable of being the first to articulate the words in that way. Moreover, what might not the result of the question be? If it were not true that she was in love with Armand, he would inflict useless pain upon her, which would aggravate still further their divorce of intimacy. What if it were true? She would not acknowledge it. She had lied just now. What would another lie cost her?

Irresolution proved the stronger. He went up to his study again without having made a fresh attempt. There was a lull for a few minutes, such as succeeds to acute crises. It was one o'clock in the morning.

"I will go to sleep," he said to himself. "When I awake it will be time enough to make up my mind."

As was usual with him, he arranged a few papers, carefully covered up the fire to avoid accidents, and was almost tranquil as he got into bed. But scarcely was he there before his anguish began again, more torturing than before. The avenue in the Jardin des Plantes again extended its vault of naked branches beneath which Helen and Armand passed along. What were they saying to each other? The well-known voice uttered again the fatal syllables, "Since yesterday!" Ah! liar! liar! the deceiver!

Once more the necessity for action pressed in its inevitableness upon this purely speculative nature. His thoughts distributed themselves again into two groups.

"Either they love each other or they do not love each other. If they do?—If they do not?—How can I find out? From her? From him?"

The thought of coming to an explanation with De Querne presented itself abruptly, and as this thought, while satisfying the need for acting, deferred the action for several hours, Alfred began mentally to muster all the arguments that told in its favor.

Such an explanation would not involve any of the drawbacks which must follow a conversation with Helen. If Armand and she did not love each other, everything would remain as it was, since she was in ignorance of her husband's



suspicion and of the step that he had taken. If they were in love with each other, he would extort the acknowledgment of the fact more readily from the loyalty of his friend. The latter at least had not lied to him. Could he have replied otherwise than as he did to Helen's phrase, that simple phrase that was so terrible to himself, Alfred: "How have you been since yesterday?" To receive the young man with these words was tantamount to a prohibition to speak.

Again, there are suspicions respecting which one friend has no right to keep silence towards another. If he, Alfred, were to learn that Armand had harbored an insulting distrust of him in his heart without speaking of it, would he not feel deeply wounded? Would he not consider such silence an unwarrantable affront? Well, then, he would not offer this affront to De Querne. He would go to him with open hand and heart, and show him all his trouble. Such a step had further in its favor the fact that it would involve practical results. He might ask his friend to come to the Rue de La Rochefoucauld less frequently. If he were mistaken in his distrust, and if the real cause of Helen's grief had been confided to Armand, he might speak of it without indelicacy on that occasion in the course of the conversation.

During the whole of that long night he turned this plan over and over, and in the end it impressed itself upon his will. Towards morning, he fell into that dark overwhelming sleep which follows upon excessive waste of nervous energy. Upon awaking, he again found himself face to face with his resolution of the night before; he foresaw, unless he acted, a day worse than that horrible night, and at nine o'clock he was ringing at Armand's door, not without a thrilling of his whole heart, yet with decision. These abstract souls, to whom action is so repellant, are capable of energy, provided this energy be sustained by reasoning, just as impassioned souls derive their force from blind impulse, and arid souls from a clear perception of self-interest.

Many days had gone by since Chazel had entered the rooms in the Rue Lincoln. The valet who answered his ring, an old servant of the De Querne family, was the same who formerly used to come to the school to take Armand away for his holidays. The few words that this man uttered when asking about his master's old companion with the familiarity of former days, brought real comfort to Alfred. He experienced an awakening of memories that to him was equivalent to an impression of friendship.

"The baron is in his bath," the servant went on, "but if



Monsieur Alfred will walk into the drawing room," and he opened the door with attentive assiduity, "and read the papers," and he handed them. Then kneeling in front of the fire to put on a fresh log, he asked:

"Will Monsieur Alfred take tea with the baron?"

These trifling attentions softened Alfred; in them he found as it were a palpable renewal of the intimacy in which he had lived with Armand. The aspect of the room heightened this first impression still more. He knew that room well; he had seen it forming year by year, and furniture being added to furniture. At every visit he was aware of some slight alterations.

"Stay, that's new, is it not?" he would say to his friend, who used then to explain to him the convenience or rarity of his recent acquisition.

He went up to the low bookcase, and by the look of the binding recognized some books which must have been college prizes. He took one out and saw the stamp of the Vanaboste School printed on the green shagreen. He replaced the volume, and the courtyard of the school was revived before his mind. What delightful hours had been spent in walking round that yard with Armand—an Armand who, despite the years, resembled the Armand of today; and to convince himself of the fact, he proceeded to look at a profile of his friend done by Bastien-Lepage, in the refined and exact manner of this master's portraits. From the portrait Alfred passed on to the photographs scattered over the mantelpiece; the comrades, living or dead, that they represented, had been known by him, ay, by him also.

Ah! from the most insignificant objects in the apartment there issued a voice to protest on behalf of the friendship that united De Querne and himself. After the anguish of the night before, this atmosphere of settled affection operated powerfully on Alfred's heart and brought him relief.

"How well it was I came," he reflected, throwing himself into an easy chair, and looking at the fire, the flames of which were assuming a joyous brightness: "I will tell him everything in a straightforward way: what is the good of artifice? And I have full confidence that everything will be explained."

He had reached this stage in his meditations, when he felt a hand laid on his shoulder. It was the hand of Armand, who had just come in. But Alfred's absorption had been too great to admit of his being disturbed by the noise of the door. The young baron was wearing a handsome morning jacket of black quilted silk, light trousers, and thin patent leather



shoes, while all about him there floated the fresh odor of a scent which Alfred suddenly recognized. This same delicate aroma was diffused around her by his wife in the morning hours when she went about in those loose dresses which best indicated the suppleness of the lines of her person. The fact that Helen and Armand made use of the same perfume was sufficient, in Alfred's present condition of soul, to make the soothing influence of youthful memories give way once more to the indefinable, the vague and torturing suspicion of the night before. He looked at his friend, but the latter seemed to be occupied solely with the preparations for his breakfast. The valet had wheeled a little movable table up to the fire, and arranged upon it a silver urn, a cup, slices of toast, butter and honey.

"Another cup for Monsieur Chazel," said Armand.

"Monsieur Alfred has refused already," said the servant.

"Then you will allow me," Armand resumed in a cheerful tone.

Sitting down, he poured the black tea into the cup, and then the hot water, calculating the proportion between them just as though his friend had not been present. Was this the attitude of a man who had a secret to conceal?

"No," said Alfred to himself, "if there were any mystery between Helen and him, my visit would put him out, he would want to know the reason of it. Are you not astonished," he went on aloud, "to see me so early in the morning?" putting his question with that incapacity for dissimulation which is characteristic of very sincere people, and which causes them almost involuntarily to continue outwardly and verbally their inmost thoughts.

"I suppose you have some little service to ask of me," replied the other, "and I am quite ready to perform it."

Then to himself: "Poor Alfred is too ingenuous. He wants to know why I am not astonished. Well, I certainly ought to be so, and should be expecting a question from him about Helen—what else could it be about? She would not believe me when I told her that he was growing jealous. Well, we'll lie as well as we can, since so much is due to her"; and he buttered a slice of toast, not without a certain melancholy at this necessity for lying, for he had preserved the haughtiness of personal pride which so often outlives true loftiness of feeling.

"Yes," Alfred resumed, in a tone of voice the seriousness of which revealed how deeply he felt the present interview, "you are my friend—my friend. Yes, I believe it, I know it."



It might have been thought that he was questioning himself the better to assure himself of his own sincerity. He again repeated, "I believe it," looking at Armand as he had never ventured to look at him in his life before. His eyes no longer expressed anything of that awkward timidity which in all arguments caused Alfred to feel beaten beforehand, even when he was right a hundred times over.

"And it is because you are my friend," he went on, "that I came to you to-day. Armand, you see in me the most unhappy of men."

The other raised his head, which, as though to pour some more tea into a cup that was already half full, he had bent down beneath his friend's gaze. He looked straight at the loyal man whom, in that very room on the eve of the first assignation, he had in thought held so cheap. Chazel had allowed his eyeglass to fall. His clear eyes showed the very depths of his soul. In them there was legible pain, so terrible and so genuine that it rendered touching and tragic a situation which, at any other moment, Armand would have considered very ridiculous—that, namely, of a deceived husband suffering from suspicion of the deception in the presence of the very man who has deceived him. No, it was simple, naked human suffering—that real suffering which grips your vitals like the shriek of a passer-by when crushed by a carriage at a street-corner. Armand suddenly felt this sympathy of humanity, then immediately afterwards a secret feeling of uncomfortableness at the thought that he was himself the cause of this visible suffering; and he listened to Alfred, who continued speaking.

"I have come to tell you things that people do not talk about, but you must listen to me. I am very unhappy, my friend, and for very vulgar reasons. Ah! there is nothing romantic in my story. It is comprised in a single line: I love my wife and my wife does not love me. How and how greatly I love her you cannot understand—no, not even you. I am a timid, awkward fellow, I know, and have always known. When quite a young man, I pictured in my dreams the ideal face of a woman. I called her my madonna—but I am talking nonsense to you. Let me go on. It was she who comforted me for the rest—those who all treated me with scorn—and it was she that I loved. When I saw Helen, I found in her a likeness to this chimera such as I had never met with. Do not smile. Just understand me. I married her. At first I was quite sensible of the fact that she was not very happy. I said to myself: Time will bring everything right. Time has brought nothing right. The martyrdom that it has been to me to see



her dull, wearied, and sad, and to be able to do nothing for her—ah! no one shall ever know. Especially since we have been living in Paris, I can see that she is sinking into still greater melancholy, that her poor face is growing thin and her eyes hollow. She is suffering and wasting away before my eyes, every day a little more, and I am unable to do anything and am ignorant of the cause. Can you understand what a torture it is to see a woman loved as I love her passing away hour by hour by my very side, and not even to know the reason?"

He had risen as he uttered these words. In proportion as the phrases came to him, they swept away the plan of discourse which he had prepared on his way from the Rue de La Rochefoucauld to the Rue Lincoln. He had allowed himself to feel aloud. He passed his hand across his eyes and went on:

"I am wandering. Why do I tell you all these things? I have come to ask you whether you know what is the matter with her."

And he stopped in front of Armand, who also rose. The latter was trying to guess the object of his old companion's tirade. He was aware that in a conversation of this kind the chief point is to abstain from informing one's interlocutor of what he may not know. To Alfred's abrupt question he replied in the vaguest of formulas:

"Why, how could I know any more than yourself?"

"Armand," said the other, going up to him and laying his hand upon his shoulders, "do not deceive me. I am able to hear anything; I am ready for anything. Yes, if Helen loved some one, I should efface myself, I should go away. I should take my son with me, and allow her to begin her life anew. A revengeful husband—how I despise such a man as that! Either he does not love—and then for what does he take revenge? For a wound dealt to his pride? What pitifulness! Or else he does love, and has only to bring about the happiness of the woman he loves at the cost of his own. Ah, I have not the ideas of the world! Answer me, Armand, is Helen in love with any one?"

"I tell you again. How should I know?"

"Ah!" exclaimed Chazel, taking his friend's arm and grasping it with all his strength, "who can know if not you? Did you consider me blind to such a degree as not to see that you were becoming her most intimate confidant? If she does not talk to you about herself, her life, her feelings, what do you say to each other in your endless conversations? Why do you become silent when I appear, if you are not speaking of things



that you do not want me to hear? Why do you hide from me?" he continued violently.

"We hide from you?" said Armand.

"Be silent," returned Armand, laying his hand upon his friend's mouth, "do not say what is false. I can endure falsehood no longer. I must have the truth, whatever it may be. I saw you yesterday in the Jardin des Plantes, in the main avenue. I was there—I saw you. You were walking together, and in the evening she said to you: 'How have you been since yesterday?' You do not hide from me? Repeat that now. Ah, why have you both lied to me?"

"You are right," replied Armand, "we ought to have spoken to you about it immediately. That is the way in which the most innocent things assume an appearance of mystery."

While affecting the most absolute calmness, he said to himself: "Helen is saved." Logical on this point with his everlasting distrust, he used at every meeting to agree with his mistress upon a common explanation to be given in case of surprise, and he went on aloud:

"Madame de Chazel was returning from a visit of charity; I met her in the garden, and we walked together for a little because the weather was fine. She asked me to say nothing about it to you, because you would scold her for going in that way into the low quarters of the town."

And it was true that Alfred, still a provincial in this respect, used often to speak of the dangers that a woman might incur alone in out of the way corners in Paris.

"You have the means of ascertaining whether I am telling you the truth," added De Querne. "Take a cab, go home, and ask Madame Chazel. I shall not have time to forewarn her, shall I? You will see whether she makes you the same reply."

"For what do you take me?" said Alfred, "I have a horror of such spying ways. I am already too much ashamed of having spoken to you in this way—Armand," he said, advancing towards his friend, "give me your word of honor that Helen and you are not in love with each other."

"Madame Chazel and I!" exclaimed De Querne, "nay, I give you my word of honor that not a word has passed between us that was not one of simple, honorable friendship. In my turn I will ask you: 'For what do you take me?'" And with the secret loathing of all his pride he added inwardly: "What mean actions a woman can make a man commit!"

"Then I ask your forgiveness," returned Alfred, "for I suspected you. Ah! I am not wronging you; I did not believe that there was anything between you. No, I think too highly



of you both. But I thought that she might have formed an affection for you and you for her. She is charming, and you, Armand—why, you have all that I have not! You are handsome, refined, witty. And I, I have only this,” he said with a heartbroken gesture, striking his breast above his heart.

“Heavens! what I should have suffered had it been true! Just think, to have lost both her who is my entire life, and you whom I liked so much! You do not know, Armand, how sincerely I am your friend—just let me tell you for once. At our age these protestations are ridiculous—but what is ridicule to me? With my father, and before I knew Helen, you are the person I loved most. I am of the Newfoundland breed; I must have someone to be attached to. Throughout my youth you were that someone to me. When we were children, I should have liked you to have a sacrifice to ask of me, something very difficult, almost impossible of execution. You were in my eyes like a more fortunate brother. I was not jealous of all your superior qualities; I was proud of them. When I got married you were not able to come to Bourges. Well! will you believe it, my heart throbbed when I introduced you to my wife in Paris? If you had not been pleased with her I should have been so unhappy. Think of that, my friend, my dear friend,” and he clasped his hands, “and you will excuse me for having said anything painful or wounding to you. You and she, to lose you both! Ah! I should have gone away. I should have sacrificed everything to your happiness. But it would have killed me!”

