Monsieur, Madame, and Bébé — Complete

Gustave Droz



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MONSIEUR, MADAME AND BEBE

By Gustave Droz

Antoine-Gustave Droz was born in Paris, June 9, 1832. He was the son of Jules-Antoine Droz, a celebrated French sculptor, and grand son of Jean Pierre Droz, master of the mint and medalist under the Directoire. The family is of Swiss origin. Gustave entered L'Ecole des Beaux Arts and became quite a noted artist, coming out in the Salon of 1857 with the painting 'L'Obole de Cesar'. He also exhibited a little later various 'tableaux de genre': 'Buffet de chemin de fer' (1863), 'A la Sacristie' and 'Un Succes de Salon' (1864), 'Monsieur le Cure, vous avez Raison' and 'Un Froid Sec' (1865).

Toward this period, however, he abandoned the art of painting and launched on the career of an author, contributing under the name of Gustave Z.... to 'La Vie Parisienne'. His articles found great favor, he showed himself an exquisite raconteur, a sharp observer of intimate family life, and a most penetrating analyst. The very gallant sketches, later reunited in 'Monsieur, Madame, et Bebe' (1866), and crowned by the Academy, have gone through many editions. 'Entre nous' (1867) and 'Une Femme genante', are written in the same humorous strain, and procured him many admirers by the vivacious and sparkling representations of bachelor and connubial life. However, Droz knows very well where to draw the line, and has formally disavowed a lascivious novel published in Belgium—'Un Ete a la campagne', often, but erroneously, attributed to him.

It seems that Gustave Droz later joined the pessimistic camp. His works, at least, indicate other qualities than those which gained for him the favor of the reading public. He becomes a more ingenious romancer, a more delicate psychologist. If some of his sketches are realistic, we must consider that realism is not intended ‘pour les jeunes filles du pensiannat’.

Beside the works mentioned in the above text, Gustave Droz wrote: ‘Le Cahier bleu de Mademoiselle Cibot (1868), ‘Auteur d’une Source (1869), ‘Un Paquet de Lettres’ (1870), ‘Babolain’ (1872), ‘Les Etangs’ (1875), ‘Tristesses et Sourires (1883), and L’Enfant (1884).

He died in Paris, October 22, 1895.

CAMILLE DOUCET
de l’Academie Francaise.

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BOOK 1.

CHAPTER I. MY FIRST SUPPER PARTY

The devil take me if I can remember her name, notwithstanding I dearly loved her, the charming girl!

It is strange how rich we find ourselves when we rummage in old drawers; how many forgotten sighs, how many pretty little trinkets, broken, old-fashioned, and dusty, we come across. But no matter. I was now eighteen, and, upon my honor, very unsuspecting. It was in the arms of that dear—I have her name at the tip of my tongue, it ended in "ine"—it was in her arms, the dear child, that I murmured my first words of love, while I was close to her rounded shoulder, which had a pretty little mole, where I imprinted my first kiss. I adored her, and she returned my affection.

I really think I should have married her, and that cheerfully, I can assure you, if it had not been that on certain details of moral weakness her past life inspired me with doubts, and her present with uneasiness. No man is perfect; I was a trifle jealous.

Well, one evening—it was Christmas eve—I called to take her to supper with a friend of mine whom I esteemed much, and who became an examining magistrate, I do not know where, but he is now dead.

I went upstairs to the room of the sweet girl, and was quite surprised to find her ready to start. She had on, I remember, a square-cut bodice, a little too low to my taste, but it became her so well that when she embraced me I was tempted to say: "I say, pet, suppose we remain here"; but she took my arm, humming a favorite air of hers, and we soon found ourselves in the street.

You have experienced, have you not, this first joy of the youth who at once becomes a man when he has his sweetheart on his arm? He trembles at his boldness, and scents on the morrow the paternal rod; yet

all these fears are dissipated in the presence of the ineffable happiness of the moment. He is free, he is a man, he loves, he is loved, he is conscious that he is taking a forward step in life. He would like all Paris to see him thus, yet he is afraid of being recognized; he would give his little finger to grow three hairs on his upper lip, and to have a wrinkle on his brow, to be able to smoke a cigar without being sick, and to polish off a glass of punch without coughing.

When we reached my friend's, the aforesaid examining magistrate, we found a numerous company; from the anteroom we could hear bursts of laughter, noisy conversation, accompanied by the clatter of plate and crockery, which was being placed upon the table. I was a little excited; I knew that I was the youngest of the party, and I was afraid of appearing awkward on that night of revelry. I said to myself: "Old boy, you must face the music, do the grand, and take your liquor like a little man; your sweetheart is here, and her eyes are fixed on you." The idea, however, that I might be ill next morning did indeed trouble me; in my mind's eye, I saw my poor mother bringing me a cup of tea, and weeping over my excesses, but I chased away all such thoughts and really all went well up till suppertime. My sweetheart had been pulled about a little, no doubt; one or two men had even kissed her under my very nose, but I at once set down these details to the profit and loss column, and in all sincerity I was proud and happy.

"My young friends," suddenly exclaimed our host, "it is time to use your forks vigorously. Let us adjourn to the diningroom."

Joyful shouts greeted these words, and, amid great disorder, the guests arranged themselves round the table, at each end of which I noticed two plates filled up with those big cigars of which I could not smoke a quarter without having a fit of cold shivers.

"Those cigars will lead to a catastrophe, if I don't use prudence and dissemble," said I to myself.

I do not know how it was, but my sweetheart found herself seated on the left of the host. I did not like that, but what could I say? And then, the said host, with his twenty-five summers, his moustache curled up at

the ends, and his self-assurance, seemed to me the most ideal, the most astounding of young devils, and I felt for him a shade of respect.

"Well," he said, with captivating volubility, "you are feeling yourself at home, are you not? You know any guest who feels uncomfortable in his coat may take it off... and the ladies, too. Ha! ha! ha! That's the way to make one's self happy, is it not, my little dears?" And before he had finished laughing he printed a kiss right and left on the necks of his two neighbors, one of whom, as I have already said, was my beloved.

The ill-bred dog! I felt my hair rise on end and my face glow like red-hot iron. For the rest, everybody burst out laughing, and from that moment the supper went on with increased animation.

"My young friends," was the remark of that infernal examining magistrate, "let us attack the cold meat, the sausages, the turkey, the salad; let us at the cakes, the cheese, the oysters, and the grapes; let us attack the whole show. Waiter, draw the corks and we will eat up everything at once, eh, my cherubs? No ceremony, no false delicacy. This is fine fun; it is Oriental, it is splendid. In the centre of Africa everybody acts in this manner. We must introduce poetry into our pleasures. Pass me some cheese with my turkey. Ha! ha! ha! I feel queer, I am wild, I am crazy, am I not, pets?" And he bestowed two more kisses, as before. If I had not been already drunk, upon my honor, I should have made a scene.

I was stupid. Around me they were laughing, shouting, singing, and rattling their plates. A racket of popping corks and breaking glasses buzzed in my ears, but it seemed to me that a cloud had risen between me and the outer world; a veil separated me from the other guests, and, in spite of the evidence of my senses, I thought I was dreaming. I could distinguish, however, though in a confused manner, the animated glances and heightened color of the guests, and, above all, a disorder quite new to me in the toilettes of the ladies. Even my sweetheart appeared to have changed. Suddenly—it was as a flash of lightning—my

beloved, my angel, my ideal, she whom that very morning I was ready to marry, leaned toward the examining magistrate and—I still feel the cold shudder—devoured three truffles which were on his plate.

I experienced keen anguish; it seemed to me as if my heart were breaking just then.

Here my recollections cease. What then took place I do not know. All I remember is that some one took me home in a cab. I kept asking: "Where is she? Where? Oh, where?"

I was told that she had left two hours before. The next morning I experienced a keen sense of despair when the truffles of the examining magistrate came back to mind. For a moment I had a vague idea of entering upon holy orders, but time—you know what it is—calmed my troubled breast. But what the devil was her name? It ended in "ine." Indeed, no, I believe it ended in "a."

CHAPTER II. THE SOUL IN AGONY. TO MONSIEUR CLAUDE DE L

———

Seminary of P——sur-C——-

(Haute-Saone).

It affords me unspeakable pleasure to sit down to address you, dear Claude. Must I tell you that I can not think without pious emotion of that life which but yesterday we were leading together at the Jesuits' College. How well I remember our long talks under the great trees, the pious pilgrimages we daily made to the Father Superior's Calvary, our charming readings, the darting forth of our two souls toward the eternal source of all greatness and all goodness. I can still see the little chapel which you fitted up one day in your desk, the pretty wax tapers we made for it, which we lighted one day during the cosmography class.

Oh, sweet recollections, how dear you are to me! Charming details of a calm and holy life, with what happiness do I recall you! Time in separating you from me seems only to have brought you nearer in recollection. I have seen life, alas! during these six long months, but, in acquiring a knowledge of the world, I have learned to love still more the innocent ignorance of my past existence. Wiser than myself, you have remained in the service of the Lord; you have understood the divine mission which had been reserved for you; you have been unwilling to step over the profane threshold and to enter the world, that cavern, I ought to say, in which I am now assailed, tossed about like a frail bark during a tempest. Nay, the anger of the waves of the sea compared to

that of the passions is mere child's play. Happy friend, who art ignorant of what I have learned. Happy friend, whose eyes have not yet measured the abyss into which mine are already sunk.

But what was I to do? Was I not obliged—despite my vocation and the tender friendship which called me to your side—was I not obliged, I say, to submit to the exigencies imposed by the name I bear, and also to the will of my father, who destined me for a military career in order to defend a noble cause which you too would defend? In short, I obeyed and quitted the college of the Fathers never to return again.

I went into the world, my heart charged with the salutary fears which our pious education had caused to grow up there. I advanced cautiously, but very soon recoiled horror-stricken. I am eighteen; I am still young, I know, but I have already reflected much, while the experience of my pious instructors has imparted to my soul a precocious maturity which enables me to judge of many things; besides my faith is so firmly established and so deeply rooted in my being, that I can look about me without danger. I do not fear for my own salvation, but I am shocked when I think of the future of our modern society, and I pray the Lord fervently, from a heart untainted by sin, not to turn away His countenance in wrath from our unhappy country. Even here, at the seat of my cousin, the Marchioness K———de C———, where I am at the present moment, I can discover nothing but frivolity among the men, and dangerous coquetry among the women. The pernicious atmosphere of the period seems to pervade even the highest rank of the French aristocracy. Sometimes discussions occur on matters pertaining to science and morals, which aim a kind of indirect blow at religion itself, of which our Holy Father the Pope should alone be called on to decide. In this way God permits, at the present day, certain petty savants, flat-headed men of science, to explain in a novel fashion the origin of humanity, and, despite the excommunication which will certainly overtake them, to throw down a wild and impious challenge at the most venerable traditions.

I have not myself desired to be enlightened in regard to such base depravity, but I have heard with poignant grief men with great minds and illustrious names attach some importance to it.

As to manners and customs, they are, without being immoral, which would be out of the question in our society, distinguished by a frivolity and a faculty for being carried away with allurements which are shocking in the extreme. I will only give you a single example of this, although it is one that has struck me most forcibly.

Ten minutes' walk from the house there is a charming little stream overshadowed by spreading willows; the current is slight, the water pellucid, and the bed covered with sand so fine that one's feet sink into it like a carpet. Now, would you believe it, dear friend, that, in this hot weather, all those staying at the house go at the same time, together, and, without distinction of sex, bathe in it? A simple garment of thin stuff, and very tight, somewhat imperfectly screens the strangely daring modesty of the ladies. Forgive me, my pious friend, for entering into all these details, and for troubling the peacefulness of your soul by this picture of worldly scenes, but I promised to share with you my impressions, as well as my most secret thoughts. It is a sacred contract which I am fulfilling.

I will, therefore, acknowledge that these bathing scenes shocked me greatly, the first time I heard them spoken of. I resented it with a species of disgust easy to understand, while I positively refused to take part in them. To speak the truth, I was chafed a little; still, these worldly railleries could not touch me, and had no effect on my determination.