He sank into the easy chair as though exhausted by the emotions that he had just experienced. His agitated face revealed too clearly the excessiveness of his grief, and Armand felt unspeakably moved by looking upon such a spectacle of sorrow and weakness. By truthfulness of soul, Alfred had just re-established between them the true nature of the situation. Husbands are not so often ridiculous, as the proverb says, but by reason of the deceived vanity which is at the bottom of nearly all their bitterness, or of the triumphant vanity which is at the bottom of their fancied security. But Alfred, face to face with Armand, was thrust face to face with treachery; serious love, ready for the most tragic sacrifices, face to face with the depraved fancy of pride and sense that scruple had not restrained.

And Armand was silent. Alfred's affection and esteem smote him as with a hand. Ah! how he would have liked to have said to this man:

“Yes, I have lied to you. I have robbed you of your wife



I had the excuse that I did not know how much you loved her and how much you loved me. Choose now the reparation that it may please you to require, and I will grant it to you. Let us put an end to it."

Yes, but what of Helen? The secret of adultery does not belong to a single individual. To his duty towards Alfred was opposed another duty—a duty of honor also, and one freely contracted—and he was silent, feeling a very child in the presence of this honesty which suffered and wept before him, honesty possibly deceived and certainly simple. But a man who entrusts you with his pocketbook, and whom you rob of the bank notes in one of the pockets of it, is also deceived and simple; only, on the other hand, you are a thief. Whatever Armand's superiority to Alfred might be, he found himself, by the mere fact of his own treachery and his friend's good faith, in that condition of humiliation which is intolerable to all higher natures. It was an experience that lasted for only a few minutes, but it was a very bitter one.

"Do not pay any attention to this complaining of mine," Alfred resumed; "my nerves are unstrung. I really do not know why I am like this, seeing that I have found with you the certainty that I needed. Ah! thank you!"—and he sprang forward to kiss his friend as brother kisses brother. Under this kiss Armand could feel the blood rising to his face.

"Come," he said in confusion, "calm yourself."

"Nay, I am calm," said Alfred; "you have been so good, you have listened to me with so much heart. Alas!" he added mournfully, "how is it that I cannot have an explanation with Helen like that which I have had with you? In her presence I feel so embarrassed, so constrained."

"And," replied Armand, who perceived the possibility of sparing his mistress a cruel scene, "you also take an exaggerated view of trifles. Shall I tell you my opinion about Madame Chazel? And this opinion has been confirmed by all the conversations I have had with her. What she is suffering from is the change in her mode of life. The atmosphere of Paris, the habits of Paris, the people of Paris, are all enervating to her. She needs great consideration. Take my advice and spare her all discussion. Be gentle with her."

"You are right," said Alfred, who remembered having heard almost the same words in the mouth of the doctor, and this coincidence succeeded in momentarily tranquillizing him. He shook his head, and uttered the following words, at which Armand felt no inclination to smile:

"I am an egotist; I see nothing but my own grief. But Helen



has confidence in me. You see that I am jealous no longer. Speak to her of me; tell her how much I love her, how I desire only her happiness. Explain it all to her; she will believe you. God! I would give my whole life for a glance of tenderness in her eyes when she looks at me."



## CHAPTER VII

WHEN Alfred Chazel had left the drawing room in the Rue Lincoln, Armand, being left alone, felt the need of seeing clear within himself. The visit from the friend of his childhood had brought him a strangely uncomfortable feeling which he was unable to shake off either during the close of that morning, or during the afternoon, which was entirely taken up with going about from one place to another. By a line alleging an imaginary excuse he had released himself from the appointment made with Helen the evening before, and in his room as well as in the cab which drove him from one neighborhood to another, he had the courage to question himself frankly.

He strove to beguile with physical motion the indefinable and unbearable sadness with which the scene that he had gone through continuously overwhelmed him. He went from tradesman to tradesman, paying bills that were in arrears, leaving cards at houses in which he had not set foot for months, and unceasingly he reverted to this questioning of the recesses of his conscience: Why was he so greatly shaken by a natural event which it was so easy to foresee, and which, when all was said, did not result in any disastrous consequence?

But no; he could not think of Chazel without feeling an inward wound, bleeding and keen. His pride had been stricken to its depths. He, who since their common adolescence had in thought treated Alfred as an inferior creature, he, who had robbed the poor wretch of his wife without the slightest remorse, he now had suddenly been crushed with generosity by this man, who had been outrageously contemned. There was no means of rebelling against it, of standing out against it. Of the two it was he, Armand, who was playing the unworthy part, and he was pained by it in his innermost soul, in that pride in taking the first place, which, from their childhood, had been manifested in the pettiest details. Did they enter a restaurant, or take part in a country excursion? It was Armand who sought to pay, just as he sought to surpass at every game,



and to win prizes at the distributions. Vanity had prevented him from choosing a career. Vanity again had inclined him to intrigues with women. Thus he was humiliated to the very soul.

But his painful sensations proceeded at the same time from a more noble cause. The chord of pity had thrilled within him at the sighing forth of the terrible lament to which he had listened for an hour. Aridity of soul was not an essential part of Armand de Querne's nature. It was caused by the fact that with him emotion passed through the brain before it reached the heart. By a rooted deformity to be found in all intellectual lives, he must needs give himself reasons for feeling in such or such a manner. The powerlessness to love of which he was a victim proceeded from this peculiar disposition. He had never been able to believe in the truth of any woman's heart, and as a consequence he had always given himself reasons for not loving any of them unreservedly.

Such a nature is the most miserable of all, for it prompts those who possess it to the worst acts of egotism without securing to them the icy and unconscious serenity of true egotists. Thus it was that the young man was able to become Helen's lover without a scruple, and to tread upon friendship as tranquilly as upon the carpet in the room where they met; and yet Alfred's suffering had just moved him to the inmost fibre. Ah! the reason was that he did not dispute the sincerity of this suffering; he had touched it as though it were an object, and as he believed in it, he felt it.

At the same moment, and for the first time, he perceived that real scope of his conduct. If he had only suspected the depth of Chazel's love for Helen! If he had known with what ardent friendship this man had been attached to himself, Armand! But, people form ideas concerning a person, and proceed to no further verification. They say to themselves: "This man is nothing." They make no more account of his existence than that of a beast or a plant. And then they find themselves face to face with a heart that beats and that has been stricken, with a happiness that was living and that has been slain. What misconceptions lie at the root of our errors! And how many of the latter are merely the misunderstandings—but the irreparable misunderstandings—of others!

Armand de Querne pursued these thoughts the whole day, and at the end of them all, encountering him in a continuous fashion above all the rest, was the image of Helen, and again of Helen. For whom had he betrayed Alfred's confidence? For Helen. To whom had he so lightly sacrificed the memories of



his childhood and his youth? To Helen. In whose interest had he just pledged that shameful word of honor. In Helen's. Now the young man had in his feelings towards his mistress reached that moment when the slightest contrariety is so exaggerated as to become almost unbearable; what, then, was to be said of such a humiliation? He had not deceived himself when, on the very eve of the first assignation, he had recognized that he could never love her.

He had at first passed through a sufficiently sweet period of intoxicated pleasure, during which he had abandoned himself to the charm of having a delightful mistress, as endearing as she was pretty, as submissive as she was impassioned. But even at that period he entertained no illusions regarding the nature of the feelings with which she inspired him or regarding their duration. As to the demonstrations of affection to which Helen surrendered herself, he looked upon them as a display of romanticism to be accounted for by a long residence in the country among bad books and absurd dreams.

"She is a *Madame Bovary*," he said to himself, and with this simple phrase he had answered everything.

When once the malady of disbelief has assailed a tormented heart, every fresh detail serves as food for it. Helen's transports and fits of melancholy, her utterances, and her silences, had served for weapons against her. Did she abandon herself to her feelings with the ardor of a deeply affected soul? He thought badly of her; she was a libertine and nothing more. Did she shroud herself in melancholy reserve? He thought badly of her; she wanted to produce an effect, to assume an attitude. Did she question him respecting himself? What tyranny on her part! Was she silent? What hypocrisy!

For all this, and by a seeming inconsistency such as characterizes the facile kindness of the indifferent when anxious to save themselves useless shocks, Armand had lent himself to the requisitions of Helen's passion. To evade petty contradictions, he had laid aside many of his habits. He declined dinner after dinner, deferred visit after visit, distanced his appearances at the club, in the Rue Royale, where formerly he used to show himself nearly every day. "You are never to be seen now." "I thought you were abroad." "You rascal, what good fortune are you hiding from us?" Such were the phrases with which he was greeted by nearly everyone he met at the corner of a footpath, on the threshold of a restaurant, in the lobby of a theatre.

These phrases had at first made him smile. They now caused him a vague regret for his former mode of life. In proportion



as habituation deadened his pleasure in the possession of Helen, did he surprise himself remembering with longing the insipid diversions of his freedom, which, as soon as they were renewed, he was again to look upon as hateful drudgery. All these different shades of feeling were beginning to have the effect of rendering his connection with Helen burdensome to him, and that long before the scene, the cruel recollection of which was persecuting him now. But the scene once passed through, how could he maintain his actual relations with his mistress?

No, he could not do it. And first with respect to himself.

"Upon my word," he said to himself, "I will despise myself up to a certain point, but not beyond. So long as he had not spoken to me—"

He paused upon this thought, then went on aloud with an evil laugh:

"Ha! ha! so long as he had not spoken to me, it was exactly the same thing. Yes, but I did not feel it as I do now. I have had enough of all this lying. Pah! Pah!" and there was a physical bitterness in his mouth, almost a real nausea at the thought of deceiving Alfred again, after the step that the other had taken so loyally and so affectionately.

"And then," he reflected, "I cannot do it on her account. When jealousy has been roused, it is never completely lulled again. Alfred would understand it all in the end. He would follow his wife or have her followed. Then, behold a surprise, a scandal, and the unhappy Helen loses at a blow her position, her child, a part, doubtless, of her fortune, and all to be constrained to live with me who do not love her, and whom she does not love."

In order to give force to the plan of a final rupture which was already being sketched in his brain, he took pleasure in considering this last thought. No, Helen did not love him. She thought that she loved him, as she had probably thought she loved Varades and the rest; for there must have been others, in conformity with the axiom that a man is never a woman's first or second lover.

"If we break, there will be a tearful scene to be gone through, she will spend a few melancholy weeks, enabling her to say to her next lover, with eyes raised heavenwards, 'How I have suffered, love!' or else to her most intimate confidante, 'Oh! men! men!'"

There was a moment of base merriment; then his reflections began again.

"What strange animals women are! Here is a fellow who



has a heart, frankness, and fidelity, as they call it; he can love—which is another of their expressions—and his wife must deceive him—for whom? For a cynic like me who am just the opposite. And if it had not been I, it would have been some one worse. It is humiliating to one's vanity, but refreshing to one's conscience—yes, it would have been some one else.”

And a few minutes later:

“What fine reasoning, too, in order to justify myself! Suppose one applied it to assassination! If I do not kill you today you will die sooner or later in some other fashion. The truth is that adultery is a great pollution!”

He returned home, turning these melancholy conclusions over and over. When he was again in his drawing room and in front of the easy chair in which Alfred had sat that morning, he felt still more incapable of continuing to be Helen's lover—no, not two days, not a single day longer.

“We must put an end to it and break with each other, and that immediately,” he said aloud.

He sat down at his table to write to Helen, but a note asking merely for an appointment, for, to break with her by letter and leave such a weapon in her hands, would be madness. Why not withdraw without seeing her again as he had done in the case of more than one mistress? It was impossible under the circumstances; it would be necessary also to renounce ever seeing Alfred again. He must therefore resign himself to a rupture by means of a scene.

The most important point was the choice of a locality. At her own house? And what if she had hysterics and some one came in? In the Rue de Stockholm? But what if she threw herself into his arms and the fever of the senses led him to take her once more, only to leave her afterwards like a clown, after possessing her? Once more, no.

“This is the best place after all,” he said to himself. “The fact that the servant is at the door will be enough to restrain me from yielding to her. And if she has an hysterical attack, I have my little travelling medicine chest.” And he scribbled a note absolutely correct in form. Had Alfred intercepted the missive he would have found in it nothing but an offer very natural, considering their somewhat exceptional degree of intimacy, to show Helen some albums for the choice of a costume for a fancy dress ball. In order to justify the meeting at his own house, he alleged the size of the albums and the difficulty of transporting them.

When he had sent this letter, melancholy took possession of him. A sudden vision showed him in anticipation the glad-



ness that Helen would feel on the receipt of this note. The two occasions on which she had visited the rooms in the Rue Lincoln had been holidays of the heart to her. What a deception was there awaiting her on the morrow!

"Come, come," said Armand with energy. "In one short month I shall be in London for the season. On my return they will be spending their holidays away from Paris. This ugly story will have a better ending than many others. Poor Alfred! There is still time to act as an honorable man."

He said this to himself, and our miserable hearts are so ingenious in duping themselves, that while he said it he believed it.

It was a little after two o'clock in the afternoon of the following day, when Helen Chazel entered this same drawing-room in the Rue Lincoln where the day before her husband had spoken, and her lover reflected, in a manner that would have prostrated her soul with despair had she been able to know their words and thoughts; but she was aware of but one thing—her deep joy at seeing her lover again after so long a time. The past forty-eight hours had seemed endless to her. When passing in front of the servant she had experienced a slight impulse of nervous emotion, although she had her veil over her face, and the man would probably never know her name. Joy at this meeting prevailed—joy and also anxiety. Since she had lost the intoxicated certainty of the early days of their love, she never parted from Armand without asking herself:

"How shall I find him next time?"

And now again, while he was relieving her of her muff and cloak, she was at once enraptured and uneasy. She took off her veil and then merely said to him: "How do you do!" laying her head upon the young man's shoulder and looking at him. This look was sufficient to enable her to discern on his countenance the premonitory tokens of the impending conversation. He said nothing to her, and already she knew that he had not brought her to show her albums, that the excuse of the preceding day for not seeing her was a false one, that an important event had come to pass.

But what event? On the occasion of their walk in the Jardin des Plantes, just two days before, he had been more coaxing, more loving, less reserved than was his wont. She had almost ventured to feel aloud in his presence. A sudden transition had again ruffled the intimacy between them. What was he going to say? He had forced her to sit down without giving her any other caress than the stroking of her hair with his hand, and



he began to speak to her, relating Alfred's visit of the previous day, the result of their explanations, and the meeting in the Jardin des Plantes.

"You reproached me for being over-prudent. You see now whether I was wrong in telling you that he was growing jealous. What did he say to you in the evening?"

"Nothing," she replied.

Although this birth of jealousy on Alfred's part, and the evidence of his deception towards herself were facts of weighty importance to her security, what chiefly concerned her at that moment was to ascertain how her lover had defended his love—their love—and she asked him:

"What did you say to him yourself?"