Yesterday, however, about five in the afternoon, the Marchioness sent for me, and managed the affair so neatly, that it was impossible for me not to act as her escort.

We started. The maid carried the bathing costumes both of the Marchioness and of my sister, who was to join us later.

"I know," said my cousin, "that you swim well; the fame of your abilities has reached us here from your college. You are going to teach me to float, eh, Robert?"

“I do not set much store by such paltry physical acquirements, cousin,” I replied; “I swim fairly, nothing more.”

And I turned my head to avoid an extremely penetrating aroma with which her hair was impregnated. You know very well that I am subject to nervous attacks.

“But, my dear child, physical advantages are not so much to be despised.”

This “dear child” displeased me much. My cousin is twenty-six, it is true, but I am no longer, properly speaking, a “dear child,” and besides, it denoted a familiarity which I did not care for. It was, on the part of the Marchioness, one of the consequences of that frivolity of mind, that carelessness of speech which I mentioned above, and nothing more; still, I was shocked at it. She went on:

“Exaggerated modesty is not good form in society,” she said, turning toward me with a smile. “You will, in time, make a very handsome cavalier, my dear Robert, and that which you now lack is easy to acquire. For instance, you should have your hair dressed by the Marquis’s valet. He will do it admirably, and then you will be charming.”

You must understand, my dear Claude, that I met these advances with a frigidity of manner that left no doubt as to my intentions.

“I repeat, my cousin,” said I to her, “I attach to all this very little importance,” and I emphasized my words by a firm and icy look. Then only, for I had not before cast my eyes on her, did I notice the peculiar elegance of her toilette, an elegance for which, unhappily, the perishable beauty of her person served as a pretext and an encouragement.

Her arms were bare, and her wrists covered with bracelets; the upper part of her neck was insufficiently veiled by the too slight fabric of a transparent gauze; in short, the desire to please was displayed in her by all the details of her appearance. I was stirred at the aspect of so much frivolity, and I felt myself blush for pity, almost for shame.

We reached, at length, the verge of the stream. She loosed my arm and unceremoniously slid down, I can not say seated herself, upon the grass, throwing back the long curls depending from her chignon. The word chignon, in the language of society, denotes that prominence of the cranium which is to be seen at the back of ladies' heads. It is produced by making coils or plaits of their long hair. I have cause to believe, from certain allusions I have heard, that many of these chignons are not natural. There are women, most worthy daughters of Eve, who purchase for gold the hair—horyesco referens—of the wretched or the dead. It sickens one.

"It is excessively hot, my dear cousin," said she, fanning herself. "I tremble every moment in such weather lest Monsieur de Beaurenard's nose should explode or catch fire. Ha, ha, ha. Upon my word of honor I do."

She exploded with laughter at this joke, an unbecoming one, and without much point. Monsieur de Beaurenard is a friend of the Marquis, who happens to have a high color. Out of politeness, I forced a smile, which she, no doubt, took for approbation, for she then launched out into conversation—an indescribable flow of chatter, blending the most profane sentiments with the strangest religious ideas, the quiet of the country with the whirl of society, and all this with a freedom of gesture, a charm of expression, a subtlety of glance, and a species of earthly poesy, by which any other soul than mine would have been seduced.

"This is a pretty spot, this charming little nook, is it not?"

"Certainly, my dear cousin."

"And these old willows with their large tops overhanging the stream; see how the field-flowers cluster gayly about their battered trunks! How strange, too, that young foliage, so elegant, so silvery, those branches so slender and so supple! So much elegance, freshness and youth shooting up from that old trunk which seems as if accursed!"

"God does not curse a vegetable, my cousin."

“That is possible; but I can not help finding in willows something which is suggestive of humanity. Perpetual old age resembles punishment. That old reprobate of the bank there is expiating and suffering, that old Quasimodo of the fields. What would you that I should do about it, my cousin, for that is the impression that it gives me? What is there to tell me that the willow is not the final incarnation of an impenitent angler?” And she burst out laughing.

“Those are pagan ideas, and as such are so opposed to the dogmas of faith, that I am obliged, in order to explain their coming from your mouth, to suppose that you are trying to make a fool of me.”

“Not the least in the world; I am not making fun of you, my dear Robert. You are not a baby, you know! Come, go and get ready for a swim; I will go into my dressing-tent and do the same.”

She saluted me with her hand, as she lifted one of the sides of the tent, with unmistakable coquetry. What a strange mystery is the heart of woman!

I sought out a spot shaded by the bushes, thinking over these things; but it was not long before I had got into my bathing costume. I thought of you, my pious friend, as I was buttoning the neck and the wrists of this conventional garment. How many times have you not helped me to execute this little task about which I was so awkward. Briefly, I entered the water and was about to strike out when the sound of the marchioness’s voice assailed my ears. She was talking with her maid inside the tent. I stopped and listened; not out of guilty curiosity, I can assure you, but out of a sincere wish to become better acquainted with that soul.

“No, no, Julie,” the marchioness was saying. “No, no; I won’t hear you say any more about that frightful waterproof cap. The water gets inside and does not come out. Twist up my hair in a net; nothing more is required.”

“Your ladyship’s hair will get wet.”

“Then you can powder it. Nothing is better for drying than powder. And so, I shall wear my light blue dress this evening; blond powder will go with it exactly. My child, you are becoming foolish. I told you to shorten my bathing costume, by taking it up at the knees. Just see what it looks like!”

“I was fearful that your ladyship would find it too tight for swimming.”

“Tight! Then why have you taken it in three good inches just here? See how it wrinkles up; it is ridiculous, don’t you see it, my girl, don’t you see it?”

The sides of the tent were moved; and I guessed that my cousin was somewhat impatiently assuming the costume in question, in order the better to point out its defects to her maid.

“I don’t want to look as if I were wound up in a sheet, but yet I want to be left freedom of action. You can not get it into your head, Julie, that this material will not stretch. You see now that I stoop a little-Ah! you see it at last, that’s well.”

Weak minds! Is it not true, my pious friend, that there are those who can be absorbed by such small matters? I find these preoccupations to be so frivolous that I was pained at being even the involuntary recipient of them, and I splashed the water with my hands to announce my presence and put a stop to a conversation which shocked me.

“I am coming to you, Robert; get into the water. Has your sister arrived yet?” said my cousin, raising her voice; then softly, and addressing her maid, she added: “Yes, of course, lace it tightly. I want support.”

One side of the tent was raised, and my relative appeared. I know not why I shuddered, as if at the approach of some danger. She advanced two or three steps on the fine sand, drawing from her fingers as she did so, the gold rings she was accustomed to wear; then she stopped, handed them to Julie, and, with a movement which I can see now, but which it is impossible for me to describe to you, kicked off into the grass the slippers, with red bows, which enveloped her feet.

She had only taken three paces, but it sufficed to enable me to remark the singularity of her gait. She walked with short, timid steps, her bare arms close to her sides.

She had divested herself of all the outward tokens of a woman, save the tresses of her hair, which were rolled up in a net. As for the rest, she was a comical-looking young man, at once slender yet afflicted by an unnatural plumpness, one of those beings who appear to us in dreams, and in the delirium of fever, one of those creatures toward whom an unknown power attracts us, and who resemble angels too nearly not to be demons.

"Well, Robert, of what are you thinking? Give me your hand and help me to get into the water."

She dipped the toes of her arched foot into the pellucid stream.

"This always gives one a little shock, but the water ought to be delightful to-day," said she. "But what is the matter with you?—your hand shakes. You are a chilly mortal, cousin."

The fact is, I was not trembling either through fear or cold; but on approaching the Marchioness, the sharp perfume which emanated from her hair went to my head, and with my delicate nerves you will readily understand that I was about to faint. I mastered this sensation, however. She took a firm grip of my hand, as one would clasp the knob of a cane or the banister of a stair, and we advanced into the stream side by side.

As we advanced the stream became deeper. The Marchioness, as the water rose higher, gave vent to low cries of fear resembling the hiss of a serpent; then she broke out into ringing bursts of laughter, and drew closer and closer to me. Finally, she stopped, and turning she looked straight into my eyes. I felt then that moment was a solemn one. I thought a hidden precipice was concealed at my feet, my heart throbbed as if it would burst, and my head seemed to be on fire.

"Come now, teach me to float on my back, Robert. Legs straight and extended, arms close to the body, that's the way, is it not?"

"Yes, my dear cousin, and move your hands gently under you."

“Very good; here goes, then. One, two, three-off! Oh, what a little goose I am, I’m afraid! Oh cousin, support me, just a little bit.”

That was the moment when I ought to have said to her: “No, Madame, I am not the man to support coquettes, and I will not.” But I did not dare say that; my tongue remained silent, and I passed my arm round the Marchioness’s waist, in order to support her more easily.

Alas! I had made a mistake; perhaps an irreparable one.

In that supreme moment it was but too true that I adored her seductive charms. Let me cut it short. When I held her thus it seemed to me that all the blood in my body rushed back to my heart—a deadly thrill ran through every limb—from shame and indignation, no doubt; my vision became obscure; it seemed as if my soul was leaving my body, and I fell forward fainting, and dragged her down to the bottom of the water in a mortal clutch.

I heard a loud cry. I felt her arms interlace my neck, her clenched fingers sink deep into my flesh, and all was over. I had lost consciousness.

When I came to myself I was lying on the grass. Julie was chafing my hands, and the Marchioness, in her bathing-dress, which was streaming with water, was holding a vinaigrette to my nose. She looked at me severely, although in her glance there was a shade of pleased satisfaction, the import of which escaped me.

“Baby! you great baby!” said she.

Now that you know all the facts, my pious friend, bestow on me the favor of your counsel, and thank heaven that you live remote from scenes like these.

With heart and soul,
Your sincere friend,
ROBERT DE K——-DEC———.

CHAPTER III. MADAME DE K.

It is possible that you know Madame de K.; if this be so, I congratulate you, for she is a very remarkable person. Her face is pretty, but they do not say of her, “Ah, what a pretty woman!” They say: “Madame de K.? Ah! to be sure, a fine woman!” Do you perceive the difference? it is easy to grasp it. That which charms in her is less what one sees than what one guesses at. Ah! to be sure, a fine woman! That is what is said after dinner when we have dined at her house, and when her husband, who unfortunately is in bad health and does not smoke, has gone to fetch cigars from his desk. It is said in a low tone, as though in confidence; but from this affected reserve, it is easy to read conviction on the part of each of the guests. The ladies in the drawing room do not suspect the charming freedom which characterizes the gossip of the gentlemen when they have gone into the smoking-room to puff their cigars over a cup of coffee.

“Yes, yes, she is a very fine woman.”

“Ah! the deuce, expansive beauty, opulent.”

“But poor De K. makes me feel anxious; he does not seem to get any better. Does it not alarm you, Doctor?”

Every one smiles ‘sub rosa’ at the idea that poor De K., who has gone to fetch cigars, pines away visibly, while his wife is so well.

“He is foolish; he works too hard, as I have told him. His position at the ministry—thanks, I never take sugar.”

“But, really, it is serious, for after all he is not strong,” ventures a guest, gravely, biting his lips meanwhile to keep from laughing.

“I think even that within the last year her beauty has developed,” says a little gentleman, stirring his coffee.

“De K.‘s beauty? I never could see it.”

“I don’t say that.”

“Excuse me, you did; is it not so, Doctor?”

“Forsooth!”—“How now! Come, let us make the distinction.”—“Ha, ha, ha!” And there is a burst of that hearty laughter which men affect to assist digestion. The ice is broken, they draw closer to each other and continue in low tones:

“She has a fine neck! for when she turned just now it looked as if it had been sculptured.”

“Her neck, her neck! but what of her hands, her arms and her shoulders! Did you see her at Leon’s ball a fortnight ago? A queen, my dear fellow, a Roman empress. Neck, shoulders, arms—”

“And all the rest,” hazards some one, looking down into his cup. All laugh heartily, and the good De K. comes in with a box of cigars which look exceptional.

“Here you are, my friends,” he says, coughing slightly, “but let me recommend you to smoke carefully.”

I have often dined with my friend De K., and I have always, or almost always, heard a conversation similar to the preceding. But I must avow that the evening on which I heard the impertinent remark of this gentleman I was particularly shocked; first, because De K. is my friend, and in the second place because I can not endure people who speak of that of which they know nothing. I make bold to say that I alone in Paris understand this matter to the bottom. Yes, yes, I alone; and the reason is not far to seek. Paul and his brother are in England; Ernest is a consul in America; as for Leon, he is at Hycres in his little subprefecture. You see, therefore, that in truth I am the only one in Paris who can—

“But hold, Monsieur Z., you must be joking. Explain yourself; come to the point. Do you mean to say that Madame de K.—oh! dear me! but that is most ‘inconvenant’!”

Nothing, nothing! I am foolish. Let us suppose that I had not spoken, ladies; let us speak of something else. How could the idea have got into my head of saying anything about “all the rest”? Let us talk of something

else.

It was a real spring morning, the rain fell in torrents and the north wind blew furiously, when the damsel, more dead than alive——

The fact is, I feel I can not get out of it. It will be better to tell all. Only swear to me to be discreet. On your word of honor? Well, then, here goes.

I am, I repeat, the only man in Paris who can speak from knowledge of "all the rest" in regard to Madame de K.

Some years ago—but do not let us anticipate—I say, some years ago I had an intimate friend at whose house we met many evenings. In summer the windows were left open, and we used to sit in armchairs and chat of affairs by the light of our cigars. Now, one evening, when we were talking of fishing—all these details are still fresh in my memory—we heard the sound of a powerful harpsichord, and soon followed the harsh notes of a voice more vigorous than harmonious, I must admit.

"Aha! she has altered her hours," said Paul, regarding one of the windows of the house opposite.

"Who has changed her hours, my dear fellow?"

"My neighbor. A robust voice, don't you think so? Usually she practises in the morning, and I like that better, for it is the time I go out for a walk."

Instinctively I glanced toward the lighted window, and through the drawn curtains I distinctly perceived a woman, dressed in white, with her hair loose, and swaying before her instrument like a person conscious that she was alone and responding to her own inspirations.

"My Fernand, go, seek glo-o-o-ry," she was singing at the top of her voice. The singing appeared to me mediocre, but the songstress in her peignoir interested me much.

"Gentlemen," said I, "it appears to me there is behind that frail tissue"—I alluded to the curtain—"a very handsome woman. Put out your cigars, if you please; their light might betray our presence and embarrass the fair singer."

The cigars were at once dropped—the window was even almost completely closed for greater security—and we began to watch.

This was not, I know, quite discreet, but, as the devil willed it, we were young bachelors, all five of us, and then, after all, dear reader, would not you have done the same?

When the song was concluded, the singer rose. It was very hot and her garment must have been very thin, for the light, which was at the farther end of the room, shone through the fabric. It was one of those long robes which fall to the feet, and which custom has reserved for night wear. The upper part is often trimmed with lace, the sleeves are wide, the folds are long and flowing, and usually give forth a perfume of ambergris or violet. But perhaps you know this garment as well as I. The fair one drew near the looking-glass, and it seemed to us that she was contemplating her face; then she raised her hands in the air, and, in the graceful movement she made, the sleeve, which was unbuttoned and very loose, slipped from her beautifully rounded arm, the outline of which we distinctly perceived.

"The devil!" said Paul, in a stifled voice, but he could say no more.

The songstress then gathered up her hair, which hung very low, in her two hands and twisted it in the air, just as the washerwomen do. Her head, which we saw in profile, inclined a little forward, and her shoulders, which the movement of her arms threw back, presented a more prominent and clear outline.

"Marble, Parian marble!" muttered Paul. "O Cypris! Cytherea! Paphia!"

"Be quiet, you donkey!"

It really seemed as if the flame of the candle understood our appreciation and ministered specially to our admiration. Placed behind the fair songstress, it illuminated her so perfectly that the garment with the long folds resembled those thin vapors which veil the horizon without hiding it, and in a word, the most inquisitive imagination, disarmed by so much courtesy, was ready to exclaim, "That is enough!"

Soon the fair one moved forward toward her bed, sat down in a very low armchair, in which she stretched herself out at her ease, and remained for some moments, with her hands clasped over her head and her limbs extended. Just then midnight struck; we saw her take her right leg slowly and cross it over her left, when we perceived that she had not yet removed her shoes and stockings.

But what is the use of asking any more about it? These recollections trouble me, and, although they have fixed themselves in my mind-very firmly indeed, I can assure you—I feel an embarrassment mingled with modesty at relating all to you at length. Besides, at the moment she turned down the clothes, and prepared, to get into bed, the light went out.

On the morrow, about ten o'clock in the evening, we all five again found ourselves at Paul's, four of us with opera-glasses in our pockets. As on the previous evening, the fair songstress sat down at her piano, then proceeded slowly to make her night toilette. There was the same grace, the same charm, but when we came to the fatal moment at which on the preceding night the candle had gone out, a faint thrill ran through us all. To tell the truth, for my part, I was nervous. Heaven, very fortunately, was now on our side; the candle continued to burn. The young woman then, with her charming hand, the plump outlines of which we could easily distinguish, smoothed the pillow, patted it, arranged it with a thousand caressing precautions in which the thought was suggested, "With what happiness shall I now go and bury my head in it!"

Then she smoothed down the little wrinkles in the bed, the contact with which might have irritated her, and, raising herself on her right arm, like a horseman, about to get into the saddle, we saw her left knee, smooth and shining as marble, slowly bury itself. We seemed to hear a kind of creaking, but this creaking sounded joyful. The sight was brief, too brief, alas! and it was in a species of delightful confusion that we perceived a well-rounded limb, dazzlingly white, struggling in the silk of

the quilt. At length everything became quiet again, and it was as much as we could do to make out a smooth, rose-tinted little foot which, not being sleepy, still lingered outside and fidgeted with the silken covering.

Delightful souvenir of my lively youth! My pen splutters, my paper seems to blush to the color of that used by the orange-sellers. I believe I have said too much.

I learned some time afterward that my friend De K. was about to be married, and, singularly enough, was going to wed this beautiful creature with whom I was so well acquainted.

“A charming woman!” I exclaimed one day.

“You know her, then?” said someone.

“I? No, not the least in the world.”

“But?”

“Yes-no, let me see; I have seen her once at high mass.”

“She is not very pretty,” some one remarked to me.

“No, not her face,” I rejoined, and added to myself, “No, not her face, but all the rest!”

It is none the less true that for some time past this secret has been oppressing me, and, though I decided to-day to reveal it to you, it was because it seems to me that to do so would quiet my conscience.

But, for Heaven’s sake, let me entreat you, do not noise abroad the affair!

CHAPTER IV.
SOUVENIRS OF LENT

The faithful are flocking up the steps of the temple; spring toilettes already glitter in the sun; trains sweep the dust with their long flowing folds; feathers and ribbons flutter; the bell chimes solemnly, while carriages keep arriving at a trot, depositing upon the pavement all that is most pious and most noble in the Faubourg, then draw up in line at the farther end of the square.

Be quick, elbow your way through the crowd if you want a good place; the Abbe Gelon preaches to-day on abstinence, and when the Abbe Gelon preaches it is as if Patti were singing.

Enter Madame, pushes the triple door, which recloses heavily, brushes with rapid fingers the holywater sprinkler which that pious old man holds out, and carefully makes a graceful little sign of the cross so as not to spot her ribbons.

Do you hear these discreet and aristocratic whisperings?

“Good morning, my dear.”

“Good morning, dear. It is always on abstinence that he preaches, is it not? Have you a seat?”

“Yes, yes, come with me. You have got on your famous bonnet, I see?”

“Yes; do you like it? It is a little showy, is it not? What a multitude of people! Where is your husband?”

“Showy! Oh, no, it is splendid. My husband is in the churchwarden’s pew; he left before me; he is becoming a fanatic—he speaks of lunching on radishes and lentils.”

“That ought to be very consoling to you.”

“Don’t mention it. Come with me. See; there are Ernestine and Louise. Poor Louise’s nose, always the same; who would believe that she drinks nothing stronger than water?”

The ladies push their way among the chairs, some of which they upset with the greatest unconcern.

Arrived at their places they sink down on their knees, and, moist-eyed and full of feeling, cast a look of veiled adoration toward the high altar, then hide their faces with their gloved hands.

For a very few minutes they gracefully deprecate themselves in the eyes of the Lord, then, taking their seats, coquettishly arrange the immense bows of their bonnet-strings, scan the assembly through a gold eyeglass, with the little finger turning up; finally, while smoothing down the satin folds of a dress difficult to keep in place, they scatter, right and left, charming little recognitions and delightful little smiles.

“Are you comfortable, dear?”

“Quite, thanks. Do you see in front there, between the two tapers, Louise and Madame de C———-? Is it allowable in any one to come to church got up like that?”

“Oh! I have never believed much in the piety of Madame de C———-. You know her history—the story of the screen? I will tell it you later. Ah! there is the verger.”

The verger shows his bald head in the pulpit of truth. He arranges the seat, adjusts the kneeling-stool, then withdraws and allows the Abbe Gelon, who is somewhat pale from Lenten fasting, but striking, as he always is, in dignity, elegance, and unction. A momentary flutter passes through the congregation, then they settle down comfortably. The noise dies away, and all eyes are eagerly looking toward the face of the preacher. With his eyes turned to heaven, the latter stands upright and motionless; a light from above may be divined in his inspired look; his beautiful, white hands, encircled at the wrists by fine lace, are carelessly placed on the red velvet cushion of the pulpit. He waits a few moments, coughs twice, unfolds his handkerchief, deposits his square hat in a

corner, and, bending forward, lets fall from his lips in those sweet slow, persuasive tones, by which he is known, the first words of his sermon, “Ladies!”

With this single word he has already won all hearts. Slowly he casts over his audience a mellow glance, which penetrates and attracts; then, having uttered a few Latin words which he has the tact to translate quickly into French, he continues:

“What is it to abstain? Why should we abstain? How should we abstain? Those are the three points, ladies, I shall proceed to discuss.”

He blows his nose, coughs; a holy thrill stirs every heart. How will he treat this magnificent subject? Let us listen.

Is it not true, Madame, that your heart is piously stirred, and that at this moment you feel an actual thirst for abstinence and mortification?

The holy precincts are bathed in a soft obscurity, similar to that of your boudoir, and inducing revery.

I know not how much of the ineffable and of the vaguely exhilarating penetrates your being. But the voice of this handsome and venerated old man has, amidst the deep silence, something deliciously heavenly about it. Mysterious echoes repeat from the far end of the temple each of his words, and in the dim light of the sanctuary the golden candlesticks glitter like precious stones. The old stained-glass windows with their symbolic figures become suddenly illuminated, a flood of light and sunshine spreads through the church like a sheet of fire. Are the heavens opening? Is the Spirit from on high descending among us?

While lost in pious revery, which soothes and lulls, one gazes with ecstasy on the fanciful details of the sculptures which vanish in the groined roof above, and on the quaint pipes of the organ with its hundred voices. The beliefs of childhood piously inculcated in your heart suddenly reawaken; a vague perfume of incense again penetrates the air. The stone pillars shoot up to infinite heights, and from these celestial arches depends the golden lamp which sways to and fro in space, diffusing its eternal light. Truly, God is great.

By degrees the sweet tones of the preacher enrapture one more and more, and the sense of his words are lost; and, listening to the divine murmur of that saint-like voice, your eyes, like those of a child falling asleep in the bosom of the Creator, close.

You do not go to sleep, but your head inclines forward, the ethereal light surrounds you, and your soul, delighting in the uncertain, plunges into celestial space, and loses itself in infinity.

What a sweet and holily intoxicating sensation, a delicious ecstasy! Nevertheless, there are those who smile at this religious raise-en-scene, these pomps and splendors, this celestial music, which soothes the nerves and thrills the brain! Pity on these scoffers who do not comprehend the ineffable delight of being able to open at will the gates of Paradise to themselves, and to become, at odd moments, one with the angels! But what purpose does it serve to speak of the faithless and of their harmless, smiles? As the Abbe Gelon has in his inimitable manner observed, “The heart is a fortress, incessantly assailed by the spirit of darkness.”