"If I alone had been involved," returned Armand, "you can understand that I should not have resorted to subterfuge in the presence of such loyalty. In short, I have wronged him, he has a right to every reparation, and I should have felt it a great relief to offer him such; but you were implicated, and I gave him my word that there had never been anything but the relations of friendship between us."

He paused for a moment, and then went on with visible irritation.

"As it has never been our custom, neither his nor mine, to have two such words, one true and the other false, he believed me, and for the moment he is quieted."

She listened to him and looked at him, while he himself looked at the fire, his elbows upon his knees, and his chin on his hands. She was asking herself:

"If we were driven to such an extremity would he love me sufficiently to go away with me, to give me all his life and to accept mine?"

She was silent, absorbed in the expectation of that which was to follow, and which she could not yet foresee. On his part, he employed his last phrase in continuation.

"He is quieted—for the moment," he repeated, and he emphasized the last three words. "But our relations will be rendered very difficult ones. You see, when a man is not suspicious, everything that should serve as a proof against serves as a proof for. When a man is suspicious, the contrary happens. Am I right?"

He was embarrassed by the silence in which she continued to look at him. Leaning back in her easy chair, her hands extended on the two arms of it, her lips parted, she watched, panting as it were, for a gleam of tender emotion on her lover's face. She read on it nothing but the dry reflectiveness



with which men set forth the data of a piece of business. His voice especially—that voice whose slightest tones she knew, the voice which always made its way into the remotest chambers of her heart—ah! that voice had a cruel, almost metallic harshness. Well! 'twas another episode to join to the tale of her prolonged martyrdom, the torture of a living creature chained to a dead soul wherein that which caused her to writhe in anguish did not awake so much as a vibration. Nevertheless, to this question, “Am I right,” she replied in a voice choking with anxiety:

“It is possible; you are a better judge of such matters than I am.” Then with an effort: “And what conclusion do you draw?”

“First promise me,” replied Armand, “that you will not take ill what I am going to say to you. Be persuaded that I shall never have any object in view but your own interest. You do not doubt this?”

Why did Helen bow her head at these simple words as though she had plainly read the fatal words of rupture on his lips? Why was she on the point of crying out like the woman condemned during the Terror:

“Sir executioner, a moment longer.”

Ah! why does the heart that loves possess this second sight which increases misfortune by the anticipation of it?

“We must endure a separation for a short time,” the young man resumed, “until Alfred’s suspicions have been set at rest—four or five months, perhaps six, but not more. I will make all easy for you by leaving Paris myself, although it is very inconvenient for me to do so just now. But your peace is the first thing to be considered, is it not?”

He continued speaking, but she had ceased to listen to him. It was not danger that she perceived before her. What was danger to her? Only one misfortune existed for her, that of seeing Armand no more. He spoke of separation for four or five months, perhaps six, just as he would have spoken of the beauty of the day, of a new play, of the paying of a visit. To him it appeared a very simple matter to be absent from the town in which she lived, to lay aside the sweet custom of their daily interviews! No, no, the man did not love her.

“And you announce this news to me calmly like that,” she said; “and if you were to love me no longer after this absence, what would become of me? What would be left to me?”

“I entreat you,” replied Armand impatiently, for he felt that the lead in the conversation was slipping from him, “not to let us confuse the questions at issue. Just now we have to



deal with your husband's jealousy and your own safety. Is an absence necessary? Yes or no? Everything turns on that."

"But what if I suggest another plan to you?" she asked. "My husband is jealous—be it so. My safety is compromised—be it so. Then, take me away with you. I would rather lose everything and keep you."

And she devoured him with her eyes as she uttered these words. He was obliged to show the bottom of his heart this time. She was in one of these crises in which one stakes all to win all—yes, to learn the truth, to hold it, clasp it, feel it as though it were a body, should death be the consequence!

"You know better than I," he replied, "that I cannot do that, and the reason why I cannot. You were forgetting your child. A wife may be taken from a husband, but never a mother from a son!"

"Ah!" she exclaimed, "why do you not tell me that you have ceased to love me? Why these phrases and this circumspection? Do you think that I am not brave enough to look reality in the face, whatever it may be? I swear to you, Armand, that it would be less cruel on your part to tell me everything at once. Armand, say that you have ceased to love me; I will not be angry with you, and will go away quite alone with my grief. A grief that you have caused will still be something of yourself; but do not leave me in this horrible uncertainty, do not speak so coldly of going away from me if you love me. Heavens! what I am enduring!"

Her mouth was distorted with emotion, her breath came short, and tears started from her eyes, big, heavy tears that flowed down her cheek one after another, leaving what looked like furrows behind them.

"It is just as I expected," said Armand to himself, and these tears, instead of softening him, enervated him even to anger. He did not sympathize with this grief as he had sympathized with Alfred's, perhaps owing to that difference between the sexes which brings it to pass that a woman's grief is not always as intelligible to us as that of a fellow man; at times, also, the feeling of cowardice that we feel when giving pain to a mistress so provokes us, by lowering us in our own eyes, as to exclude tenderness. He had risen, and was walking about the room, thinking to himself:

"Why not put an end to the whole thing at once?"

Then he added aloud:

"I really do not know what it is that makes you cry. In what I have said to you there was nothing that did not breathe the deepest affection for you."



How could she have failed to notice that already he no longer made use of the word "love."

"But since you require me to speak frankly to you, I will obey you. No; it is not only on your own account that I request this separation, but also on my own. There is now a barrier between us, Helen, that a man of honor cannot cross."

"What is it?" replied Helen, finding strength enough to raise her pale, tear-stained face.

"The unqualified trust of another man," he answered brusquely. "When Alfred came here, to this very spot, he did not speak to me of his jealousy only, he displayed such esteem and friendship towards me as I forbear from describing to you. He suspected me, and he came to me with open heart. There is no bitterness, no sentiment in that heart, but beauty of feeling, straightforwardness and sincerity of friendship. No, Helen, I can deceive that man no longer. I should despise myself too much if I did."

"Well! and what of me?" she cried, rising in her turn. This praise of her husband by her lover completed her distraction, and anger was overtaking her. "Did I not trample upon all that, in order to come to you? Do you think that I was born for treachery and falsehood? Did you hesitate for one moment about asking me to deceive this honest man, this confiding friend, when you wished to have me? Ah! you are not ashamed of it on my account and you are on your own! I forbid you to speak of honor, and perjured faith, and betrayed friendship. You have no right to do so, seeing that it is upon yourself, upon yourself, understand, that it all recoils. Did you entreat me to be yours? Answer in your turn, yes or no?"

"Pardon me," returned Armand. "Let us go back to the facts. We loved each other. You were not a young girl so far as I know. I was not a youth. We were not making our first entry upon life—we were both persons of experience. Is that not so? We knew where we were going. I owed it to you not to compromise you. Did I speak of you to any living soul? I owed it to you not to disturb your peace? I am disturbing it and I withdraw. As to my conscience, permit me to be the sole judge of what it enjoins and what it forbids."

"And in six months," replied Helen, "will your conscience be more accommodating? Come, be logical and frank. It is not a momentary separation that you want but a rupture. Let me at least hear you say as much since you desire people to esteem you."



"Yes," replied the young man brutally, exasperated by the revolt of a woman usually so gentle and submissive.

"So you thought that you were free from all duty towards me?" she continued. "You were leaving me all alone in that way. You were going away. You would have written me five or six letters, and then that would have been the end. You would have uttered these fine phrases to yourself: 'We knew where we were going.' 'She was not a young girl.' 'We were both persons of experience.' I should be curious to know," she added with that mournful irony which is imparted by rising frenzy, "just what you understand by that."

"What would be the use?" he said.

"I want to know," she returned vehemently. "I have a good right to know at least what you think of me."

"Do you believe that I am not acquainted with your life?"

"With my life," Helen questioned, crushed by a kind of stupor, which the young man took for terror at this sudden revelation.

"Do you wish for facts?" he returned harshly. "Well, you shall have them. Have you forgotten your intrigue with Monsieur de Varades!"

"Ah!" she cried, "nay, that is infamous. Monsieur de Varades!" And she passed her hands wildly across her forehead. "Tell me that you did not believe that, I entreat you. My love, tell me that you did not think that of me. Oh! tell me, tell me, tell me!"

"I did believe it," he replied, his heart closed to the wail of his mistress by that keen, insidious jealousy of the past which, by a strange anomaly of his nature, had always caused him some pain when by her side, although he did not love her.

"Then," said Helen, frozen now by this reply, "if you believed it, why did you never speak of it to me? If the thought of it governed you when you asked me to be yours, if you considered that you had less responsibility towards me by reason of it, why did you entertain no doubt about it? Were you sure of it? Had you seen it? Was there not a chance against it being true—a chance, a single chance? Why, are you not aware that it is a crime to take all a woman's heart, and to keep thoughts of that kind in one's own?"

"Tut!" he replied, shrugging his shoulders: "you would have thought me perfectly ridiculous if I had not been your lover. Your past belonged to you alone, and I had no right to call you to account for it any more than for your future. As to the present, I know you well enough to be sure that



you are not a woman who would take two lovers at the same time."

"'Tis a great honor," she replied in an almost stifled voice. She was pale as death. The egotism and insensibility of the man she loved paralyzed her with such horror that her tears would no longer come. She felt but one desire: to leave this man, to see no longer those eyes and those lips—those lips that she had loved so well, and which had always lied so to her, since from the very first day he had believed this without proof! Mechanically she resumed her cloak and muff, and fastened her veil.

"Good-bye," she said. It would have been impossible for her to continue the conversation just then, so choked was she with indignation.

He did not try to detain her, and also said:

"Good-bye."

She left the room, and he accompanied her, without a word being spoken on either side, to the outer door. The latter once closed, he returned to the drawing room, where no trace of the tragic scene enacted in it remained but the disarrangement of the easy chair that had been pushed aside by Helen as she rose.

"All has passed off better than I expected," he said to himself. "How easy it is to pin them to the wall with a little fact! Well! it is over."

"It is over," he repeated aloud with that strange feeling both of relief and of distress which accompanies the interruption of love. "She was very pretty," he reflected to himself. "Now we must be on the lookout for revenge. But what revenge? She has not a note in which I speak familiarly to her. I shall have the trouble of taking away all those trifles of hers at Madame Palmyre's. I will have them returned to her later on, when we have reached the stage at which she can say to me, 'You gave me great pain,' with the letter of my successor in her bosom, between the chemisette and her skin."

He sat down again in front of the fire, from which he drew a few sparks.

"Ah!" he continued, "the aftertaste of life is too bitter!"



## CHAPTER VIII

REVENGE! Such was scarcely the subject of Helen's reflections while returning from the Rue Lincoln. The sudden blow which she had just received had been too heavy a one to leave room within her for any other feeling but that of the most continuous and crushing grief. At the dinner table, during the evening, then during the night when alone in her own room with every light extinguished, and sleepless, then during the day that succeeded to that night, and during the other nights and days that ensued for a fortnight afterwards, what she perceived unremittingly and with the same cruel, uninterrupted clearness was the brutal fact that had at last been grasped in its indisputable reality, the fact that her lover had never loved her!

Not for a moment? No, not for a moment, seeing that when he had possessed her for the first time, he had believed himself in the possession of the former mistress of Monsieur de Varades, and perhaps of others. The smiles and reticences and unresponsiveness and mistrust on the part of Armand were now clearly accounted for, and her whole being rebelled against the murderous injustice, as she compared what she had given with what she had received. What! the tender refinements of her dreams, the noble madness of her dear love, the idolatry of her ecstasies, the sincerity of the sacrifices made without regret or remorse to give happiness to the man she loved, all this wasted upon a lie, upon a void, as vainly as the leaves driven by the wind along the walks of the old garden in which they had walked together, as uselessly as the motes dancing in a sunbeam on the edge of the window in the little room during those afternoons devoted to their loves.

Devoted to their loves? Yes, she had loved deeply, madly, and alas! for nothing—to find herself looked upon as a woman that passed from one intrigue to another, as one that had loosed her robe for this man and for that, as one that collected sensations, just as others collect fans or trinkets. Ah!



she could not endure the injustice of it. To be deprived of the sight of Armand—for on the day following the explanation that had proved so tragical to her, Alfred had received a line from his friend announcing a temporary absence necessitated by business of importance—yes, to be deprived of the sight of Armand was an anguish to her, but she possessed a weapon against this anguish: the contempt with which she had been inspired by her lover's poverty of heart, by the implacable egotism of the man that the last conversation had revealed.

How should she ever accustom her heart to the iniquity of this same being whom she had so greatly loved. He had parted from her abruptly, and unworthily, but the recognition of the extent of her love for him would not have caused her so much suffering as she had endured. The martyrdom, the intolerable martyrdom consisted in the impotence of her love, not to command a return, but to make itself merely understood. She was like one under sentence of death who is willing indeed to die, but whose worst agony is the powerlessness to exclaim before death: "I am innocent."

How keenly he had made her feel the arrogant outrage inflicted by his honor as a man, for it was in the name of this honor that he had sacrificed her. Ah! had he loved her, how lightly he would have held this honor, just as she had lightly held her own; but how could he have loved her since from the very first he had believed her guilty of deception? She used to come and say to him: "I have kept myself for you," and he used to say to himself: "After Monsieur de Varades!" All the proofs of her affection—and how she had lavished them upon him!—had been shattered against this invincible conviction, and yet, heavens! her affection was real, as real as the life which had begun only on the day when she had come to know him. And she could hear his voice saying: "We were both persons of experience. Do you believe that I was not acquainted with your life?"

Oh! what injustice, what hideous injustice! She sobbed her heart out at the thought of it. She came and went, a prey to continual fever, finding no more rest for her poor burning head than for her poor bleeding heart, and inwardly given over to a medley of emotions—despair for happiness that was lost for ever, keen regret for her absent lover, frenzy at having been misunderstood in the noblest and most genuine of her feelings. To repent of having belonged to this cruel Armand before the hour of her supreme deception was what she could not do. Love, sublime love had impelled her to the



act, as sublime as itself. Sublime love! "No," she now exclaimed, "blind, insensate love!"

And she walked to and fro, at random, in her room like a caged animal, and ever, as against an irrefragable wall, she struck against this thought:

"What was the use of having loved like that? What was the use? Ah! the lying, lying, lying—"

What served to complete her provocation in the mortal crises through which she was passing was the tender and untimely solicitude of her husband. As he had no suspicion of the drama that was being enacted in this distempered soul, he would chance to say to her, in the belief that he was holding out an agreeable prospect: "We will make a trip as soon as I am free. Perhaps Armand will come with us." Or perhaps: "I am surprised at not having heard from Armand. Has he not written to you?"