The idea of a constant struggle with this powerful being has something about it that adds tenfold to our strength and flatters our vanity. What, alone in your fortress, Madame; alone with the spirit of darkness.

But hush! the Abbe Gelon is finishing in a quivering and fatigued voice. His right hand traces in the air the sign of peace. Then he wipes his humid forehead, his eyes sparkle with divine light, he descends the narrow stairs, and we hear on the pavement the regular taps of the rod of the verger, who is reconducting him to the vestry.

“Was he not splendid, dear?”

“Excellent! when he said, ‘That my eyes might close forever, if...’ you remember?”

“Superb! and further on: ‘Yes, ladies, you are coquettes.’ He told us some hard truths; he speaks admirably.”

“Admirably! He is divine!”

It is four o'clock, the church is plunged in shadow and silence. The confused rumble of the vehicles without hardly penetrates this dwelling of prayer, and the creak of one's boots, echoing in the distance, is the only human noise which ruffles the deep calm.

However, in proportion as we advance, we perceive in the chapels groups of the faithful, kneeling, motionless and silent. In viewing the despair that their attitude appears to express, we are overwhelmed with sadness and uneasiness. Is it an appeal for the damned?

The aspects of one of these chapels is peculiar. A hundred or a hundred and fifty ladies, almost buried in silk and velvet, are crowded devoutly about the confessional. A sweet scent of violets and vervain permeates the vicinity, and one halts, in spite of one's self, in the presence of this large display of elegance.

From each of the two cells adjoining the confessional shoot out the folds of a rebellious skirt, for the penitent, held fast at the waist, has been able to get only half of her form into the narrow space. However, her head can be distinguished moving in the shadow, and we can guess from the contrite movements of her white feather that her forehead is bowed by reason of remonstrance and repentance.

Hardly has she concluded her little story when a dozen of her neighbors rush forward to replace her. This eagerness is quite explicable, for this chapel is the one in which the Abbe Gelon hears confessions, and I need not tell you that when the Abbe Gelon confesses it is the same as if he were preaching—there is a crowd.

The good Abbe confesses all these ladies, and, with angelic devotion, remains shut up for hours in this dark, narrow, suffocating box, through the grating of which two penitents are continually whispering their sins.

The dear Abbe! the most likable thing about him is that he is not long over the business. He knows how to get rid of useless details; he perceives, with subtle instinct and a sureness of vision that spares you a thousand embarrassments, the condition of a soul, so that, besides being

a man of intelligence and of the world, he renders the repetition of those little weaknesses, of which he has whispered the one half to you, almost agreeable.

In coming to him with one's little burden of guilt, one feels somewhat embarrassed, but while one is hesitating about telling him all, he, with a discreet and skilful hand, disencumbers one of it rapidly, examines the contents, smiles or consoles, and the confession is made without one having uttered a single word; so that after all is over the penitent exclaims, prostrating one's self before God, "But, Lord, I was pure, pure as the lily, and yet how uneasy I was!"

Even when he assumes the sacerdotal habit and ceases to be a man, and speaks in the name of God, the tones of his voice, the refinement of his look, reveal innate distinction and that spotless courtesy which can not harm even a minister of God, and which one must cultivate on this side of the Rue du Bac.

If God wills that there must be a Faubourg St.-Germain in the world—and it can not be denied that He does—is it not proper that He should give us a minister who speaks our language and understands our weaknesses? Nothing is more obvious, and I really do not comprehend some of these ladies who talk to me about the Abbe Brice. Not that I wish to speak ill of the good Abbe, for this is neither the time nor the place for it; he is a holy man, but his sanctity is a little bourgeois and needs polish.

With him one has to dot one's i's; he is dull in perception, or does not perceive at all.

Acknowledge a peccadillo, and his brows knit, he must know the hour, the moment, the antecedents; he examines, he probes, he weighs, and finishes his thousand questions by being indiscreet and almost improper. Is there not, even in the holy mission of the priest, a way of being politely severe, and of acting the gentleman to people well born?

The Abbe Brice—and there is no reason why I should conceal it—smells of the stable, which must be prejudicial to him. He is slightly Republican, too, wears clumsy boots, has awful nails, and when he gets new gloves, twice a year, his fingers stand out stiff and separate.

I do not, I would have you remark, deny his admirable virtues; but say what you like, you will never get a woman of fashion to confide her "little affairs" to a farmer's son, and address him as "Father." Matters must not be carried the length of absurdity; besides, this Abbe Brice always smells detestably of snuff.

He confesses all sorts of people, and you will agree that it is not pleasant to have one's maid or one's cook for one's visa-vis at the confessional.

There is not a woman who understands Christian humility better than yourself, dear Madame; but all the same you are not accustomed to travel in an omnibus. You may be told that in heaven you will only be too happy to call your coachman "Brother," and to say to Sarah Jane, "Sister," but these worthy folk shall have first passed through purgatory, and fire purifies everything. Again, what is there to assure us that Sarah Jane will go to heaven, since you yourself, dear Madame, are not so sure of entering there?

It is hence quite well understood why the Abbe Gelon's chapel is crowded. If a little whispering goes on, it is because they have been waiting three long hours, and because everybody knows one another.

All the ladies, you may be sure, are there.

"Make a little room for me, dear," whispers a newcomer, edging her way through trains, kneeling-stools, and chairs.

"Ah! is that you, dear? Come here. Clementine and Madame de B. are there in the corner at the cannon's mouth. You will have to wait two good hours."

"If Madame de B. is there, it does not surprise me. She is inexhaustible, and there is no other woman who is so long in telling a thing. Have all these people not had their turn yet? Ah! there is Ernestine." (She waves her hand to her quietly.) "That child is an angel. She acknowledged to me the other day that her conscience troubled her because, on reading the 'Passion,' she could not make up her mind to kiss the mat."

“Ah! charming; but, tell me, do you kiss the mat yourself?”

“I! no, never in my life; it is so nasty, dear.”

“You confess to the omission, at least?”

“Oh! I confess all those little trifles in a lump. I say, ‘Father, I have erred out of human self-respect.’ I give the total at once.”

“That is just what I do, and that dear Abbe Gelon discharges the bill.”

“Seriously, time would fail him if he acted otherwise. But it seems to me that we are whispering a little too much, dear; let me think over my little bill.”

Madame leans upon her praying-stool. Gracefully she removes, without taking her eyes off the altar, the glove from her right hand, and with her thumb turns the ring of Ste-Genevieve that serves her as a rosary, moving her lips the while. Then, with downcast eyes and set lips, she loosens the fleur-de-lys-engraved clasp of her Book of Hours, and seeks out the prayers appropriate to her condition.

She reads with fervency: “‘My God, crushed beneath the burden of my sins I cast myself at thy feet’—how annoying that it should be so cold to the feet. With my sore throat, I am sure to have influenza,—‘that I cast myself at thy feet’—tell me, dear, do you know if the chapel-keeper has a footwarmer? Nothing is worse than cold feet, and that Madame de P. sticks there for hours. I am sure she confesses her friends’ sins along with her own. It is intolerable; I no longer have any feeling in my right foot; I would pay that woman for her foot-warmer—‘I bow my head in the dust under the weight of repentance, and of.....’”

“Ah! Madame de P. has finished; she is as red as the comb of a turkey-cock.”

Four ladies rush forward with pious ardor to take her place.

“Ah! Madame, do not push so, I beg of you.”

“But I was here before you, Madame.”

“I beg a thousand pardons, Madame.”

“You surely have a very strange idea of the respect which is due to this hallowed spot.”

“Hush, hush! Profit by the opportunity, Madame; slip through and take the vacant place. (Whispering.) Do not forget the big one last night, and the two little ones of this morning.”

CHAPTER V. MADAME AND HER FRIEND CHAT BY THE FIRESIDE

Madam—(moving her slender fingers)—It is ruched, ruched, ruched, loves of ruches, edged all around with blond.

Her Friend—That is good style, dear.

Madame—Yes, I think it will be the style, and over this snowlike foam fall the skirts of blue silk like the bodice; but a lovely blue, something like—a little less pronounced than skyblue, you know, like—my husband calls it a subdued blue.

Her Friend—Splendid. He is very happy in his choice of terms.

Madame—Is he not? One understands at once—a subdued blue. It describes it exactly.

Her Friend—But apropos of this, you know that Ernestine has not forgiven him his pleasantry of the other evening.

Madame—How, of my husband? What pleasantry? The other evening when the Abbe Gelon and the Abbe Brice were there?

Her Friend—And his son, who was there also.

Madame—What! the Abbe's son? (Both break into laughter.)

Her Friend—But—ha! ha! ha!—what are you saying, ha! ha! you little goose?

Madame—I said the Abbe Gelon and the Abbe Brice, and you add, 'And his son.' It is your fault, dear. He must be a choir-boy, that cherub. (More laughter.)

Her Friend—(placing her hand over hey mouth)—Be quiet, be quiet; it is too bad; and in Lent, too!

Madame—Well, but of whose son are you speaking?

Her Friend—Of Ernestine's son, don't you know, Albert, a picture of innocence. He heard your husband's pleasantry, and his mother was vexed.

Madame—My dear, I really don't know to what you refer. Please tell me all about it.

Hey Friend—Well, on entering the drawing-room, and perceiving the candelabra lit up, and the two Abbe's standing at that moment in the middle of the room, your husband appeared as if looking for something, and when Ernestine asked him what it was, he said aloud: "I am looking for the holy-water; please, dear neighbor, excuse me for coming in the middle of the service."

Madame—Is it possible? (Laughing.) The fact is, he can not get out of it; he has met the two Abbes, twice running, at Ernestine's. Her drawing-room is a perfect sacristy.

Hey Friend (dryly)—A sacristy! How regardless you are getting in your language since your marriage, dear.

Madame—Not more than before. I never cared to meet priests elsewhere than at church.

Her Friend—Come, you are frivolous, and if I did not know you better—but do you not like to meet the Abbe Gelon?

Madame—Ah! the Abbe Gelon, that is quite different. He is charming.

Her Friend—(briskly)—His manners are so distingue.

Madame—And respectful. His white hair is such an admirable frame for his pale face, which is so full of unction.

Her Friend—Oh! yes, he has unction, and his looks—those sweetly softened looks! The other day, when he was speaking on the mediation of Christ, he was divine. At one moment he wiped away a tear; he was no longer master of his emotions; but he grew calm almost immediately—his power of self-command is marvellous; then he went on quietly, but the emotion in turn had overpowered us. It was electrifying. The Countess de S., who was near me, was bubbling like a spring, under her yellow bonnet.

Madame—Ah! yes, I have seen that yellow bonnet. What a sight that Madame de S. is!

Her Friend—The truth is, she is always dressed like an applewoman. A bishopric has been offered these messieurs, I know, on good authority; my husband had it from De l'Euvre. Well—

Madame—(interrupting her)—A bishopric offered to Madame de S. It was wrong to do so.

Her Friend—You make fun of everything, my dear; there are, however, some subjects which should be revered. I tell you that the mitre and the ring have been offered to the Abby Gelon. Well, he refused them. God knows, however, that the pastoral ring would well become his hand.

Madame—Oh! yes, he has a lovely hand.

Her Friend—He has a white, slender, and aristocratic hand. Perhaps it is a wrong for us to dwell on these worldly details, but after all his hand is really beautiful. Do you know (enthusiastically) I find that the Abbe Gelon compels love of religion? Were you ever present at his lectures?

Madame—I was at the first one. I would have gone again on Thursday, but Madame Savain came to try on my bodice and I had a protracted discussion with her about the slant of the skirts.

Her Friend—Ah! the skirts are cut slantingly.

Madame—Yes, yes, with little cross-bars, which is an idea of my own—I have not seen it anywhere else; I think it will not look badly.

Her Friend—Madame Savain told me that you had suppressed the shoulders of the corsage.

Madame—Ah! the gossip! Yes, I will have nothing on the shoulders but a ribbon, a trifle, just enough to fasten a jewel to—I was afraid that the corsage would look a little bare. Madame Savain had laid on, at intervals, some ridiculous frippery. I wanted to try something else—my plan of crossbars, there and then—and I missed the dear Abbe Gelon's lecture. He was charming, it seems.