"No," she would reply.

Alfred now reproached himself for the explanation that he had had with his friend, feeling persuaded that the latter had gone to travel only in order to spare his jealousy. He thought about his wife's melancholy, he found it ever more inexplicable, and he told himself that he had deprived her of one of her few relaxations. She, on the other hand, was profoundly sensible of angered pride on thus encountering her husband's trust, which contrasted too sharply with the distrust of her lover. And then these plans of travelling together, which Alfred called up, were they not the very ones that she had herself formerly cherished? They showed her with only too great precision what might have been—those summer months whose intimate holiday-making she had imagined beforehand. They would have lived together by the seashore in one of the villages of Normandy, where the trees grow green to the very margin of the blue waves. Perhaps they would have seen together one of those Italian towns whose mere names seem to shroud a promise of happiness with light. And then there came nothing but freezing solitude, nothing but desertion! He had not written her a note since their rupture, nor a line of pity. But why should he have pitied her? Doubtless he believed her already comforted, perhaps in the arms of another. Why not? He had deemed her capable of having Varades before himself. Two lovers, three, ten, what matters the total if there be more than one?

From day to day the pain of this injustice became more keen within her, and the pain resulted in a mad and morbid thought, yet the only one that could satisfy somewhat the



despair that raged in her heart. Yes, in those hours of anguish she conceived the criminal thought of committing frightful actions, since she had been deemed capable of them, of being like the image that Armand had formed of her, like that fast and facile woman whom he had believed himself to possess.

Moral life, like physical life, has its suicidal fevers, its damning frenzies. There are moments when we are driven at all costs to renounce our inner personality, to assassinate it, to become another being. It is especially injustice that produces these crises, mysterious yet so necessary, and so natural that even children, like animals, are subject to them. Are not the best rendered the worst by being beaten without having deserved it? The more Helen was sensible of having been irredeemably misunderstood, the more a frightful attraction impelled her to become just the opposite of what she had formerly been. A vertigo seized her, and, as it were, a delirious longing for degradation. " 'Tis too foolish," she said to herself, "to have any heart."

This appetite for destruction which works in all creatures simultaneously with the sense of love, recoiled upon herself. She set herself to attack her own inner nature systematically, as some men intoxicate themselves, in analogous circumstances, glass by glass, in spite of disgust and, so to speak, from a sense of duty. She began to exhibit strange phenomena of nervous gaiety in the ordinary affairs of life. She, who hitherto had detested light conversation, affected to fill her talk with the most direct allusions to the things of love. She sent for those works which, during the last few years, she had heard spoken of as being the most audacious, in order to have them upon her table. She was seized with a sort of frenzy for pleasure, and every evening there would be a party at the theatre to which she brought Alfred, and she would speak of her intentions of going again into society, and interest herself with surprising activity in the disguise that she was to wear at a fancy ball given by the Malhoures, a ball for which Armand was to have chosen her costume. Her voice seemed to be of a higher pitch. She laughed a more sonorous laugh, and at all the demonstrations of this painful merriment Alfred, in spite of himself, felt affected by an indefinable anxiety, so completely were her eyes characterized by that extraordinary brightness, her gestures by those nervous jerkings, and her words by that abruptness which occasion a dread lest a woman capable of looking, gesticulating, and talking in this way should suddenly be seized by a fit of insanity, and should commit some extravagant and irretrievable action.



She was stranger still on the morning of the day on which she was to go to the Malhoures' ball. It was the first time since her quarrel with Armand that she was going out for the evening. She did not come down to breakfast. Alfred, seated at the square table with his wife's cover laid opposite to him, and with his son on his right, ate without speaking, a prey to the increasing distress inflicted upon him by the mournful oddness of Helen's behavior. She no longer seemed to be aware of the little boy's existence. "Good-morning, dear," "Good-night, dear," and that was nearly all. She, a mother usually so loving, seemed to have the maternal instinct paralyzed within her, and for the moment such was indeed the case.

A settled idea produces upon the heart the same effect as is produced by a bright and motionless point upon our eyes; it hypnotizes the being which it sways, and limits its susceptibility to a tiny circle of sensations. It was impossible for the unhappy woman to have any feeling whatever in respect of her son, because in her condition of lucid aberration it was impossible for her to be sensible of his existence.

The little boy was raised on a high chair, and had that morning on his face the sad, and at the same time perplexed expression of a child that grieves without knowing why. A depth of undefined sorrow was in his eyes; his father was aware, merely by observing the way in which he ate with the tips of his teeth, that a hidden trouble was tormenting this curly head.

"Have you not been good this morning," he said to him, "that you are so sad?"

"Yes, I have been good," Henry replied, and was again silent; then suddenly he said: "Papa, what does 'to prejudice' mean?"

"It is a wrong done to a person unjustly. But why do you ask me that?"

"Because Miette said the other day that someone had prejudiced her uncle against her cousin." This expression, heard for the first time, and only half understood, had struck his childish imagination, and he went on: "Could anyone prejudice you or mamma against me?"

"What notions are you taking into your head?" replied the father.

He had just become sensible that his son was himself perceiving the change in his mother's disposition. He looked at him, and felt that inclination to weep which comes upon a widower at the sight of his orphan child—a poor little thing



who has lost the greatest of earthly blessings, who does not suspect this, but who nevertheless forebodes and guesses irretrievable misfortune. Father and son preserved silence, when through the dining room door, which had been left open, was heard a voice, Helen's voice, completing an order to a work-woman. "For nine o'clock then, punctually." She was engaged about her ball dress. She was not there where her glance, her smile, would have cast such a ray of joy, and Alfred reflected upon the incomprehensible, and at the same time unconquerable disaster which had brought them all there, himself, his son, and his wife—especially his wife. Heavens! what was the matter with her?

He was still thinking of this many hours later, in the brougham that was taking them both in the direction of the Rue du Bac, where the Malhoures lived. She was in the corner of the carriage, with powdered hair and two patches at the corner of her thin, pale cheek. The powder, and the patches, and the dark touches that she had put round her eyes, in which the flame of fever was burning, imparted to her beauty something dangerous, and disquieting, and more inaccessible than ever to the man who was sitting by her side, and looking at her without venturing to speak.

Her neck, mobile and graceful, issued from the furs which hid her disguise as a flower girl of the time of Louis XV. She wore pink silk stockings, pink satin shoes, a flowered skirt, and in her soul was the mortal blending of frenzy and despair of a woman who would ruin herself with delight, for nothing—for the sake of being ruined and ruined for ever! Through the brougham windows, the glass of which she had let down in order to inhale something of the keen night air, she watched the houses filing past, and the picture presented by Paris after the toils of the day. The shops were flaming on the ground floor; the cafés were opening their doors to customers; the wind was sending a quiver through the gas flames that outlined the notices of the theatres. Along the Boulevards, as in the Avenue de l'Opéra and in the Rue des Tuileries, there was a moving crowd.

Of what was this crowd in quest? Of pleasure, and of nothing but pleasure. *She* had pursued an ideal which had proved most false! It was time to live like the rest. A woman's amusement consists of coquetry, of intrigue. She would be a coquette. She would have lovers—yes, lovers. She repeated these words, in thought, with strange passion, for the face of the man she had loved had just appeared again before her recollection, and with it the unbearable palpitation of the



heart had begun again. Ah! between that face and herself, between that memory and her heart, she would put other faces, other memories!

Yet, how he had mocked her! She now at certain moments felt a genuine hatred towards him. By a sort of backward crystallization, she multiplied reasons for animosity round the thought of Armand that she bore in her mind, and she calumniated him fiercely on her own behalf. Did not his whole behavior towards her bear the stamp of abominable and daily calculation? When he had entreated her to be his under the pretense that he would not believe in her love without this proof, was it not that he would not fail where another had succeeded? Was it true even that Alfred was jealous? This was doubtless a pretext devised for the purpose of bringing about a rupture. And how carefully he had kept the name of Varades to himself, to throw it into his mistress's teeth only at the last moment, without giving her time to justify herself! She ought to have spoken, to have looked for old letters, to have found some testimony. But why? Would he have believed her for an instant? And bruising herself afresh against the poisoned point of injustice, she detested all men in this man, she envied those who mock the hateful race, the jades who take the initiative in this duel of distrust and are the first to betray. How glad she would be to have been one of them, to have really had a dozen intrigues before that one with Armand, and to be able to tell him so, and to degrade herself and him, and to pollute everything within her and about her, her soul and her body, with a pollution such as no water could wash away.

She was enduring, while in this carriage, one of those tempests of passion which she had to pass through several times in the day, and especially at night, for she had not slept two hours out of the twenty-four during the past three weeks. It was as though a tide of bitterness were rising within her, and the whirling of her thoughts became so rapid that all idea of ambient things was blotted out from her consciousness; and she did not emerge from her dream until some inevitable detail compelled her to action, such as Alfred's hand shaking her arm as the brougham stopped, and his voice saying to her: "We have arrived." The stupor of an awakening from sleep showed in her eyes, and she recognized the Malhoures' gate.

The house stood at the back of a courtyard and was one of those old mansions such as are still found in that part of the Faubourg Saint-Germain with views behind over vast



stretches of garden, while in front there is the narrow, populous, noisy street. The house was let in floors, and the Malhoures occupied the second. The lofty windows were gleaming, and the shadows of the various couples were thrown in black, moving silhouettes upon the luminous glass. Old Malhoure, as he was familiarly called, was a professor in the École Polytechnique, a member of the Institute, and tolerably rich by inheritance from his father, the celebrated inventor. He had three marriageable daughters, and received every Wednesday. Twice a year he gave a fancy-dress dance. On these evenings a general clearance was made. All the rooms, even the *savant's* study, were in requisition for the entertainment, and although they were large and lofty apartments, they scarcely sufficed for the number of the guests.

People used to visit the Malhoures a great deal. Their house was in the first place a centre of reunion for the great professor's former pupils who were separated by their modes of life; intrigue also went on behind the doors with important personages of the Academy of Sciences; finally people were amused by the youthfulness of the three young ladies and the good nature of their father, whose appearance—a legendary one in the École—was in itself an element of mirth. He was huge and short, with eyes hidden behind blue spectacles, a beard collar of greenish-white, clothes of extraordinary cut, and a continual nodding of the head. Though he presented this figure, it was pretended that the old man had once been a lady's man, a gay dog, as the students used to say facetiously to one another. At twenty-two he had discovered a theorem, which bore his name, and since then he had multiplied treatises after treatises. When, wearied by fourteen hours of work, he went out in the evening, he used to follow the young workwomen in the Quartier de l'Observatoire, where he then lived. He used to heap up engaging offers to entice them, but he was so ugly—so ugly—that they laughed impudently in his face. The *savant* used to look round him to make sure he was not heard, and then murmur as a supreme argument:

"I am Malhoure, the inventor of the theorem!"

After his marriage he had grown somewhat religious, but he had remained very cheerful, especially when he had discovered some particularly elegant formula during the day. Such was doubtless the case that evening, for he was standing on the threshold receiving guests with his most cordial smile, although he did not recognize one person out of ten; he had no memory for faces. By his side, and grumbling, was his intimate friend, Professor Moreau, a calculator long and lean,



and as great a pessimist as Malhoure was an optimist. Just as Madame Chazel reached the landing, and while she was leaving her furs in the care of a servant, the two professors were speaking of a lady who had just passed, wearing a dress as outrageously low as she herself was faded, and old Malhoure was saying to his friend:

"Well, geometry does not grow old. The square of the hypotenuse is always young."

"For my own part," replied Moreau, "I can see whether a woman is hump-backed or blind of an eye, whether she walks straight or is lame. But what a difference there is between ugliness and beauty I have never been able to conceive."

The piano was playing a quadrille, the din of the dance filled the rooms, and Malhoure clasped both of Chazel's hands, taking him for someone else, and calling him "My dear, my very dear Arthur." Helen was looking, with strange feeling of envy, at the professors, whose conversation she had just overheard. They at least would never know that continuous, settled torture which brings with it incapacity for a thought foreign to itself, for study, for reading, for conversation!

But she was already in the hands of Madame Malhoure and her three daughters, all four being equally unreasonable, and having no object save that of amusing themselves. The mother was dressed as Catherine de Médicis, and the three daughters as a gypsy, a milk-woman, and a Cauchois peasant. Their costumes savored of work done at home, and fashioned with chance materials after the engravings of the illustrated papers, and the same held good of the toilets worn by these ladies' friends. The men, on their side, seemed uncomfortable in their black coats; several looked like people who had to get up early in the morning, and were computing that every call from the piano robbed them of a little of their sleep.

The talk that was flying about in the warm atmosphere was astonishing by contrast. Fragments of frivolous phrases alternated with thoughtful conversation.

"Don't talk to me of these new theories about space that has more than three dimensions—"

"Have you danced much this winter, mademoiselle?—"

"Ah! what a genius Cauchy had, what power of analysis!—"

"Mamma, will you allow me to stay for the cotillion?—"

Alfred Chazel had lighted upon one of his old companions, and was communicating to him a long-cherished project of a new algebra—that, namely, of order—and Helen, assailed by the effusiveness of the Malhoure ladies, was telling herself that



it had been scarcely worth while to take the trouble about her dress. Thanks to the education received from her stepmother, and also to her talks with Monsieur de Querne, she had acquired tolerably accurate ideas concerning society. She comprehended the distinction that separates true assemblies of the world from middle-class carnivals such as she was now present at. Nevertheless, as she was charming in her pale blue and bright pink costume, and could read the triumph of her beauty in the envious glances of many women, and the admiring gaze of the men, she gave herself up of set purpose to that sensation of success so intoxicating to feminine pride, even when it is a success that is despised; and she proceeded to dance every dance that she might exhaust the inward torture by physical activity, and she desisted only to visit the refreshment room and drink a little champagne. The wine sent a trifle of light and sparkling froth to her head that was so wearied by excessive thought.

She was standing thus beside the table in the refreshment room, fanning herself with one hand, and holding in the other the cup containing the last golden drops of the drink whose vague enervation was pleasant to her; her partner, an insignificant and sufficiently correct young man, who was quite proud of having promenaded with her on his arm, was trying to talk; he was speaking of the new play, a middle-class comedy which Monsieur de Querne had cruelly ridiculed one evening, and Helen was replying with praise to a work which hitherto on her lover's authority she had considered detestable. At the mere mention of the actors' names and the title of the play, she could see herself in a box beside him, and a flame coursed through her blood as she suddenly heard close to her a voice that competed her emotion—that voice?—no, but the voice of Monsieur de Varades, of the man who had exercised so fatal an influence upon the destiny of her love, the voice of him whose name Armand had flung in insult into her teeth during the scene of their rupture. By what cruel mystery of fate was the officer here, almost within two steps of her, and talking without appearing to see her?