Her Friend—Oh! charming. He spoke against bad books; there was a large crowd. He demolished all the horrible opinions of Monsieur Renan. What a monster that man is!

Madame—You have read his book?

Her Friend—Heaven forbid! Don't you know it is impossible for one to find anything more—well, it must be very bad 'Messieurs de l'OEuvre' for the Abbe Gelon, in speaking to one of these friends of my husband, uttered the word——

Madame—Well, what word?

Her Friend—I dare not tell you, for, really, if it is true it would make one shudder. He said that it was (whispering in her ear) the Antichrist! It makes one feel aghast, does it not! They sell his photograph; he has a satanic look. (Looking at the clock.) Half-past two—I must run away; I have given no orders about dinner. These three fast-days in the week are to me martyrdom. One must have a little variety; my husband is very fastidious. If we did not have water-fowl I should lose my head. How do you get on, dear?

Madame—Oh! with me it is very simple, provided I do not make my husband leaner; he eats anything. You know, Augustus is not very much —

Her Friend—Not very much! I think that he is much too spare; for, after all, if we do not in this life impose some privations upon ourselves —no, that would be too easy. I hope, indeed, that you have a dispensation?

Madame—Oh! yes, I am safe as to that.

Her Friend—I have one, of course, for butter and eggs, as vice-chancellor of the Association. The Abbe Gelon begged me to accept a complete dispensation on account of my headaches, but I refused. Yes! I refused outright. If one makes a compromise with one's principles—but then there are people who have no principles.

Madame—If you mean that to apply to my husband, you are wrong. Augustus is not a heathen—he has excellent principles.

Her Friend—Excellent principles! You make my blood boil. But there, I must go. Well, it is understood, I count upon you for Tuesday; he will preach upon authority, a magnificent subject, and we may expect allusions—Ah! I forgot to tell you; I am collecting and I expect your mite, dear. I take as low a sum as a denier (the twelfth of a penny). I have an idea of collecting with my little girl on my praying-stool. Madame de K. collected on Sunday at St. Thomas's and her baby held the alms-bag. The little Jesus had an immense success—immense!

Madame—I must go now. How will you dress?

Her Friend—Oh! for the present, quite simply and in black; you understand.

Madame—Besides, black becomes you so well.

Her Friend—Yes, everything is for the best; black does not suit me at all ill. Tuesday, then. But my dear, try to bring your husband, he likes music so much.

Madame—Well, I can not promise that.

Her Fiend—Ah! mon Dieu! they are all like that, these men; they are strong-minded, and when grace touches them, they look back on their past life with horror. When my husband speaks of his youth, the tears come into his eyes. I must tell you; that he has not always been as he is now; he was a gay boy in his youth, poor fellow. I do not detest a man because he knows life a little, do you? But I am gossiping and time passes; I have a call to make yet on Madame W. I do not know whether she has found her juvenile lead.

Madame—What for, in Heaven's name?

Her Friend—For her evening party. There are to be private theatricals at her house, but for a pious object, you may be sure, during Lent; it is so as to have a collection on behalf of the Association. I must fly. Good-by, dear.

Madame—Till Tuesday, dear; in full uniform?

Her Friend—(smiling)—In full uniform. Kind regards to your reprobate. I like him very much all the same. Good-by.

CHAPTER VI. A DREAM

Sleeplessness is almost always to be traced to indigestion. My friend, Dr. Jacques, is there and he will tell you so.

Now, on that particular evening, it was last Friday, I had committed the mistake of eating brill, a fish that positively disagrees with me.

God grant that the account of the singular dream which ensued may inspire you with some prudent reflections.

Be that as it may, this was my dream, in all its extravagance.

I had, in this dream, the honor to belong, as senior curate, to one of the most frequented parish churches in Paris. What could be more ridiculous! I was, moreover, respectably stout, possessed a head decked with silver locks, well-shaped hands, an aquiline nose, great unction, the friendship of the lady worshippers, and, I venture to add, the esteem of the rector.

While I was reciting the thanksgiving after service, and at the same time unfastening the cords of my alb, the rector came up to me (I see him even now) blowing his nose.

“My dear friend,” said he, “you hear confessions this evening, do you not?”

“Most certainly. Are you well this morning? I had a good congregation at mass.”

Having said this, I finished my thanksgiving, put my alb into the wardrobe, and, offering a pinch to the rector, added cheerily:

“This is not breaking the fast, is it?”

“Ha! ha! no, no, no! Besides, it wants five minutes to twelve and the clock is slow.”

We took a pinch together and walked off arm in arm by the little side door, for night sacraments, chatting in a friendly way.

Suddenly I found myself transported into my confessional. The chapel was full of ladies who all bowed at my approach. I entered my narrow box, the key of which I had. I arranged on the seat the air-cushion which is indispensable to me on the evenings preceding great church festivals, the sittings at that season being always prolonged. I slipped the white surplice which was hanging from a peg over my cassock, and, after meditating for a moment, opened the little shutter that puts me in communication with the penitents.

I will not undertake to describe to you one by one the different people who came and knelt before me. I will not tell you, for instance, how one of them, a lady in black, with a straight nose, thin lips, and sallow complexion, after reciting her Confiteor in Latin, touched me infinitely by the absolute confidence she placed in me, though I was not of her sex. In five minutes she found the opportunity to speak to me of her sister-in-law, her brother, an uncle who was on the point of death whose heiress she was, her nephews, and her servants; and I could perceive, despite the tender benevolence that appeared in all her words, that she was the victim of all these people. She ended by informing me she had a marriageable daughter, and that her stomach was an obstacle to her fasting.

I can still see a throng of other penitents, but it would take too long to tell you about them, and we will confine ourselves, with your permission, to the last two, who, besides, impressed upon my memory themselves particularly.

A highly adorned little lady rushed into the confessional; she was brisk, rosy, fresh. Despite her expression of deep thoughtfulness, she spoke very quickly in a musical voice, and rattled through her Confiteor, regardless of the sense.

“Father,” she said, “I have one thing that is troubling me.”

“Speak, my child; you know that a confessor is a father.”

“Well, father—but I really dare not.”

There are many of these timid little hearts that require to be encouraged. I said, “Go on, my child, go on.”

“My husband,” she murmured confusedly, “will not abstain during Lent. Ought I to compel him, father?”

“Yes, by persuasion.”

“But he says that he will go and dine at the restaurant if I do not let him have any meat. Oh! I suffer terribly from that. Am I not assuming the responsibility of all that meat, father?”

This young wife really interested me; she had in the midst of one cheek, toward the corner of the mouth, a small hollow, a kind of little dimple, charming in the profane sense of the word, and giving a special expression to her face. Her tiny white teeth glittered like pearls when she opened her mouth to relate her pious inquietudes; she shed around, besides, a perfume almost as sweet as that of our altars, although of a different kind, and I breathed this perfume with an uneasiness full of scruples, which for all that inclined me to indulgence. I was so close to her that none of the details of her face escaped me; I could distinguish, almost in spite of myself, even a little quiver of her left eyebrow, tickled every now and again by a stray tress of her fair hair.

“Your situation,” I said, “is a delicate one; on one hand, your domestic happiness, and on the other your duty as a Christian.” She gave a sigh from her very heart. “Well, my dear child, my age warrants my speaking to you like that, does it not?”

“Oh, yes, father.”

“Well, my dear child”—I fancy I noticed at that moment that she had at the outer corner of her eyes a kind of dark mark something like an arrow-head—“try, my dear child, to convince your husband, who in his heart—” In addition, her lashes, very long and somewhat curled, were underlined, I might almost say, by a dark streak expanding and shading off delicately toward the middle of the eye. This physical peculiarity did not seem to me natural, but an effect of premeditated coquetry.

Strange fact, the verification of such weakness in this candid heart only increased my compassion. I continued in a gentle tone:

“Strive to bring your husband to God. Abstinence is not only a religious observance, it is also a salutary custom. ‘Non solum lex Dei, sed etiam’. Have you done everything to bring back your husband?”

“Yes, father, everything.”

“Be precise, my child; I must know all.”

“Well, father, I have tried sweetness and tenderness.”

I thought to myself that this husband must be a wretch.

“I have implored him for the sake of our child,” continued the little angel, “not to risk his salvation and my own. Once or twice I even told him that the spinach was dressed with gravy when it was not. Was I wrong, father?”

“There are pious falsehoods which the Church excuses, for in such cases it only takes into consideration the intention and the greater glory of God. I can not, therefore, say that you have done wrong. You have not, have you, been guilty toward your husband of any of those excusable acts of violence which may escape a Christian soul when it is struggling against error? For it really is not natural that an honest man should refuse to follow the prescription of the Church. Make a few concessions at first.”

“I have, father, and perhaps too many,” she said, contritely.

“What do you mean?”

“Hoping to bring him back to God, I accorded him favors which I ought to have refused him. I may be wrong, but it seems to me that I ought to have refused him.”

“Do not be alarmed, my dear child, everything depends upon degrees, and it is necessary in these matters to make delicate distinctions.”

“That is what I say to myself, father, but my husband unites with his kindness such a communicative gayety—he has such a graceful and natural way of excusing his impiety—that I laugh in spite of myself when I ought to weep. It seems to me that a cloud comes between myself and

my duties, and my scruples evaporate beneath the charm of his presence and his wit. My husband has plenty of wit," she added, with a faint smile, in which there was a tinge of pride.

"Hum! hum!" (the blackness of this man's heart revolted me). "There is no seductive shape that the tempter does not assume, my child. Wit in itself is not to be condemned, although the Church shuns it as far as she is concerned, looking upon it as a worldly ornament; but it may become dangerous, it may be reckoned a veritable pest when it tends to weaken faith. Faith, which is to the soul, I hardly need tell you, what the bloom is to the peach, and—if I may so express myself, what the—dew is—to the flower—hum, hum! Go on, my child."

"But, father, when my husband has disturbed me for a moment, I soon repent of it. He has hardly gone before I pray for him."

"Good, very good."

"I have sewn a blessed medal up in his overcoat." This was said more boldly, though still with some timidity.

"And have you noticed any result?"

"In certain things he is better, yes, father, but as regards abstinence he is still intractable," she said with embarrassment.

"Do not be discouraged. We are in the holy period of Lent. Make use of pious subterfuges, prepare him some admissible viands, but pleasant to the taste."

"Yes, father, I have thought of that. The day before yesterday I gave him one of these salmon pasties that resemble ham."

"Yes, yes, I know them. Well?"

"Well, he ate the salmon, but he had a cutlet cooked afterward."

"Deplorable!" I exclaimed, almost in spite of myself, so excessive did the perversity of this man seem to me. "Patience, my child, offer up to Heaven the sufferings which your husband's impiety causes you, and remember that your efforts will be set down to you. You have nothing more to tell me?"

"No, father."

“Collect yourself, then. I will give you absolution.”

The dear soul sighed as she joined her two little hands.

Hardly had my penitent risen to withdraw when I abruptly closed my little shutter and took a long pinch of snuff—snuff-takers know how much a pinch soothes the mind—then having thanked God rapidly, I drew from the pocket of my cassock my good old watch, and found that it was earlier than I thought. The darkness of the chapel had deceived me, and my stomach had shared my error. I was hungry. I banished these carnal preoccupations from my mind, and after shaking my hands, on which some grains of snuff had fallen, I slackened one of my braces that was pressing a little on one shoulder, and opened my wicket.

“Well, Madame, people should be more careful,” said the penitent on my left, addressing a lady of whom I could only see a bonnet-ribbon; “it is excusable.”

My penitent’s voice, which was very irritated, though restrained by respect for the locality, softened as if by magic at the creaking of my wicket. She knelt down, piously folded her two ungloved hands, plump, perfumed, rosy, laden with rings—but let that pass. I seemed to recognize the hands of the Countess de B., a chosen soul, whom I had the honor to visit frequently, especially on Saturday, when there is always a place laid for me at her table.