Had she been able to reflect for a moment she would have deemed the presence of old Malhoure's former pupil as natural as her own. Was not she at this ball as the wife of an old fellow-student of De Varades? She would also have reflected that living for months and months, as she had done, apart from the society frequented by her husband, she was ignorant of the movements of Alfred's companions. But in her present state of morbid over-excitement, this sudden meeting struck



her with a sort of almost terror-stricken stupor, which was immediately replaced by a fresh sweep of her secret grief, of that maddening grief which made her long to cry out at injustice as one cries *Fire!* and *Murder!*

Without paying any further attention to what her partner was saying, she looked with devouring curiosity at De Varades as though she had not known him for years. He was a handsome fellow, slenderly built, and muscular all over. The contrast in color between his hair, which had become nearly white, and his moustache, which had remained very dark, a singular aspect to his refined head. A low forehead, a hooked nose, eyes that were somewhat too small and close together, and a flashing glance, in which bravery and temerity could alike be read, caused his countenance to be vaguely suggestive of the profile of a bird of prey. The stiffness, as of a uniform, assumed by the officer's evening coat, which he wore in a military style, was all that was further required to single him out and render him remarkable in an assembly wherein the wearied race of the men of desk and study was predominant. Since the audacious attempt at Bourges, Helen had never seen this disquieting individual coming towards her without feeling dimly uncomfortable, so sensible was she that in him she had an enemy capable of anything. And now, a prey to a maddening ulceration, she would on the contrary have liked him to approach her, to pay her attentions as he did formerly.

Yes, to pay her attentions, and she would not be childish and silly as she had been before. In her misery and madness, she went so far as to regret her former behavior! She had been a loyal wife, and what had this done for her? Only brought her to an hour when nothing in the world remained to her save an incurable wound in the most sensitive portion of her heart. She drank a few more drops of champagne in order to relieve her thoughts, and De Varades, off whom she never took her eyes, turned in her direction. Did he see her for the first time, or had he perhaps affected not to notice her? He bowed and came to greet her, with the expression at once ironical, respectful, and freezing, with which he used to accost her at Bourges; and instead of replying to it as she did then, with equal coldness, she had a light in her eyes and a smile on her lips. She held out her hand to him, and after the first polite formulas, immediately asked:

"Are you passing through Paris?"

"No, madame, I am living here," he replied; "I was appointed professor at the School of War four months ago."



"Four months, and you have not come to see us?" she said in a coquettishly reproachful tone of voice.

"No, but I heard about you," replied the young man, and to himself: "How Paris has changed her!" He detested her deeply, first because she had wounded his pride, and then by reason of the infamous conduct of which he had been guilty towards her. He had boasted of having been her lover, giving details in proof; it was not true, and he could not forgive her for the irreparable wrong that he had done her. Ah! if the calumny had only been like those others that are stated aloud and that it is possible to grasp! But no, it passes from ear to ear and from lip to lip until it reaches a man who might have loved this woman, and whose heart is stayed, suddenly paralyzed by the terrible uncertainty concerning the answer to the question: "Has she that in her past?"

To the young officer's credit it must be said that he had not seen so far. He had yielded to the hideous spite of masculine vanity, and it was again this vanity which, on Helen's unexpected reception of him, prompted him to murmur an interrogative "Eh?" and immediately to begin again the love-comedy that had formerly been played. A waltz was sounding—the waltz of *Faust*, for the second of the young Malhoure ladies was at the piano, and she, the artist of the family, liked people to dance to classical subjects, whereas the eldest and the youngest, who prided themselves upon being regular Parisians, doted on popular music, and airs from the operettas and musical cafés.

"May I have the honor of this waltz, madame?" asked De Varades of Helen.

"Was I engaged or was I not?" said the latter. "So much the worse! I restore you your liberty," she added, addressing the young man who had accompanied her to the refreshment room, but who through timidity did not venture to remind her of the promise she had given of dancing with himself; and immediately she was whirling around in the ballroom in the arms of De Varades.

She was whirling round, prettier than ever with the feverish pink that colored her cheeks and imparted to them a tint similar to that of her stockings, her skirt, and her corsage. The two patches at the corner of her cheek, her black eyes, and her powdered hair, clothed her with a sovereign grace that, apart from feelings of pride, stirred old longings in the young man's heart. He was speaking to her while they danced. She listened to him with—strange contrast!—Armand's image before her thoughts. "If he could see me," she said to herself,



"he would have doubts no longer, he would triumph. Well! what does it matter to me?"

This strange inclination to act exactly contrary to her innermost nature, which, when light and artificial is called spite, was exalted in this distempered soul to the pitch of aberration, and she listened with a pleased smile to what De Varades said to her. The latter, clever enough to discern that something extraordinary was going on in Madame Chazel's mind, and too desirous of requital not to take advantage of the opportunity, had again begun to speak to her of his feelings. In passionate terms he depicted to her his despair at Bourges when he had displeased her, his vain attempts at self-consolation, his resolve never to marry for her sake; he gave her to understand that she was the only woman he had ever loved, and that he had sought an appointment at Paris solely that he might meet her again. Never had he dared to tell her so much at the period of their early relationships, and before his brutal assault. But to all these falsehoods, repeated over and over again during this first waltz, then in the square dances which followed, and then in the quietude of the cotillion which they danced together, she responded by such slight interjections of doubt as encourage avowals. She seemed to be delirious for coquetry; she spent upon this flirtation of an evening the fever that was preying upon her. Thus, a few hours later, the officer, on his return to his small abode in the Rue Saint-Dominique—a suite of apartments of which only two were furnished, the others being filled with uniforms, weapons, and big boots—swore inwardly as he undressed that he would carry this affair through with a high hand. From his grandfather, who had served under the Emperor, De Varades inherited the maxim that everything, in all circumstances, should be ventured with women. And so, when he laid his head upon his pillow before going to sleep, he had resolved to essay the possession of Madame Chazel, no matter where, even though it were in her own drawing room, at the risk of a servant's interruption. "And this time she shall not escape me," he thought to himself. "She told me she was always at home between two and four." And he closed his eyes on the sweet hope of repairing his former wrong.

While this man was falling asleep over his dangerous plan, she herself was watching, a prey to those memories each one of which was hurrying her to some act of madness. Her husband had been unlucky enough to say to her on their return to the Rue de La Rouchefoucauld after the party at the Malheures':



"I thought you had quite an antipathy to Varades, and you danced with scarcely anybody else."

"Does that make you jealous?" she had asked abruptly.

"No," he had replied, "but how is it possible to change one's disposition towards people in this way?"

"I am what it pleases me to be," she had rejoined.

She might at that moment have been forbidden to throw herself into the water, and in her rage for contradiction, and to relieve her nerves, she would have hastened to the Seine. On entering her room again, she felt so unhappy that she did not even undress. She walked about in her ball costume until morning, and the champagne she had drunk, the bewilderment of the party, the fund of despair upon which her soul had been living for so many hours, all united to confuse her understanding.

"Yes," she said to herself at certain moments, "'tis he that I must have and no other—for the time being," she added with such implacability in the imagining of ill as at dark moments relieves the heart somewhat, "and when I have done it, when I am low and in the mire, then perhaps I shall forget, and then all this will be over, over, over."

And when her soul recoiled at the wildness of this monstrous plan, then, that she might resume her inclination for the shame to which she was being dizzily impelled, she pictured Armand to herself, she saw him with his eyes and his smile, she heard his voice:

"Do you believe that I was not acquainted with your life?"

"Ah!" she would then exclaim like a wounded creature uttering a cry, and she would stretch herself upon her bed with that whirl in her sick brow which was intolerable to her.

In the morning she had an hour's heavy sleep, visited with nightmare. At about nine o'clock she rose to attend to household affairs, as was her habit, indolently and with soul roaming elsewhere. Extreme fatigue and, as it were, a dying languor had taken possession of her. After breakfast she went up to her room again, and, in spite of herself, her hands opened the box containing Armand's letters. There were not fifteen—she counted them—and the longest of them had but two pages. She read them again, as she did nearly every day, and their aridity showed to her even worse than on former occasions. Every phrase in these notes might have been quoted without compromising her to whom the notes were addressed; and so there was not one that might have been traced in a moment of self-surrender, or to give passage to the overflowing of a heart. She had believe formerly that he used to write



to her in this way out of regard for her peace, and she had been grateful to him for it.

Fool! Fool! He wrote to her thus because he did not love her, because he had never loved her, and why should he have loved her, judging of her as he did? In his eyes, what was she? A woman like all the rest! Of what did he not believe her capable? Of making use, perhaps, of his letters against him? Her soul was bleeding again at every pore. Ah! what remedy was there, what remedy?—and as she was asking herself this question for the hundredth time the servant entered and inquired whether she would see Monsieur de Varades. The officer had kept his word, and had not lost a day in taking advantage of the permission to come and see her which she had granted him.

“Show him into the drawing-room,” she said; suddenly the memory of Armand’s injustice awoke keener than before, and the crisis of sorrow through which she had just been passing resulted in one of those rushes of frenzy in which she really no longer knew what she was doing. She went into her dressing room. With a little water she removed the traces of her tears, for at the times when she renewed, one by one, the details of her wretchedness, she used to weep, almost without perceiving it, and mad, as it were, through grief, she went down to the little drawing room.

“How kind of you to come to keep me company!” she said, holding out her hand to the young man. Voluntarily she made him sit down in the armchair in front of her, the one in which Monsieur de Querne used generally to sit. How he had lied to her in that place! How he had misunderstood her! It seemed to her that she was taking vengeance upon him at that moment by this profanation of their common memories. She herself took a seat on the couch which stood obliquely against the fireplace, in which the remnant of a fire was burning. She looked at De Varades with eyes that did not see him, but he, as he began to talk, watched her with much attention. The obvious wildness that she displayed, the almost incoherent rapidity of her speech, the element of nervelessness that was manifested in her laughter, in her gestures, in the movements of her head, all evidenced a woman that was half beside herself.

The evening before De Varades had inwardly said in explanation of her coquetry at the Malhoures’ ball: “She wants to make someone jealous.” Then he had not discovered any one wearing towards her the countenance of a wounded lover. In the twilight in the little drawing-room he said to himself:



"'Tis she who is jealous, and wishes to be revenged." Insensibly he caused the conversation to glide upon the same slope as on the previous evening; he spoke to her again of his despairing and melancholy feelings. She listened to him almost without reply, with the thought of the indignation that Armand would feel after all, if he could see her at that moment. De Varades meanwhile was reasoning thus to himself:

"What do I risk? Being shown the door at once again as at Bourges?"

He made up his mind to take advantage of the disquiet which, as he could see, possessed her, and he rose and seated himself on the couch by her side, saying to her:

"Ah! I loved you dearly!"

She turned towards him with a delirious expression which he took for the frenzy of spite, and he seized her in his arms. Was it that kind of momentary aberration which at certain moments prompts us to the performance of actions in which later on we fail to recognize ourselves? Was it the denomination of a distempered will by a will that was cold and steady? To what extent did that frenzy for degradation, that madness for her own ruin which had haunted this hapless soul the evening before, enter into her weakness? The fact remains that she did not defend herself against the young man's embrace. He grew more bold, and she was completely his. Yes, in that very drawing room where formerly she had shrunk in horror from giving herself to the man she loved, she suffered herself to be taken by a man whom she did not love, and the latter was stupefied both by the ease of his victory and by the corpse-like insensibility encountered in this unlooked-for mistress, of whom he had not even been thinking twenty-four hours before.

De Varades had been gone for a long time, and evening was falling. Helen had remained in the same place, seated in the same corner of the couch, as though dead. The enormity of the event that had just come to pass had suddenly dispersed the hallucination in which grief had been causing her to live during the past few weeks. What! she was the mistress of Monsieur de Varades—she, Helen Chazel! No, it was not true, seeing that she loved Armand. Where was she? What had she done? Impelled by what madness?

And through the supreme horror by which she was possessed on finding that she was alive, and that all was true, a sudden idea rose in her mind, the idea of seeing Armand. Why? She could not have told exactly, but the desire had



swooped upon her, irresistible; she felt that it must be done, and not on the morrow, not that evening, but immediately. She must speak to him, were she to fly from her home in order to find him wherever he might be. At all costs she would see him. Had he returned to Paris? She would ascertain. In ten minutes she had put on a fashionable dress and bonnet, had called a cab, and shivering with fever in a corner of it—how great a change from the day on which a similar vehicle was conveying her to the meeting with her lover!—was proceeding to the Rue Lincoln.



## CHAPTER IX

THE cab went slowly along the streets, and every moment Helen said to herself: "Shall I see him again?" She was now facing the irresistible thought, the mere appearance of which had hurried her to the immediate quest of Armand when she had barely emerged from her horrible delirium. She must be able to cry to this man that he had ruined her. Yes, she must do this, and he must at last believe her and understand the infamy of his behavior. She would say to her former lover:

"I am Monsieur de Varades's mistress, and *you* are the cause of it—you, your injustice, and your desertion." And how could the man help believing her when she went on to say to him: "Before knowing you I was pure."

This indisputable proof of the genuineness of her love, this proof which she had so greatly desired, she now held fast, and she would not let it go. Would not her present sincerity be a guarantee of her past sincerity? If she acknowledged the guilt of today, what motive of modesty, hypocrisy or interest could prompt her to deny that of yesterday? This strange reasoning appeared to her to carry with it a sort of obviousness from which Armand could not escape. He would believe her, and this should be her revenge. "But how will he receive me? Yet, what does it matter? I will spit my misery and my shame, and his responsibility for them, into his face."

Her distempered soul found relief in the audacity of this plan. She hated Armand now, she trembled lest he should be absent, lest he should escape her. "Faster," she said several times to the driver. Would she ever arrive soon enough? She recognized the smallest details of the road—the road traversed with such lightness of heart the last time that she had visited him! And the scene which she had been obliged to go through showed in her mind still more terrible and clear. During that scene she had been choked with indignation. She had been unable to make any reply. He could not have believed her



then, but he should believe her now. She would show him what had been the drama of her existence for months past. She would at last lay bare all her heart's hidden wounds. She would make him touch with his finger the work of death that he had wrought, and she would depart, leaving him, if he had any honor left, at least this hideous remorse, this poisoned arrow in his conscience. Then she thought: "In what condition shall I find him. What has he been doing since our rupture?"