She raised her little lace veil and I saw that I was not mistaken. It was the Countess. She smiled at me as at a person with whom she was acquainted, but with perfect propriety; she seemed to be saying, “Good-day, my dear Abbe, I do not ask how your rheumatism is, because at this moment you are invested with a sacred character, but I am interested in it all the same.”

This little smile was irreproachable. I replied by a similar smile, and I murmured in a very low tone, giving her, too, to understand by the expression of my face that I was making a unique concession in her favor, “Are you quite well, dear Madame?”

“Thanks, father, I am quite well.” Her voice had resumed an angelic tone. “But I have just been in a passion.”

“And why? Perhaps you have taken for a passion what was really only a passing moment of temper?”

It does not do to alarm penitents.

“Ah! not at all, it was really a passion, father. My dress had just been torn from top to bottom; and really it is strange that one should be exposed to such mishaps on approaching the tribunal of——”

“Collect yourself, my dear Madame, collect yourself,” and assuming a serious look I bestowed my benediction upon her.

The Countess sought to collect herself, but I saw very well that her troubled spirit vainly strove to recover itself. By a singular phenomenon I could see into her brain, and her thoughts appeared to me one after the other. She was saying to herself, “Let me collect myself; our Father, give me grace to collect myself,” but the more effort she made to restrain her imagination the more it became difficult to restrain and slipped through her fingers. “I had made a serious examination of my conscience, however,” she added. “Not ten minutes ago as I was getting out of my carriage I counted up three sins; there was one above all I wished to mention. How these little things escape me! I must have left them in the carriage.” And she could not help smiling to herself at the idea of these three little sins lost among the cushions. “And the poor Abbe waiting for me in his box. How hot it must be in there! he is quite red. Good Heavens! how shall I begin? I can not invent faults? It is that torn dress which has upset me. And there is Louise, who is to meet me at five o’clock at the dressmaker’s. It is impossible for me to collect myself. O God, do not turn away your face from me, and you, Lord, who can read in my soul—Louise will wait till a quarter past five; besides, the bodice fits—there is only the skirt to try on. And to think that I had three sins only a minute ago.”

All these different thoughts, pious and profane, were struggling together at once in the Countess’s brain, so that I thought the moment had come to interfere and help her a little.

“Come,” I said, in a paternal voice, leaning forward benevolently and twisting my snuff-box in my fingers. “Come, my dear Madame, and speak fearlessly; have you nothing to reproach yourself with? Have you had no impulses of—worldly coquetry, no wish to dazzle at the expense of your neighbor?”

I had a vague idea that I should not be contradicted.

“Yes, father,” she said, smoothing down her bonnet strings, “sometimes; but I have always made an effort to drive away such thoughts.”

“That good intention in some degree excuses you, but reflect and see how empty are these little triumphs of vanity, how unworthy of a truly poor soul and how they draw it aside from salvation. I know that there are certain social exigencies—society. Yes, yes, but after all one can even in those pleasures which the Church tolerates—I say tolerates—bring to bear that perfume of good-will toward one’s neighbor of which the Scriptures speak, and which is the appanage—in some degree... the glorious appanage. Yes, yes, go on.”

“Father, I have not been able to resist certain temptations to gluttony.”

“Again, again! Begin with yourself. You are here at the tribunal of penitence; well, promise God to struggle energetically against these little carnal temptations, which are not in themselves serious sins—oh! no, I know it—but, after all, these constant solicitations prove a persistent attachment—displeasing to Him—to the fugitive and deceitful delights of this world. Hum, hum! and has this gluttony shown itself by more blameworthy actions than usual—is it simply the same as last month?”

“The same as last month, father.”

“Yes, yes, pastry between meals,” I sighed gravely.

“Yes, father, and almost always a glass of Capri or of Syracuse after it.”

“Or of Syracuse after it. Well, let that pass, let that pass.”

I fancied that the mention of this pastry and those choice wines was becoming a source of straying thoughts on my part, for which I mentally asked forgiveness of heaven.

“What else do you recall?” I asked, passing my hand over my face.

“Nothing else, father; I do not recollect anything else.”

“Well let a sincere repentance spring up in your heart for the sins you have just admitted, and for those which you may have forgotten; commune with yourself, humble yourself in the presence of the great act you have just accomplished. I will give you absolution. Go in peace.”

The Countess rose, smiled at me with discreet courtesy, and, resuming her ordinary voice, said in a low tone, “Till Saturday evening, then?”

I bowed as a sign of assent, but felt rather embarrassed on account of my sacred character.

CHAPTER VII. AN EMBASSY BALL

"Don't say that it is not pretty," added my aunt, brushing the firedog with the tip of her tiny boot. "It lends an especial charm to the look, I must acknowledge. A cloud of powder is most becoming, a touch of rouge has a charming effect, and even that blue shadow that they spread, I don't know how, under the eye. What coquettes some women are! Did you notice Anna's eyes at Madame de Sieurac's last Thursday? Is it allowable? Frankly, can you understand how any one can dare?"

"Well, aunt, I did not object to those eyes, and between ourselves they had a softness."

"I do not deny that, they had a softness."

"And at the same time such a strange brilliancy beneath that half shadow, an expression of such delicious languor."

"Yes, certainly, but, after all, it is making an exhibition of one's self. But for that—it is very pretty sometimes—I have seen in the Bois charming creatures under their red, their black, and their blue, for they put on blue too, God forgive me!"

"Yes, aunt, Polish blue; it is put on with a stump; it is for the veins."

With interest: "They imitate veins! It is shocking, upon my word. But you seem to know all about it?"

"Oh, I have played so often in private theatricals; I have even quite a collection of little pots of color, hare's-feet stumps, pencils, et cetera."

"Ah! you have, you rascal! Are you going to the fancy ball at the Embassy to-morrow?"

"Yes, aunt; and you, are you going in character?"

“One must, since every one else will. They say the effect will be splendid.” After a silence: “I shall wear powder; do you think it will suit me?”

“Better than any one, my dear aunt; you will look adorable, I feel certain.”

“We shall see, you little courtier.”

She rose, gave me her hand to kiss with an air of exquisite grace, and seemed about to withdraw, then, seemingly changing her mind:

“Since you are going to the Embassy to-morrow, Ernest, call for me; I will give you a seat in the carriage. You can give me your opinion on my costume, and then,” she broke into a laugh, and taking me by the hand, added in my ear: “Bring your little pots and come early. This is between ourselves.” She put her finger to her lip as a signal for discretion. “Till tomorrow, then.”

The following evening my aunt’s bedroom presented a spectacle of most wild disorder.

Her maid and the dressmaker, with haggard eyes, for they had been up all night, were both on their knees, rummaging amidst the bows of satin, and feverishly sticking in pins.

“How late you are,” said my aunt to me. “Do you know that it is eleven o’clock? and we have,” she continued, showing her white teeth, “a great many things to do yet. The horses have been put to this last hour. I am sure they will take cold in that icy courtyard.” As she spoke she stretched out her foot, shod with a red-heeled slipper, glittering with gold embroidery. Her plump foot seemed to overflow the side of the shoe a trifle, and through the openwork of her bright silk stocking the rosy skin of her ankle showed at intervals.

“What do you think of me, Monsieur Artist?”

“But, Countess, my dear aunt, I mean, I—I am dazzled by this July sun, the brightest of all the year, you know. You are adorable, adorable—and your hair!”

“Is it not well arranged? Silvani did it; he has not his equal, that man. The diamonds in the hair go splendidly, and then this lofty style of head-dressing gives a majestic turn to the neck. I do not know whether you are aware that I have always been a coquette as regards my neck; it is my only bit of vanity. Have you brought your little color-pots?”

“Yes, aunt, I have the whole apparatus, and if you will sit down—”

“I am frightfully pale-just a little, Ernest; you know what I told you,” and she turned her head, presenting her right eye to me. I can still see that eye.

I do not know what strange perfume, foreign to aunts in general, rose from her garments.

“You understand, my dear boy, that it is only an occasion like the present, and the necessities of a historical costume, that make me consent to paint like this.”

“My dear little aunt, if you move, my hand will shake.” And, indeed, in touching her long lashes, my hand trembled.

“Ah! yes, in the corner, a little—you are right, it gives a softness, a vagueness, a—it is very funny, that little pot of blue. How ugly it must be! How things lead on one to another! Once one’s hair is powdered, one must have a little pearl powder on one’s face in order not to look as yellow as an orange; and one’s cheeks once whitened, one can’t—you are tickling me with your brush—one can’t remain like a miller, so a touch of rouge is inevitable. And then—see how wicked it is—if, after all that, one does not enlarge the eyes a bit, they look as if they had been bored with a gimlet, don’t they? It is like this that one goes on little by little, till one comes to the gallows.”

My aunt began to laugh freely, as she studied her face.

“Ah! that is very effective what you have just done—well under the eye, that’s it. What animation it gives to the look! How clever those creatures are, how well they know everything that becomes one! It is shameful, for with them it is a trick, nothing more. Oh! you may put on a little more of that blue of yours, I see what it does now. It has a very good effect. How

you are arching the eyebrows. Don't you think it is a little too black? You know I should not like to look as if—you are right, though. Where did you learn all that? You might earn a deal of money, do you know, if you set up a practice."

"Well, aunt, are you satisfied?"

My aunt held her hand-glass at a distance, brought it near, held it away again, smiled, and, leaning back in her chair, said: "It must be acknowledged that it is charming, this. What do your friends call it?"

"Make-up, aunt."

"It is vexatious that it has not another name, for really I shall have recourse to it for the evening—from time to time. It is certain that it is attractive. Haven't you a little box for the lips?"

"Here it is."

"Ah! in a bottle, it is liquid."

"It is a kind of vinegar, as you see. Don't move, aunt. Put out your lips as if you wished to kiss me. You don't by chance want to?"

"Yes, and you deserve it. You will teach me your little accomplishments, will you not?"

"Willingly, aunt."

"Your vinegar is miraculous! what brightness it gives to the lips, and how white one's teeth look. It is true my teeth were always—"

"Another of your bits of vanity."

"It is done, then. Thank you." She smiled at me mincingly, for the vinegar stung her lips a little.

With her moistened finger she took a patch which she placed with charming coquetry under her eye, and another which she placed near the corner of her mouth, and then, radiant and adorable, exclaimed: "Hide away your little color-pots; I hear your uncle coming for me. Clasp my bracelets for me. Midnight! O my poor horses!"

At that moment my uncle entered in silk shorts and a domino.

"I hope I do not intrude," said he, gayly, on seeing me.

“What nonsense!” said my aunt, turning toward him. “Ernest is going to the Embassy, like ourselves, and I have offered him a seat in the carriage.”

At the aspect of my aunt, my uncle, dazzled, held out his gloved hand to her, saying, “You are enchanting this evening, my dear.” Then, with a sly smile, “Your complexion has a fine brightness, and your eyes have a wonderful brilliancy.”

“Oh, it is the fire they have been making up—it is stifling here. But you, my dear, you look splendid; I have never seen your beard so black.”

“It is because I am so pale—I am frozen. Jean forgot to look after my fire at all, and it went out. Are you ready?”

My aunt smiled in turn as she took up her fan.

CHAPTER VIII. MY AUNT AS VENUS

Since that day when I kissed Madame de B. right on the centre of the neck, as she held out her forehead to me, there has crept into our intercourse an indescribable, coquettish coolness, which is nevertheless by no means unpleasant. The matter of the kiss has never been completely explained. It happened just as I left Saint-Cyr. I was full of ardor, and the cravings of my heart sometimes blinded me. I say that they sometimes blinded me; I repeat, blinded me, and this is true, for really I must have been possessed to have kissed my aunt on the neck as I did that day. But let that pass.

It was not that she was hardly worth it; my little auntie, as I used to call her then, was the prettiest woman in the world—coquettish, elegant; and what a foot! and, above all, that delightful little—I don't know what —which is so fashionable now, and which tempts one always to say too much.

When I say that I must have been possessed, it is because I think of the consequences to which that kiss might have led. Her husband, General de B., being my direct superior, it might have got me into a very awkward position; besides, there is the respect due to one's family. Oh, I have never failed in that.