At last the vehicle stopped at the corner of the Rue Lincoln and the Champs-Élysées. In two minutes Helen had gained the door of Armand's house. How her voice shook as she asked the porter: "Is Monsieur de Querne at home?" How completely the affirmative reply upset her. She hesitated for a second in spite of the resolve she had taken; then she climbed the staircase with deliberate foot. Her hand pressed the bell without hesitation. A servant's footstep became audible. The door opened. It was no longer possible to draw back.

What had Armand been doing during that period in which she had been in the throes of despair? Had she known, even when in front of the open door, disgust would perhaps have restrained her and drawn her back. She would have fled in horror from the threshold of the abode to which she had come in order to defend, not her person, not her happiness, but the truth of her former love, as we defend the memory of the dead.

The young man had spoken the truth in his note to Chazel. A ten days' journey had brought him to an estate which he possessed close to Nantes—the De Querne family came from this town—and he had stayed there to arrange some business respecting farm rents. Then he had returned to Paris, persuaded that the rupture was a final one, seeing that during those ten days Helen had not hazarded any attempt at reconciliation.

By a contradiction of his nature, too usual with him to cause him astonishment, these early moments had been melancholy ones. He was one of those men who are moved by memories after having remained nearly indifferent to the reality, who become enamored of the women whom they cast off, just as they regret the places of which they tired when living in them—a restless race, who know nothing of the present but its weariness, and for whom the past assumes a unique and affecting charm from the mere fact that it is the past.

Armand had never loved poor Helen; he applauded himself



for breaking with her as for an action that was most reasonable, regard being had to his own interests, and withal exceedingly meritorious, seeing that he had responded to Alfred's generosity with similar generosity; but neither the grounds of interest nor those of merit could prevent him from thinking with painful emotions of the sweet and dainty mistress who after all had never deceived him except for the purpose of pleasing him the more. To be sure he doubted less than ever that she had had that first intrigue with De Varades at Bourges, of which Lucien Rieume had spoken to him. What more evident token could there have been of this than the manner in which she had received the accusation? Immediately she had bowed her head, and had, as it were, collapsed beneath the insult. But even though he had had two, three, four predecessors, by what right had he been indignant against her? Had she not displayed during their connection all the loyalty of which such amours are capable? Had she ever manifested so much as a trace of coquetry towards any one? Had she made him jealous for but a single hour, with jealousy such as women of the world, more abandoned in this than abandoned women themselves, do not hesitate to inflict upon a lover, in order to gratify the pettiest impulse of vanity, to please a man who has some claim or other to celebrity or who has merely been noticed by another woman. No, Helen had been perfect towards him. The consciousness of this pleased and at the same time tormented him, for, if she flattered his pride, she also rendered more present to him, the faded charm of a love which he had not been able to enjoy at the time when he dreaded its obligations.

But what he regretted in Helen, even more than her gracious tenderness, was her physical person. From the time that he had become her lover he had, contrary to all his principles, remained entirely faithful to her, and this fidelity increased in him the exactitude of the memory of the senses. He could again see in thought the room in the Rue de Stockholm, and on the pillow that refined head, its eyes laden with mysterious voluptuousness. Slight and scarcely observed details recurred to him: a certain fashion that she had of leaning her pretty face over him, the aroma which hung about her kisses and their special flavor.

A yearning then seized him, against which he employed the infallible remedy to which he was accustomed. He felt that he must place between Helen and himself bodily shapes that might afford his senses a pasture of beauty, bosoms fit to serve for the modelling of cups, sinking shoulders worthy



of statues, supple hips, slender legs, and skilful caresses. Such instruments of forgetfulness abound in first-class houses of pleasure. The young man used them on this occasion, as on others, even to excess, so that when Helen rang at the door in the Rue Lincoln, she had come to be almost as great a stranger to him as though he had never known her.

He was turning over the leaves of a book, lying rather than sitting in an easy chair, and waiting until it should be time to dress in order to rejoin some dinner companions at the club. He was in that condition of pleasing weariness which heartless pleasure always brings to men who are wise enough to ask nothing of women but the enjoyment of palpable beauty. Helen and the intrigue of the previous months were, so far as he was concerned, shrinking into a background that each day made more inaccessible than before. It was another chapter to be added to the others in the mournful romance of gallantry in the course of which his feelings had been exhausted without being expended.

Already, as he thought about it, he had ceased to feel anything more than a sick spot in his heart. He was sorry for having so greatly misunderstood Chazel, but a satisfied conscience softened this sorrow. Had he not unhesitatingly sacrificed to his friend's confidence all the pleasure that his intrigue might still have brought him? Accordingly, he experienced the most disagreeable of surprises when, after being informed by his servant that a lady wished to speak to him, he saw Helen. She had not taken the trouble to put on a veil. He perceived at a glance her wasted countenance, her discolored eyes, her bright and steady gaze, her bitter lips. Mechanically, he pushed an armchair towards her, which she declined.

"It is not worth while," she said, "what I have to say to you will not take long. I shall not take up much of your time."

"Well," he thought to himself, "another scene. It shall be the last."

The complete absence of physical desire resulting from his recent debauches made him singularly dry and hard. He reflected that it had been very stupid on his part not to close his door against her, and he forthwith determined to enter into no explanations, and to keep her at a distance by the employment of the most commonplace politeness.

"I feel quite put out," he said to her, just as though there had never been anything but the most official relations between them; "I ought to have called on you after my return, and then a dozen wretched trifles prevented me. You know



how it is when one is on the point of going away. I expect to be in London towards the end of the month."

"Do not trouble yourself to make excuses," Helen interrupted, shrugging her shoulders; "what is the use? Why should you have come? To avoid compromising me? I will dispense with such delicacy on your part. To tell me again that you do not love me, and have never loved me, and to see me suffer? You are not a monster. All that you had to tell me you told me. Do not be afraid," she added with a nervous smile, "it is not to resume our former conversation that I am here."

She paused as though the words that she was about to utter were already burning her lips, the lips parched by so many feverish nights. She had spoken in so bitter and withal so grave a voice that the young man felt a pang. On seeing her again he had expected a pleading scene, the eager appeal of a forsaken mistress who entreats for but a day of the old happiness, and the solemnity of Helen's accents heralded a prayerless, hopeless revelation, tidings such as to her appeared of tragic importance. Was she going to tell him that she was pregnant? Or had she in an hour of wildness confessed everything to her husband? She remained silent, and it was his turn to be impatient.

"Speak," he said, "I am listening to you."

"In that last conversation, which once more I have no wish to resume," she went on, "you told me that you were acquainted with my life. You even entered into particulars by mentioning a name, the name of Monsieur de Varades. You asserted that this man had been my lover."

"I told you what had been told to me," he said with emphasis.

"And you believed it?" she questioned.

"As people do believe such things," he returned; "you misunderstood me, or else I expressed myself badly, very badly." And he thought: "She is going to produce some letter or other from her pocket, witnessing to De Varades's deep respect for her." He recollected having written similar letters to former mistresses, to be shown to one having special privileges. "A foolish discussion," he sighed to himself, "but how is it to be avoided?"

"Well," she retorted with strange energy, "if you are told that now, you may believe it, and reply that you have it from a sure source." And looking at him with an air at once of triumph and of despair, she added: "I am Monsieur de Var-



ades's mistress, do you hear?" And she repeated: "I am Monsieur de Varades's mistress."

Armand listened to her repetition of these words by which she was inflicting dishonor upon herself, and his feeling was one rather of pain than of sorrow. It appeared to him as well piteous as insane that, impelled by some sickly appetite for drama and emotion, she should thus come and tell him of the renewal of her amour with her former lover. On the other hand, he had not, at the period of his first suspicions, been in possession of an absolute, indisputable assurance respecting the guilty nature of the relations between Helen and De Varades, and now she had come to denounce herself to him in so brutal a fashion that he could not help feeling a spasm of base jealousy; and he replied with involuntary abruptness:

"You are perfectly free; how do you think that concerns me? Unless," he added, cruelly, "I can be of use to you?"

"Don't play the wit," she went on more violently still. "You owe it to me to listen to me; the least that a man can do is to listen to the woman he has ruined. For you have ruined me; yes, you, and I wish you to know it. Ah! you thought that I was lying, that I was showing off to please you, when I told you that I had never had a lover before yourself; will you believe me now when I tell you in the same breath that I am today Monsieur de Varades's mistress, and that I was not so before? I have met him again and I have given myself to him. Do not ask me why, but it is a fact. You see that I am not seeking to play a part, that I am not afraid of your contempt, that I have not come to renew relations with you; but it is equally true that I have degraded and polluted all that is in me. And when I gave myself to you I was so pure! I had nothing, nothing on my conscience! I had kept myself for you alone, as though I had known that I was one day to meet you. Ah! that is what I want you to know. A woman who accuses herself as I am doing now has nothing left to be careful about, has she? Why should I lie to you now? Tell me, why? You will be forced to believe me, and you will say to yourself: 'I was her first love; she did not deny herself because she loved me. She loved me as man dreams of being loved, with her whole heart, her whole being, and not in the present merely, but in the past. And see what I have made of the woman who loved me thus—a creature who has ceased to believe in anything or respect anything, who has taken a fresh lover in caprice, who will take a second and a third—a ruined woman.' Yes, once more, it is you who have ruined me, and I want, I want you to know it, and it will be my re-



venge that you will never more be able to doubt it. Ruined! Ruined! You have ruined me—you! you! you!"

She had hurled forth these words in a panting voice, drawing closer to Armand as she went on in a convulsion of frenzy, and in the tone of her voice, in her looks, in the whole of her agitated person, there was that levelling power of truth against which doubt in vain tries to stand. The kind of frightful, dishonoring proof of her former purity resting upon the cynical avowal of her present infamy became irrefutable through the evident exaltation which possessed her and which did not suffer her to conceal anything in her thoughts. But what rendered this reasoning still more decisive to the man listening to the miserable confession with a blending of astonishment and terror, was the sudden crisis of emotion wrought in her after she had spoken. Passion, sated by this frantic utterance, suddenly gave way to despair. All at once she looked at Armand with eyes in which the flush of indignation was drowned in tears, and uttering a shriek she sank to the floor.

There, stretched at length, she began to moan. It was a slow, continuous sob, the dull, uniform wail of a dying creature. It came up, up to Armand, and this supreme wail gathered into itself the echoes of all the wails that she had stifled, of all the sighs that had been checked on the margin of her heart. It was the throes of many days breathed forth in a last appeal. If on coming into contact with Alfred's distress, Armand had experienced an irresistible feeling of sorrowful humanity, how much the more and with how much greater power was he visited with this feeling now, on coming into contact with the distress of the woman lying thus on the ground? The frail and potent tie which had united him to this vanquished being, the unconquerable tie of mutual voluptuousness, suddenly bound him to her anew. He believed that he had forgotten her, and here, beneath the two-fold influence of unconscious jealousy and physical pity, he was again finding within himself feelings of which he had deemed himself no longer capable. A passionate impulse prompted him to fling himself upon his knees, and he strove to raise her as though she had been his mistress still.

"Helen," he said, "recover yourself. In pity to me do not weep in this way. Stand up."

She obeyed, and slowly turned towards him her swimming eyes and parted lips. An expression of unspeakable gratitude passed across her mournful countenance. He seated her in



an armchair, placing himself at her feet to wipe away her tears. Then she was able to speak again.

"Ah!" she said, "all is over—over! Ah! never again—! You do not know, Armand, how I loved you, how I love you. Ah! why have I done what I did? You see, I was like a madwoman. I could do nothing, I could do nothing but love you. You were my whole life, my whole faith, all that to me was noble and good. And then, suddenly, it all failed me! I have suffered so greatly! I could always hear you saying those frightful words to me. It was like a knife turning every moment in my heart. I wanted to forget you, to forget myself, to destroy everything, unhappy woman! What have I done? Why did I not come to entreat you to take me back again, to believe in me. I should have found words to convince you. Now, all is over. Do not touch me; I loathe myself."

And she freed herself and repulsed him. He perceived that she had just seen the other, her new lover. Then she went on passionately:

"No! tormenter! tormenter! It is your fault. Yes, it is you who flung me there. Had you any right to treat me so? Answer. What wrong had I done you? When had I deceived you? Why did you doubt me? No, my love. It is you who are so good, so kind, whom I love so much. Forgive me! Forgive me! Grief is killing me!"

Thus she lamented, revealing by the reciprocation of her alternately reviling and loving utterances the incoherence of the feelings whose tempest was shaking her. Then came relief from this frenzy, and she said:

"Let me weep a little. It eases me. Do not speak to me. Presently."

And he left her side. How powerless he felt in presence of this outbreak of despair. He began to pace backwards and forwards in the room, which was being invaded by the melancholy of the twilight; and Helen's sobbing had grown quite humble now, quite low, almost like that of a little girl. Instead of the frantic rebellion that there had been at first, there was a long sigh, ceaselessly broken and ceaselessly resumed, which completed the young man's perturbation. He no longer tried to comfort her, and he tried no more to contest the cruel evidence that had become fixed within him, never more to leave him. Pity for such agony, shivering horror at such irretrievable pollution, and the sight of the cruel injustice which he had committed, blended together to torture him. But what more than all beside overwhelmed him, and laid upon his heart a weight which he could feel would hence-



forward be irremovable, was the feeling of his own terrible responsibility for the fate of this woman. What! it was through knowing him and loving him that the unhappy woman had sunk so low! Helen's instinct had not deceived her. He could doubt no longer. He believed her, and in all respects. He believed that she had really loved him. He believed that before meeting him she had been pure. He believed that frenzy at an iniquitous desertion had led her so far astray as to throw her into the arms of another, and that he, Armand, was the cause, the sole cause, of it all. He continued to walk up and down, and every time that he turned to retrace his steps he could see between the dimly lighted windows that sunken form, that face standing out so pale against the background of shadow! What had become of his indifference before Helen's entrance? And his power of negation, what had he done with it? People do not dispute with a death rattle, and he had been present at the death of a soul. It was too true that she had asked for nothing and wished for nothing, unless that he should see her heart laid bare; he had seen it, he saw it still and the blood that flowed from the wound inflicted by himself. How long did they continue thus without speaking, he still walking and she still weeping? In the end he went up to her, took her hand with a shudder at feeling this soft, damp, cold hand, raised it to his lips, and let fall upon it the first tears that he had shed for years. In the depths of the abyss of despair in which she was lying, she could still find pity for her tormentor's tears. "Do not weep," she said to him, and drawing him to her, she passionately covered his face with kisses. He could feel burning lips traverse his eyes, his brow, his mouth. Then she disengaged herself from him. She rose. Once again had she just seen the other.

"Ah," she exclaimed, in anguish, "I cannot even comfort you now. Good-bye, good-bye," she repeated, "and this time it is good-bye for ever."

She passed her hands over the young man's hair, and over his face, as though to convince herself of the real existence of the countenance she had loved so dearly, and then she broke away, hastening towards the door.

"Where are you going?" he asked her.

"I am fleeing from you," she said wildly, and already she was out of the room.

The outer door had closed after her and he had not found energy enough to follow her. He remained standing on the spot where she had left him, as though he had been smitten with a stroke of paralysis. A terrible dread suddenly sent an



icy shiver through his whole body. What if Helen in the frenzy of her despair had fled from his house in order to kill herself? For a moment he had before his eyes a horrible hallucination—the shadow of a quay, the great, dim, moving sheet of river, and a woman's body rolled along in the icy water. In his turn he rushed away. He descended the staircase four steps at a time. On the footpath there was a woman going in the direction of the Champs Élysées. He hurried after her. It was not she. He reached the Avenue, which was filled with a swarm of passengers and vehicles. How could he find her in such a crowd? How guess in what direction the unhappy woman had fled. A drizzling rain was falling. He hailed several cabs in vain, and not until he had reached the crossways could he stop one. He gave the driver the address in the Rue de La Rochefoucauld, and on the way he, too, knew an anguish driven to the point of madness. But he was already at the foot of the street and in front of the little house. It was with a trembling of his entire heart that he drew the bell at the door, and asked the servant whether Madame Chazel had come in. On hearing the man's affirmative reply he nearly fell to the ground in the excess of his emotion. And forthwith—for the play of the passions constantly causes us to conflict with these countless trifles of existence—he felt like a fool in the presence of the man, who stood aside to let him pass. How could he endure Helen's presence at that moment, or, more than all, Alfred's? He stammered out a sentence alleging that he had forgotten a piece of business, and saying that he would return in the evening. He threw himself again into his cab.

"The thought of her son had saved her!" he said to himself. "I am at least not a murderer!"



## CHAPTER X

A FEW days after this scene, Armand sent Chazel a letter dated from London in which he made his excuses for not shaking hands with his friends before his final departure. To set foot again in the little house in the Rue de La Rochefoucauld, to see again the two beings whose lives he had broken, but who both had nevertheless only words of trust or forgiveness for him, to be present once more at those moral throes whose every sigh echoed in intolerable fashion to the very depths of his soul—this effort had been beyond his actual energy. He had said to himself when thinking on the one hand of Alfred's probable melancholy, and on the other, of Helen and of the life that she would lead amid such a bankruptcy of all modesty and feeling:

"It is horrible, but I cannot help it. I must forget it."

And to put petty facts, in accordance with one of his favorite maxims, between himself and his grief, he had hastened his journey to England. During the years of his cruelly idle and empty life, he had done his best to beguile weariness by cosmopolitan wanderings. He had thus formed three or four social centres for himself through Europe. In London, especially, he had a life ready made, rooms in Bolton Street, off Piccadilly, two clubs in which to find hospitality, and twenty houses in which to be received as a friend. But this year, when settled as usual in the three furnished apartments reserved for him, he felt incapable of entering immediately upon the whirl of society. "I will leave my cards in a few days," he said to himself.

The few days passed by, and he had the same repugnance to seeing his acquaintances again. He allowed a week to glide away in this manner, two weeks, three, and he continued to experience an unconquerable aversion to all conversation and all friendly meeting, to all things and all persons. He went so far as to walk only in the evening, the more surely to evade the human face. If he went out in daylight, it was to take one of those two-wheeled cabs, the driver of which is



perched high up behind, and the horse in which trots so quickly.

Without an object, he had himself driven at random through the interminable streets of the huge city. Small, dark houses succeeded to small, dark houses, squares with railings and miserable trees, open spaces with discolored statues, and boundless parks with grass browsed on by flocks, opened up at distant intervals. Over the monstrous ant hill extended the vault of a sooty sky. Sometimes this sky was wholly hidden by a yellow fog; at other times the mist broke in pelting rain, or else there was a dim, cold azure in which coal dust seemed to be floating. A population was hurrying along these streets, but Armand did not recognize a single face, and he would go on thus for whole hours, alone with his thoughts as when he awoke, and dressed, and ate—with that thought which was always present and was always similar to itself.

And what was it that was shown him by this fixed and torturing thought? Unceasingly, unceasingly, Helen, and the terrible confession during their last interview showed itself in all its details, and he could see the act which she had avowed in terms so pitilessly precise and clear. She was evoked before him in the arms of De Varades; for he told himself that after the first crisis of despair she must have relapsed again, and the vision inflicted upon him a feeling which he again compared to a weight upon his heart, crushing it with sadness.

This dull weight had descended upon it on the day when she had lamented so tragically in the drawing room in the Rue Lincoln. And, as on that occasion, he endured an unbearable oppression in knowing himself to be the cause of this woman's misery. After the present intrigue with De Varades, doubtless she would have others. Is there ever a check on that slippery incline which leads from the second lover to the tenth? When the habit and power of self-respect, that unique principle of all dignity, has been lost, what dike can be opposed to the invading flood of temptation and curiosity? Helen was beautiful and would be courted. Her successive falls occurred by anticipation now beneath his eyes, he could do nothing to prevent them, and it was he, as she had exclaimed through her tears, it was he who had ruined her.

In presence of the image of this woman's life, he felt as though set over against a being for whom he had poured out poison with his own hands. The mortal discomposure of the face, the cold sweat, the terrible convulsions, how could these be prevented when the fatal drug was flowing in her blood?



The venom of adultery with which he had infected this creature would accomplish its work of destruction. What excuse had he for having done this? None, seeing that he had taken her without loving her. Yes, if only he had loved her, if he had repaid her a little happiness in exchange for the gift of her person!

But to the inevitable humiliation of guilt he had united another ground of humiliation, namely, the most cruel disillusion. Of a child rich in hopes, and led astray by a generous seeking after the most elevated feelings, what had he made? One undeceived and in quest of forgetfulness. What would she be in a year, and then in another year, and in yet another? He repeated the celebrated phrase: "*All the perfumes of Arabia will not sweeten this little hand.*" And he bent beneath the weight of remorse, a weight so heavy, ah! so cruelly heavy, that he was rendered incapable of any experience save that overwhelming, continuous crushing beneath the thought of the act committed.

"What an absurd machine man is," he thought, "and what contemptible weakness this distress! To justify such remorse I should of necessity be guilty, that is to say, responsible and free. Is not freedom an empty word, as also in consequence good and evil, virtue and vice?"

He had thought much on these questions in his youth, and had allowed as accurate the chief modern arguments against the freedom of the will. He studied himself that, by applying them to his own case, he might destroy the moral misery that affected him.

"What am I?" he went on; "the product of a certain heredity placed in a certain environment. The circumstances once given, I could not but feel as I felt, think as I thought, desire as I desired."

And he decomposed his own personality into its elements, as he had done only too often in his periods of "Hamletism," as he called his analytic crises of inward paralysis. He recognized the first beginning of his egotism in the absence of family life; he took cognizance of the fact that college life had too early polluted his imagination, and the sight of the slaughter in the civil war too early awakened his misanthropy. He could see himself losing his religious faith by precocious reading, becoming uninterested in all ambition for lack of a cause in which he could believe, and because he was rich enough to live without a profession. Then he watched the long, useless, and fatal series of his love experiences unfold itself down to the hour when he had met Madame Chazel.



"How could I have judged of her otherwise than I did?" he went on. "She in a measure threw herself at my head. Could I understand that this was the madness of a romantic, irrational, but sincere nature? I thought she was a woman like the rest. I thought so, and it was inevitable that I should think so."

He thrust the words expressively of necessity—"it was inevitable"—into his heart, like a lever wherewith he might raise the weight of his remorse, but the weight continued there still. His striving was in vain; something within him that was stronger than himself constrained him to consider himself the author of this woman's ruin.

Then he exerted himself to devise some other process of alleviation. He reverted in imagination to all the halting places in their mutual intrigue, and he passed along this road of perdition seeking for the crossways, the moments when he might have entered and caused her to enter upon a different route. Why during the first few weeks of the Chazels' stay in Paris had he, when walking with Helen, taken pains to assume a sentimental attitude towards her? That he might appeal to her thoughts and influence them to curiosity. Could he have helped it? "No," he replied, angrily; "seduction is a part of my nature, as the chase is of the nature of a greyhound."

A moment had come when he had perceived that Helen was beginning to love him. Could he then have withdrawn himself from her life? Yes, if he had believed himself to be her first love. But does a man command himself to believe this or that, to think in one way or another? What would he not now have given to judge of Helen as he formerly did, and this was impossible just as it had been impossible that he should judge of her during that period as he did now!

On the night before their first secret interview, he could again see himself hesitating and on the point of writing her a truthful letter in order to break with her before the irreparable hour had come. But could he have prevented such or such an image from beleaguering his thought and restraining his pen?

During the few months of their union he had not loved her, and his lack of feeling had martyred her! But is emotion to be commanded, and tenderness? If he had broken brutally with her, this was a further effect of the potency of ideas over the human will. The perception within him of his friend's sorrow had been stronger than that of his mistress's. He grasped as through a magnifying glass the internal mechanism of which



his actions had been a visible sign, the final result; he buried himself in this minute examination of his past.

It was all in vain. The weight of his remorse was still there. He succeeded in convincing his intellect, and the conviction did not relieve his heart. His conscience, as the vulgar phrase has it, was tormenting him. But what is conscience other than an illusion? A stone that has been thrown, and that feels itself rolling without even knowing that a hand has thrown it, might also believe itself to be the cause of its own motion. Its conscience might reproach it for the crushing of the grass-blades in its path. Remorse might start up in it.

"If I had a spectre before my eyes in consequence of an hallucination," Armand concluded, "should I place credence in apparitions? I should tell myself that I saw a spectre, an empty form, that the condition of my bodily organs inflicted the obsession upon me, and that would be all. Let me suffer from my spectre if it must be so, but let me not believe in it."

Granted! Good, evil, remorse, conscience, freedom—all so many unreal apparitions, so many bodiless shadows! But there was indisputable reality in the ruin of a soul, and in the fact that a dreadful destiny had made him the instrument of its ruin. A ruined soul? There are then a life and a death of souls, something that fosters them and something that destroys them, after the manner of spiritual damnation and salvation. Then he thought of Helen's soul before the final disaster, all the episodes of their common past recurred simultaneously to him, and he interpreted and understood them.

Now that he knew the truth concerning her, and the extent to which he had misjudged her, the pettiest facts in that past were possessed of unlooked-for significance. The mute moments of his sad sweetheart, her melancholy, her effusiveness, showed to him in turn, and each memory revealed to him at once his own ingratitude and the strength of the feeling that he had inspired. How living was then that woman's soul! How noble even in guilt! What richness in its sensibility! What fullness in its emotions! What depth in its sorrow, and what magnificence in its striving after an inaccessible happiness. And now, in the same soul, what ineffaceable pollution!

His reflections turned upon Alfred, and he recalled his last conversation with the man he had so unworthily deceived. He too possessed a living soul whence gushed, as from kindly springs, tenderness and loyalty, all the forces of belief and love. Then Armand directed his thought to himself: "Ah, it is I," he said, "I who have the dead soul."

He retraced the course of his youth. He saw himself young



and incapable of devoting his activity to an ideal faith, a libertine incapable of steadying his heart upon a passion—powerless for self-surrender, belief, love! He went over the fatal list which had been drawn up certainly no less by his vanity as a seducer than by his curiosity as a debauchee. He sought again the names and countenances of the women who had given themselves to him, from those who had been his in rooms of infamy, where the mirrors of alcove and ceiling multiply the whiteness of naked charms, to those whom he had possessed in modesty and who required that endearments should be shrouded in the shadow of lowered curtains. What had he made of the first and of the second, of the impassioned and of the venal, of the romantic and of the depraved, of little Aline and of Juliet, of Madame de Rugle and of Helen? Instruments of sensation and nothing more. Could he remember a single one to whom he had been good and helpful, and who was the better for having known him? The prostitutes he had caused to commit an act of prostitution among a thousand others. The adulteresses had lied once more for him. His soul had not only been dead; it had spread around it the infection of its own essential death. With his keen intellect, his rare imagination, and all the implements of superiority that fortune had placed in his hands, what work had he been accomplishing since his youth? And all was to end in the moral assassination of a woman who had believed in him!

Then the weight increased in heaviness and he strove anew.

“Life and death of the soul! Words! Words! A trifling cerebral alteration and the soul is changed. The microscope would reveal the slight disposition of cells which has it that I have never loved. But why,” he added, “does this soul live by means of certain ideas and die through others? Why? I do not know, and there are many other things that I do not know. I talk of the brain. What is the brain? It is matter. And what is matter? No one knows, no one understands. What is the use of asking: Why this or why that? There is but one question: Why anything? And the only thing we really know is that we shall never be able to answer that question.”

He perceived the gulf of mystery, the abyss of the unknowable which science shows to be at the basis of all thought and of all existence. Beneath the problem of his own particular destiny, he touched upon the problem of all destiny, and his moral pain was so intense that he felt a temptation to interpret, in a consolatory sense, the mystery wherein he felt drowned. Why should not the key to this enigma of life, undecipherable by reason according to reason's own avowal, be



one of salvation, a key that should redeem the universal distress here below, that should restore life to dead souls such as his own soul, and deep peace to tortured consciences such as his own conscience? Why should there not be a heart like to our own hearts and capable of pitying us at the centre of that nature which has nevertheless produced us, us with our bitter or tender manner of feeling, with our appetite for the ideal and our infirmities, with our greatness and our depravity?

"But then," he reflected, "God would exist. I might throw myself upon my knees now in this hour of suffering, and say, 'Our Father, which art in heaven.' Our Father!"

When the young man had reached this stage in his reasonings, tears rose to his eyes. He who had known neither father nor mother was caused unspeakable emotion by this single phrase of the sublime prayer.

Then he immediately grew steady again. Thoughts came to him that were stronger than such mystic effusion. He was disputing with his intellect against his heart, and his intellect was always victorious. The objections to a belief in God, drawn from the existence of evil, took shape before him. How reconcile a Father's goodness with that law of reversion which wills it that the sins of some shall fall ceaselessly upon others? Of Helen and himself, which was guilty? Himself. Which of the two had committed a crime in love? Himself, by seducing this woman without loving her, solely to satisfy a whim of pride, weariness and sensuality. Who was punished? Helen. Of the latter and Alfred, who was guilty? Helen. Who suffered? Alfred. Thus the sin of each, if there be sin, bears its poisonous fruit in the soul of another, and the same solidarity governs all the relations of men among themselves. The sons atone for the fathers, the just for the wicked, the innocent for the guilty! Ah, how is it possible, in presence of this uninterrupted transmission of misery, to believe in the existence of a principle of justice and goodness in that obscurity beyond the day?