But I do not know why I am recalling all these old recollections, which have nothing in common with what I am about to relate to you. My intention was simply to tell you that since my return from Mexico I go pretty frequently to Madame de B.'s, as perhaps you do also, for she keeps up a rather good establishment, receives every Monday evening, and there is usually a crowd of people at her house, for she is very entertaining. There is no form of amusement that she does not resort to

in order to keep up her reputation as a woman of fashion. I must own, however, that I had never seen anything at her house to equal what I saw last Monday.

I was in the ante-room, where the footman was helping me off with my top-coat, when Jean, approaching me with a suspicion of mystery, said: "My mistress expects to see you immediately, Monsieur, in her bedroom. If you will walk along the passage and knock at the door at the end, you will find her."

When one has just returned from the other side of the world, such words sound queer. The old affair of the kiss recurred to me in spite of myself. What could my aunt want with me?

I tapped quietly at the door, and heard at once an outburst of stifled laughter.

"Wait a moment," exclaimed a laughing voice.

"I won't be seen in this state," whispered another—"Yes"—"No"—"You are absurd, my dear, since it is an affair of art."—"Ha, ha, ha." And they laughed and laughed again.

At last a voice cried, "Come in," and I turned the handle.

At first glance I could only make out a confused chaos, impossible to describe, amidst which my aunt was bustling about clad in pink fleshings. Clad, did I say?—very airily.

The furniture, the carpet, the mantel-piece were encumbered, almost buried under a heterogeneous mass of things. Muslin petticoats, tossed down haphazard, pieces of lace, a cardboard helmet covered with gilt paper, open jewel-cases, bows of ribbon; curling-tongs, half hidden in the ashes; and on every side little pots, paint-brushes, odds and ends of all kinds. Behind two screens, which ran across the room, I could hear whisperings, and the buzzing sound peculiar to women dressing themselves. In one corner Silvani—the illustrious Silvani, still wearing the large white apron he assumes when powdering his clients—was putting away his powder-puff and turning down his sleeves with a satisfied air. I stood petrified. What was going on at my aunt's?

She discovered my astonishment, and without turning round she said in agitated tones:

"Ah! is it you, Ernest?" Then as if making up her mind, she broke into a hearty burst of laughter, like all women who have good teeth, and added, with a slightly superior air, "You see, we are having private theatricals."

Then turning toward me with her elegant coiffure powdered to excess, I could see that her face was painted like that of a priestess of antiquity. That gauze, that atmosphere, redolent with feminine perfumes, and behind those screens-behind those screens!

"Women in society," I said to myself, looking about me, "must be mad to amuse themselves in this fashion."

"And what piece are you going to play, aunt, in such an attractive costume?"

"Good evening, Captain," called out a laughing voice from behind the screen on the right.

"We were expecting you," came from behind the screen on the left.

"Good evening, ladies; what can I do for you?"

"It is not a play," observed my aunt, modestly drawing together her sea-weed draperies. "How behind the age you are, to think that any one plays set-pieces nowadays. It is not a piece, it is a 'tableau vivant', 'The judgment of Paris.' You know 'The Judgment of Paris'? I take the part of Venus—I did not want to, but they all urged me—give me a pin—on the mantelpiece—near the bag of bonbons—there to the left, next to the jewel-case—close by the bottle of gum standing on my prayer-book. Can't you see? Ah! at last. In short, the knife to my throat to compel me to play Venus."

Turning to the screen on the right she said: "Pass me the red for the lips, dear; mine are too pale." To the hairdresser, who is making his way to the door: "Silvani, go to the gentlemen who are dressing in the billiard-room, and in the Baron's dressing-room, they perhaps may need you. Madame de S. and her daughters are in the boudoir—ah! see

whether Monsieur de V. has found his apple again—he plays Paris," added my aunt, turning toward me once more; "the apple must not be lost—well, dear, and that red for the lips I asked you for? Pass it to the Captain over the screen."

"Here it is; but make haste, Captain, my cuirass cracks as soon as I raise my arm."

I descried above the screen two slender fingers, one of which, covered with glittering rings, held in the air a little pot without a cover.

"What,—is your cuirass cracking, Marchioness?"

"Oh! it will do, but make haste and take it, Captain."

"You may think it strange, but I tremble like a leaf," exclaimed my aunt. "I am afraid of being ill. Do you hear the gentlemen who are dressing in there in the Baron's dressing room? What a noise! Ha! ha! ha! it is charming, a regular gang of strollers. It is exhilarating, do you know, this feverish existence, this life in front of the footlights. But, for the love of Heaven, shut the door, Marie, there is a frightful draught blowing on me. This hourly struggle with the public, the hisses, the applause, would, with my impressionable nature, drive me mad, I am sure."

The old affair of the kiss recurred to me and I said to myself, "Captain, you misunderstood the nature of your relative."

"But that is not the question at all," continued my aunt; "ten o'clock is striking. Ernest, can you apply liquid white? As you are rather experienced—"

"Rather—ha! ha! ha!" said some one behind the screen.

"On the whole," continued the Baroness, "it would be very singular if, in the course of your campaigns, you had never seen liquid white applied."

"Yes, aunt, I have some ideas; yes, I have some ideas about liquid white, and by summoning together all my recollections—"

"Is it true, Captain, that it causes rheumatism?"

“No, not at all; have a couple of logs put on the fire and give me the stuff.”

So saying, I turned up my sleeves and poured some of the “Milk of Beauty” into a little onyx bowl that was at hand, then I dipped a little sponge into it, and approached my Aunt Venus with a smile.

“You are sure that it has no effect on the skin—no, I really dare not.” As she said this she looked as prim as a vestal. “It is the first time, do you know, that I ever used this liquid white, ah! ah! ah! What a baby I am! I am all in a shiver.”

“But, my dear, you are foolish,” exclaimed the lady of the screen, breaking into a laugh; “when one acts one must submit to the exigencies of the footlights.”

“You hear, aunt? Come, give me your arm.”

She held out her full, round arm, on the surface of which was spread that light and charming down, symbol of maturity. I applied the wet sponge.

“Oh! oh! oh!” exclaimed the Baroness; “it is like ice, a regular shower-bath, and you want to put that all over me?”

Just then there was a knock at the door which led out of the Baron’s dressing-room, and instinctively I turned toward it.

“Who’s there? Oh! you are letting it splutter all over me!” exclaimed the Baroness. “You can’t come in; what is it?”

“What is the matter, aunt?”

“You can’t come in,” exclaimed some one behind the screen; “my cuirass has split. Marie, Rosine, a needle and thread, the gum.”

“Oh! there is a stream all down my back, your horrid white is running down,” said the Baroness, in a rage.

“I will wipe it. I am really very sorry.”

“Can you get your hand down my back, do you think?”

“Why not, aunt?”

“Why not, why not! Because where there is room for a drop of water, there is not room for the hand of a lancer.”

Another knock, this time at the door opening from the passage.

“What is it now?”

“The torches have come, Madame,” said a footman. “Will you have them lighted?”

“Ah! the torches of Mesdemoiselles de N., who are dressing in the boudoir. No, certainly not, do not light them, they are not wanted till the second tableau.”

“Do not stir, aunt, I beg of you. Mesdemoiselles de N. appears too, then?”

“Yes, with their mamma; they represent ‘The Lights of Faith driving out Unbelief,’ thus they naturally require torches. You know, they are tin tubes with spirits of wine which blazes up. It will be, perhaps, the prettiest tableau of the evening. It is an indirect compliment we wish to pay to the Cardinal’s nephew; you know the dark young man with very curly hair and saintly eyes; you saw him last Monday. He is in high favor at court. The Comte de Geloni was kind enough to promise to come this evening, and then Monsieur de Saint P. had the idea of this tableau. His imagination is boundless, Monsieur de Saint P., not to mention his good taste, if he would not break his properties.”

“Is he not also a Chevalier of the Order of Saint Gregory?”

“Yes, and, between ourselves, I think that he would not be sorry to become an officer in it.”

“Ah! I understand, ‘The Lights of Faith driving out,’ et cetera. But tell me, aunt, am I not brushing you too hard? Lift up your arm a little, please. Tell me who has undertaken the part of Unbelief?”

“Don’t speak of it, it is quite a history. As it happened, the casting of the parts took place the very evening on which his Holiness’s Encyclical was published, so that the gentlemen were somewhat excited. Monsieur de Saint P. took high ground, really very high ground; indeed, I thought for a moment that the General was going to flare out. In short, no one

would have anything to do with Unbelief, and we had to have recourse to the General's coachman, John—you know him? He is a good-looking fellow; he is a Protestant, moreover, so that the part is not a novel one to him."

"No matter, it will be disagreeable for the De N.'s to appear side by side with a servant."

"Come! such scruples must not be carried too far; he is smeared over with black and lies stretched on his face, while the three ladies trample on him, so you see that social proprieties are observed after all. Come, have you done yet? My hair is rather a success, is it not? Silvani is the only man who understands how to powder one. He wanted to dye it red, but I prefer to wait till red hair has found its way a little more into society."

"There; it is finished, aunt. Is it long before you have to go on?"

"No. Good Heavens, it is close on eleven o'clock! The thought of appearing before all these people—don't the flowers drooping from my head make my neck appear rather awkward, Ernest? Will you push them up a little?"

Then going to the door of the dressing-room she tapped at it gently, saying, "Are you ready, Monsieur de V.?"

"Yes, Baroness, I have found my apple, but I am horribly nervous. Are Minerva and Juno dressed? Oh! I am nervous to a degree you have no idea of."

"Yes, yes, every one is ready; send word to the company in the drawing-room. My poor heart throbs like to burst, Captain."

CHAPTER IX. HUSBAND AND WIFE MY DEAR SISTERS:

Marriage, as it is now understood, is not exactly conducive to love. In this I do not think that I am stating an anomaly. Love in marriage is, as a rule, too much at his ease; he stretches himself with too great listlessness in armchairs too well cushioned. He assumes the unconstrained habits of dressing-gown and slippers; his digestion goes wrong, his appetite fails and of an evening, in the too-relaxing warmth of a nest, made for him, he yawns over his newspaper, goes to sleep, snores, and pines away. It is all very well, my sisters, to say, “But not at all—but how can it be, Father Z.?—you know nothing about it, reverend father.”

I maintain that things are as I have stated, and that at heart you are absolutely of my opinion. Yes, your poor heart has suffered very often; there are nights during which you have wept, poor angel, vainly awaiting the dream of the evening before.

“Alas!” you say, “is it then all over? One summer’s day, then thirty years of autumn, to me, who am so fond of sunshine.” That is what you have thought.

But you say nothing, not knowing what you should say. Lacking self-confidence and ignorant of yourself, you have made it a virtue to keep silence and not wake your husband while he sleeps; you have got into the habit of walking on the tips of your toes so as not to disturb the household, and your husband, in the midst of this refreshing half-sleep, has begun to yawn luxuriously; then he has gone out to his club, where he has been received like the prodigal son, while you, poor poet without pen or ink, have consoled yourself by watching your sisters follow the same road as yourself.

You have, all of you, ladies, your pockets full of manuscripts, charming poems, delightful romances; it is a reader who is lacking to you, and your husband takes up his hat and stick at the very sight of your handwriting; he firmly believes that there are no more romances except those already in print. From having read so many, he considers that no more can be written.

This state of things I regard as absolutely detestable. I look upon you, my dear sisters, as poor victims, and if you will permit I will give you my opinion on the subject.

Esteem and friendship between husband and wife are like our daily bread, very pleasant and respectable; but a little jam would not spoil that, you will admit! If, therefore, one of your friends complains of the freedom that reigns in this little book, let her talk on and be sure beforehand that this friend eats dry bread. We have described marriage as we think it should be—depicting smiling spouses, delighted to be together.

Is it because love is rare as between husband and wife that it is considered unbecoming to relate its joys? Is it regret, or envy, that renders you fastidious on the subject, sisters? Reserve your blushes for the pictures of that society of courtesans where love is an article of commerce, where kisses are paid for in advance. Regard the relation of these coarse pleasures as immodest and revolting, be indignant, scold your brethren—I will admit that you are in the right beforehand; but for Heaven's sake do not be offended if we undertake your defence, when we try to render married life pleasant and attractive, and advise husbands to love their wives, wives to love their husbands.