"No," said Armand to himself, "just as errors are produced by the combined necessities of circumstances and temperaments, so are the consequences of these acts distributed at random—at least on earth."

The mystic effusion then returned: "On earth? Can there be then another world whereof this is but the symbol or the preparation? But how can any link subsist between this and that? How can any help come in hours of distress? Ah, if He were a heavenly Father, would not all suffering be in his sight a prayer?"



Through the tumult of all these contradictory thoughts, the unhappy man perceived that grand, unique problem of human life which religion alone can solve, that of knowing whether beyond our limited days, our brief sensations, our fleeting actions, there be something which does not pass away, and which can satisfy our hunger and thirst for the infinite. Armand was perhaps to become religious again some day; at the present moment he was not so, and he answered himself:

"If there be nothing, why this terrible remorse? If there be something, why am I unable either to conceive it with my intellect or to feel it with my heart? How can I put an end to this unbearable anguish? How raise the weight that is stifling me?"

The principal incidents during these gloomy days were some letters from Alfred, filled with affection and with complaints about his wife's health, the sadness of his home, his anxieties for the future. Helen therefore continued to be unhappy.

"Ah!" thought Armand, "it is possible that the words 'good' and 'evil,' 'soul' and 'God,' have no kind of meaning. For thousands of years philosophers have been disputing inconclusively about them, and religions have been succeeding to one another and crumbling away. I have measured the impotence of reason and I have not faith. But there is need neither of reason nor of faith to know whether human misery exists, and to know that we ought to do everything to avoid being the cause of this misery."

We ought! As though we were free! But free or not, let us be sensible of this misery and pity it! When the young man entered upon the new path of pity, he experienced, not absolute relief from his remorse, but a sort of despairing tenderness which at last moistened his heart. He pictured Helen to himself when quite a little girl in a past such as her confidences had revealed to him, and he pitied her for her sad childhood and her oppressed youth. He pitied her for her marriage and for the moral divorce which had separated her from Alfred. He pitied her for having known himself, Armand, for the words that he had uttered to her and which she had believed, for the kisses which he had asked of her and which she had given him. But especially for that second fall, for that frenzy which had thrown her into the arms of Varades did he passionately pity her, and for all the errors into which this first error would draw her. He pitied her for her birth, for her existence, for her subjection to an unconquerable fate!

He was now more sensible of her life than he had been



in the days when she had been his, lost in emotion on his breast. By a strange kind of soul-transposition he suffered from the sorrows of a mistress whose joys he had been unable to share. He abode in thought within that sick heart, and the feeling of pity became so strong and full that it overflowed from him upon all life.

When in the evening he walked along the streets and reached the sinister corners of the Haymarket and Regent Street, the sight of the girls of different nationalities wandering there in all weathers moved him to the bottom of his soul. They walked in their dark toilets and accosted the passers-by in every idiom. There were tall, heavy Germans, delicate Frenchwomen, and Englishwomen recognizable by faces that had often retained an expression of purity. The majority were old, with fierce gleaming in their gaze. What lamentable adventures—criminal ones, perhaps—had cast these foreigners, far from their native lands and beneath an ever gloomy sky, upon the pavement of these streets, pitilessly traversed by the busy work of commerce? And the young, with profiles as of angels—for there were some such—how melancholy to see them pushing open the bar-doors, and drinking large glasses of brandy at a draught! They came out with a little color on their cheeks and resumed their pilgrimage of infamy, warmed by the draught of alcohol against the rude climate, the sudden showers, the penetrating fog.

Armand watched them going and coming, accosting this man, abusing that, and talking among themselves. There was a whole populace of these lost ones passing through the streets. Yes, lost ones, for nothing can save them any more than the prostitutes of luxury who go in pursuit of men with diamonds and horses, or the adulteresses, those victims of the search for new sensations. Nothing can save them, for there is nothing that can save! Sometimes, however, the young man chanced to pass in front of temples and to remember that thousands of beings believe in a Saviour.

"But if I do not believe in Him," he asked himself, "is it my fault? A true Saviour would be one who saved even the incredulous, even the renegades, even the rebellious, even those who do not repent, seeing that they are most to be pitied! No, there is no redemption, and Christ has died in vain!"

Then he perceived life as the work of blind and destructive necessity, of an evil force impelling creatures to ruin one another. Prostitution below, adultery above, such are the products of the noblest of human feelings—love. Civilization



appeared to him as a huge orgy where the dishes are more numerous, the wines more heating, the guests a larger crowd; but on what mystic plate will the bread of ransom be found by those hungering for forgiveness? Meanwhile the orgy hums and roars, the women offer the fruit of their red lips, a colossal hymn of mirth encompasses the intoxication, every moment one of those present rolls beneath the table, thunder-smitten by death who takes his victims at random; he is so quickly replaced by another that his disappearance is not even noticed, and joy plays on every brow and laughs in every eye. Joy? Yes, provided that no thought be given to one's own distress, and further that one's own misery be endured with courage; but the misery of another—when can we find courage to endure that when we are ourselves its cause? And suddenly his visions would fade away, and his theories and dreamings, to give place to the sole image of Helen in agony, or else of Helen depraved, and of these two images Armand could not have told which tortured his thought the most.

"Can I be in love with her?" he asked himself one morning as he was rising, "and is what I am taking for remorse simply love?"

He found it impossible to answer this question. When a man loves, he conceives happiness as coming from the woman he loves, and how could he imagine a single minute of happiness as coming from Helen now? He might return to Paris, try to renew relations with her, carry her off, take her to a land where everything should be strange to them, and where they might forget! He felt that the worst follies committed for her would remove nothing of his present anguish. Therefore he did not love her.

But then, why this cruel throbbing of the heart at the mere thought of the act to which despair had led her? Why this continual anxiety which caused him at the sight of Chazel's letters to pause with trembling hand before opening them, as though he were about to read some fresh intrigue that had been at last discovered by the unhappy man? Why was he unable to take a book, or sit down to table, or go out, or come in, without having the spectre of this woman beside him. Yet he had not killed her, he had not shed her blood with his hands. Why this unwearied recurrence to their mutual relations with the everlasting reflection as a despairing background: "If I had known?" If he had known the worth of what she gave him when she was giving it to him, if he had felt as he was feeling now when she used to come and



rest so tenderly, so sincerely, upon his heart, if he had had that in his heart towards her which was in it now, then—then he would have loved her—he would have loved her!

That impotence to arrive at complete emotion, the martyrdom of egotism to which he had been a victim, his lack of feeling, his barren rancor, his vexation of spirit in solitude and distress, all his moral miseries would have been brought to an end if he had had a simpler heart, if he had understood, if he had believed! He believed in her now, and it was too late. He understood her when she had ceased to be pure. He loved her when she had endured pollution from the endearments of another. He was discovering that he had passed by the side of happiness, now that the enchanted palace which he had traversed without seeing it was closed to him for ever. He was beginning to cherish her, like one dead to whom he could never speak more. But one that is dead remains sheltered from pollutions, and Helen? "All the perfumes of Arabia," he repeated, rubbing his hand like the blood-stained queen. The weight was again on his heart. How could he ever remove it?

But what if this remorse were merely a mirage fostered by absence? When children are afraid of a dim form at night, what remedy does their father adopt? He leads them to the object of their terror, and by touching it cures their panic. What if he, too, tried this remedy? What if he saw Helen again, and with his own eyes measured the evil that he had wrought her? "It is the only step that is left to try," he said to himself one day, and he abruptly resolved to return to Paris. He had spent more than six weeks in preying thus upon his heart.



## CHAPTER XI

WHAT a charming and coquettish summer-like Paris Armand passed through in going from the Rue Lincoln to the Rue de La Rochefoucauld on the day after his return! It was two o'clock; a slight breeze was quivering among the green leaves of the trees in the Champs Élysées, and the carriages were driving gaily along. There was a light such as makes all women pretty, but he had darkness within.

His memories rose from the pavement to form his melancholy escort, and especially those of that cold winter night when he had passed on foot through the same avenue on the eve of their first secret meeting. An entire year had not passed away since then. How swift is time, and how it carries away chances of happiness with it! Certainly, he had been mournful even to death on that night, but not with the same sadness as today, and yet he recognized that today's sadness was of higher worth than the other. He would no longer act as he had done. Had, then, his remorse purified while torturing him? Is there, then, a source of ennoblement in sorrow? But of what use is this nobleness if it only serves to show what a criminal use we have made of our powers?

He passed in front of the Marché de la Madeleine, and inhaled on the warm wind the aroma of the bouquets and plants. He recollected that the previous winter he used to bring violets to his mistress. On each occasion she used to place one of these violets between the leaves of some favorite book. There was one that was quite filled with these love relics, one that she had lent one day with these words written in her own handwriting on the first page: "Take care of my little flowers." It was a childlike and charming token of the tender carefulness which she bestowed upon the smallest detail of their mutual romance! And what had he made of this passionate tenderness with which he had inspired her but a means of perdition?

At last he was in front of the door of the little house. He rang, and had scarcely entered the narrow courtyard when



a joyful voice cried: "Monsieur de Querne! Monsieur de Querne!" and little Henry Chazel, who was making ready to go out with his nurse, ran up to him to welcome him. The child's reception increased still more the melancholy of his return. Armand was pained by encountering the brightness of affection in the eyes of the son of the woman whom he had tortured and the man whom he had betrayed.

"Is your father at home?" he asked.

"He's gone out," replied Henry; "but mamma's at home. She has been very ill while you were away."

"And now?"

"She is better," said the little boy.

His nurse was already leading him away, and De Querne passed into the narrow entrance hall, and climbed the red-carpeted wooden staircase that led to Helen's drawing room. The aspect of things had not altered—those things which had seen him so carefully plan and commit the crime in love for which he had during the past two months been going through a terrible expiation! How light had been his foot in clearing the low steps of this staircase in the house of a friend of his childhood, when on his way to outrage that friend! Whither without our knowledge do our footsteps lead us?

He was shown into the drawing room where, like a robber, he had given his mistress so many kisses as soon as the master of the house was gone. Why had these actions left him indifferent at the time, and why did the sick place of his sensibility bleed so cruelly for them today? The servant had uttered his name when opening the door. Helen, who was seated near the window, and working, raised her head, laying her work upon her knees. He saw her face, which was still more worn than on the day of their last interview, and her features became discomposed as though she were going to be ill. Suddenly he perceived the ravages that grief had wrought: the eyes were hollow, the lips drawn, the chin wasted, and—a detail which touched him more than anything else—her gray dress, a dress which he had known the previous summer, lay on the shoulders in folds that witnessed to the decline of the whole of her body.

She did not say a word to him, and he, too, remained for a moment without speaking. Mechanically he sought with his eyes for the low armchair which he used formerly to wheel beside her, in order to talk the better with her. This armchair had disappeared, as well as the couch which formerly had stood crosswise at the corner of the fireplace. They had spent so many intimate evenings together, seated,



she on the couch and he in the easy chair! It was no doubt for the purpose of forgetting those scenes of tenderness that the deserted woman had banished these pieces of furniture from her home in this room. If he had known the true reason of the change!

He seated himself on a chair beside her, and taking her hand said to her:

"I have come to ask you to forgive me."

She withdrew that little hand whose almost convulsive trembling he had felt. She looked at him with eyes of singular depth. The dark point of the pupil dilated strangely. Then in a low, almost stifled voice she replied:

"It is not for me to forgive you. If you have made me unhappy, it was never your fault. Ah!" she went on, "I am greatly changed. I have been ill, very ill, but I wished for my son's sake, and for yours also, that you might not have that upon your conscience. I have thought so much of you, during so many feverish nights! No, it was not your fault if you were unable to believe me. Heavens! I have greatly pitied you!"

He listened with infinite gratitude to these words of charity coming from lips which his injustice had wrung so many sobs. For a moment this forgiveness coming to him from his victim melted to tenderness the weight of remorse, the alleviation of which he had so long sought in vain, and he said to her in tones of deep emotion:

"What suffering I have caused you!"

"Do not reproach yourself for it," she said, with that angelic mildness which caused in him so strange a feeling at once of sadness and of consolation—of sadness, for this mildness betokened so great a shattering, of consolation, for the balm of this pity penetrated to the most secret recesses of his wounded heart—"Yes," she went on, shaking her head, "it is this suffering that has saved me, and it is through it that I have judged my life. When we parted in the way you know, I returned here nearly mad, I had to take to my bed for many days, and unceasingly I found the eyes of the man I had deceived fixed upon me with devotion and sadness! By what I suffered, I understood the suffering that I had caused and the evil that I had spread around me. The shame into which I had fallen appeared to me, and in the presence of death I inwardly vowed to make every endeavor to become once more a virtuous woman."

She paused; he saw clearly that she wished to speak to him of the other, to tell him that that man had not been



received at her house again; but was not her silence after the last sentence sufficiently eloquent?

"And then," she resumed, "that was again for your sake. To cause you that remorse for having ruined me—ah! the distraction caused by the injustice could alone have impelled me to such unworthy revenge. But I had seen you weep. I thought to myself: He will return to me some day if he is suffering, and if he be not suffering, why cause him to suffer? But no, he will return to me, and I will tell him to live in peace. There is now nothing in my life but my duty towards my son and his father, and you must know that I found strength for this resolve only in the remnant of my affection for you. But I have perhaps the right to ask you for a promise in exchange for what I have given you."

She added in a deep tone:

"In memory of me, for we must see each other no more, say that you will never trample upon a heart, that you will respect feeling wherever you may find it."

He was silent. These last words, in revealing to him the transformation wrought in this soul by its martyrdom, reassured him concerning the terrible anxiety of those cruel weeks in London. After perceiving all the ruin that may be multiplied by egotistical and mistrustful injustice, he felt the supreme beneficence of pity. It was through having pity for her lover's remorse, pity for her husband's love, pity for her son's future, that Helen had been arrested in the fatal path. It was from pity that she was blotting out all their sad and gloomy past. It was further from pity for her husband and for her son that she might perhaps find means to live a life of reparation if only he, Armand, pitied and assisted her.

Thus, the principle of salvation which he had failed to obtain from impotent reason, and which the dogmas of faith had not given him, he now met with in that virtue of charity which foregoes all demonstrations and all revelations—though is it not itself the abiding and supreme revelation? And he felt that something had sprung up within him through which he might always find reasons for living and acting—the religion of human suffering.



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