You must understand that there is a truly moral side to all this. To prove that you are adorable; that there are pleasures, joys, happiness, to be found outside the society of those young women—such is our object; and since we are about to describe it, we venture to hope that after reflecting for a few minutes you will consider our intentions praiseworthy, and encourage us to persevere in them.

I do not know why mankind has chosen to call marriage a man-trap, and all sorts of frightful things; to stick up all round it boards on which one reads: “Beware of the sacred ties of marriage;” “Do not jest with the sacred duties of a husband;” “Meditate on the sacred obligation of a father of a family;” “Remember that the serious side of life is beginning;” “No weakness; henceforth you are bound to find yourself face to face with stern reality,” etc., etc.

I will not say that it is imprudent to set forth all those fine things; but when done it should be done with less affectation. To warn people that there are thorns in the path is all very well; but, hang it! there is something else in married life, something that renders these duties delightful, else this sacred position and these ties would soon be nothing more than insupportable burdens. One would really think that to take to one’s self a pretty little wife, fresh in heart and pure in mind, and to condemn one’s self to saw wood for the rest of one’s days, were one and the same thing.

Well, my dear sisters, have you any knowledge of those who have painted the picture in these gloomy colors and described as a punishment that which should be a reward? They are the husbands with a past and having rheumatism. Being weary and—how shall I put it?—men of the world, they choose to represent marriage as an asylum, of which you are to be the angels. No doubt to be an angel is very nice, but, believe me, it is either too much or too little. Do not seek to soar so high all at once, but, instead, enter on a short apprenticeship. It will be time enough to don the crown of glory when you have no longer hair enough to dress in any other fashion.

But, O husbands with a past! do you really believe that your own angelic quietude and the studied austerity of your principles are taken for anything else than what they really mean—exhaustion?

You wish to rest; well and good; but it is wrong in you to wish everybody else about you to rest too; to ask for withered trees and faded grass in May, the lamps turned down and the lamp-shades doubled; to require one to put water in the soup and to refuse one’s self a glass of

claret; to look for virtuous wives to be highly respectable and somewhat wearisome beings; dressing neatly, but having had neither poetry, youth, gayety, nor vague desires; ignorant of everything, undesirous of learning anything; helpless, thanks to the weighty virtues with which you have crammed them; above all, to ask of these poor creatures to bless your wisdom, caress your bald forehead, and blush with shame at the echo of a kiss.

The deuce! but that is a pretty state of things for marriage to come to.

Delightful institution! How far are your sons, who are now five-and-twenty years of age, in the right in being afraid of it! Have they not a right to say to you, twirling their moustaches:

"But, my dear father, wait a bit; I am not quite ripe for it!"

"Yes; but it is a splendid match, and the young lady is charming."

"No doubt, but I feel that I should not make her happy. I am not old enough—indeed, I am not."

And when the young man is seasoned for it, how happy she will be, poor little thing!—a ripe husband, ready to fall from the tree, fit to be put away in the apple-loft! What happiness! a good husband, who the day after his marriage will piously place his wife in a niche and light a taper in front of her; then take his hat and go off to spend elsewhere a scrap of youth left by chance at the bottom of his pocket.

Ah! my good little sisters who are so very much shocked and cry "Shame!" follow our reasoning a little further. It is all very well that you should be treated like saints, but do not let it be forgotten that you are women, and, listen to me, do not forget it yourselves.

A husband, majestic and slightly bald, is a good thing; a young husband who loves you and eats off the same plate is better. If he rumples your dress a little, and imprints a kiss, in passing, on the back of your neck, let him. When, on coming home from a ball, he tears out the pins, tangles the strings, and laughs like a madman, trying to see whether you are ticklish, let him. Do not cry "Murder!" if his moustache pricks you, but think that it is all because at heart he loves you well. He

worships your virtues; is it surprising hence that he should cherish their outward coverings? No doubt you have a noble soul; but your body is not therefore to be despised; and when one loves fervently, one loves everything at the same time. Do not be alarmed if in the evening, when the fire is burning brightly and you are chatting gayly beside it, he should take off one of your shoes and stockings, put your foot on his lap, and in a moment of forgetfulness carry irreverence so far as to kiss it; if he likes to pass your large tortoise-shell comb through your hair, if he selects your perfumes, arranges your plaits, and suddenly exclaims, striking his forehead: “Sit down there, darling; I have an idea how to arrange a new coiffure.”

If he turns up his sleeves and by chance tangles your curls, where really is the harm? Thank Heaven if in the marriage which you have hit upon you find a laughing, joyous side; if in your husband you find the loved reader of the pretty romance you have in your pocket; if, while wearing cashmere shawls and costly jewels in your ears, you find the joys of a real intimacy—that is delicious! In short, reckon yourself happy if in your husband you find a lover.

But before accepting my theories, ladies, although in your heart and conscience you find them perfect, you will have several little prejudices to overcome; above all, you will have to struggle against your education, which is deplorable, as I have already said, but that is no great matter. Remember that under the pretext of education you have been stuffed, my dear sisters. You have been varnished too soon, like those pictures painted for sales, which crack all over six months after purchase. Your disposition has not been properly directed; you are not cultivated; you have been stifled, pruned; you have been shaped like those yew-trees at Versailles which represent goblets and birds. Still, you are women at the bottom, though you no longer look it.

You are handed over to us men swaddled, distorted, stuffed with prejudices and principles, heavy as paving-stones; all of which are the more difficult to dislodge since you look upon them as sacred; you are started on the matrimonial journey with so much luggage reckoned as

indispensable; and at the first station your husband, who is not an angel, loses his temper amidst all these encumbrances, sends it all to the devil under some pretext or other, lets you go on alone, and gets into another carriage. I do not require, mark me, that you should be allowed to grow up uncared for, that good or evil instincts should be suffered to spring up in you anyhow: but it were better that they should not treat your poor mind like the foot of a well-born Chinese girl—that they should not enclose it in a porcelain slipper.

A marriageable young lady is a product of maternal industry, which takes ten years to fructify, and needs from five to six more years of study on the part of the husband to purify, strip, and restore to its real shape. In other words, it takes ten years to make a bride and six years at least to turn this bride into a woman again. Admit frankly that this is time lost as regards happiness, but try to make it up if your husband will permit you to do so.

The sole guaranty of fidelity between husband and wife is love. One remains side by side with a fellow-traveller only so long as one experiences pleasure and happiness in his company. Laws, decrees, oaths, may prevent faithlessness, or at least punish it, but they can neither hinder nor punish intention. But as regards love, intention and deed are the same.

Is it not true, my dear sisters, that you are of this opinion? Do not you thoroughly understand that if love is absent from marriage it should, on the contrary, be its real pivot? To make one's self lovable is the main thing. Believe my white hairs that it is so, and let me give you some more advice.

Yes, I favor marriage—I do not conceal it—the happy marriage in which we cast into the common lot our ideas and our sorrows, as well as our good-humor and our affections. Suppress, by all means, in this partnership, gravity and affectation, yet add a sprinkling of gallantry and good-fellowship. Preserve even in your intimacy that coquetry you so

readily assume in society. Seek to please your husband. Be amiable. Consider that your husband is an audience, whose sympathy you must conquer.

In your manner of loving mark those shades, those feminine delicacies, which double the price of things. Do not be miserly, but remember that the manner in which one gives adds to the value of the gift; or rather do not give—make yourself sought after. Think of those precious jewels that are arranged with such art in their satin-lined jewel-case; never forget the case. Let your nest be soft, let your presence be felt in all its thousand trifles. Put a little of yourself into the ordering of everything. Be artistic, delicate, and refined—you can do so without effort—and let your husband perceive in everything that surrounds him, from the lace on the curtains to the perfume that you use, a wish on your part to please him.

Do not say to him, “I love you”; that phrase may perhaps recall to him a recollection or two. But lead him on to say to you, “You do love me, then?” and answer “No,” but with a little kiss which means “Yes.” Make him feel beside you the present to be so pleasant that the past will fade from his memory; and to this end let nothing about you recall that past, for, despite himself, he would never forgive it in you. Do not imitate the women whom he may have known, nor their head-dresses or toilettes; that would tend to make him believe he has not changed his manner of life. You have in yourself another kind of grace, another wit, another coquetry, and above all that rejuvenescence of heart and mind which those women have never had. You have an eagerness in life, a need of expansion, a freshness of impression which are—though perhaps you may not imagine it—irresistible charms. Be yourselves throughout, and you will be for this loved spouse a novelty, a thousand times more charming in his eyes than all the bygones possible. Conceal from him neither your inclinations nor your inexperience, your childish joys or your childish fears; but be as coquettish with all these as you are of the features of your face, of your fine, black eyes and your long, fair hair.

Nothing is more easily acquired than a little adroitness; do not throw yourself at his head, and always have confidence in yourself.

Usually, a man marries when he thinks himself ruined; when he feels in his waistcoat pocket—not a louis—he is then seasoned; he goes at once before the registrar. But let me tell you, sisters, he is still rich. He has another pocket of which he knows nothing, the fool! and which is full of gold. It is for you to act so that he shall find it out and be grateful to you for the happiness he has had in finding a fortune.

I will sum up, at once, as time is flying and I should not like you to be late for dinner. For Heaven's sake, ladies, tear from the clutches of the women, whose toilettes you do very wrong in imitating, your husbands' affections. Are you not more refined, more sprightly, than they? Do for him whom you love that which these women do for all the world; do not content yourselves with being virtuous—be attractive, perfume your hair, nurture illusion as a rare plant in a golden vase. Cultivate a little folly when practicable; put away your marriage-contract and look at it only once in ten years; love one another as if you had not sworn to do so; forget that there are bonds, contracts, pledges; banish from your mind the recollection of the Mayor and his scarf. Sometimes when you are alone fancy that you are only sweethearts; sister, is not that what you eagerly desire?

Ah! let candor and youth flourish. Let us love and laugh while spring blossoms. Let us love our babies, the little dears, and kiss our wives. Yes, that is moral and healthy; the world is not a shivering convent, marriage is not a tomb. Shame on those who find in it only sadness, boredom, and sleep.

My sisters, my sisters, strive to be real; that is the blessing I wish you.

CHAPTER X. MADAME'S IMPRESSIONS

The marriage ceremony at the Town Hall has, no doubt, a tolerable importance; but is it really possible for a well-bred person to regard this importance seriously? I have been through it; I have undergone like every one else this painful formality, and I can not look back on it without feeling a kind of humiliation. On alighting from the carriage I descried a muddy staircase; walls placarded with bills of every color, and in front of one of them a man in a snuff-colored coat, bare-headed, a pen behind his ear, and papers under his arm, who was rolling a cigarette between his inky fingers. To the left a door opened and I caught a glimpse of a low dark room in which a dozen fellows belonging to the National Guard were smoking black pipes. My first thought on entering this barrack-room was that I had done wisely in not putting on my gray dress. We ascended the staircase and I saw a long, dirty, dim passage, with a number of half-glass doors, on which I read: "Burials. Turn the handle," "Expropriations," "Deaths. Knock loudly," "Inquiries," "Births," "Public Health," etc., and at length "Marriages."

We entered in company with a small lad who was carrying a bottle of ink; the atmosphere was thick, heavy, and hot, and made one feel ill. Happily, an attendant in a blue livery, resembling in appearance the soldiers I had seen below, stepped forward to ask us to excuse him for not having at once ushered us into the Mayor's drawing-room, which is no other than the first-class waiting-room. I darted into it as one jumps into a cab when it begins to rain suddenly. Almost immediately two serious persons, one of whom greatly resembled the old cashier at the Petit-Saint-Thomas, brought in two registers, and, opening them, wrote for some time; only stopping occasionally to ask the name, age, and baptismal names of both of us, then, saying to themselves, "Semi-colon... between the aforesaid... fresh paragraph, etc., etc."

When he had done, the one like the man cashier at the Petit-Saint-Thomas read aloud, through his nose, that which he had put down, and of which I could understand nothing, except that my name was several times repeated as well as that of the other “aforesaid.” A pen was handed to us and we signed. Voila.

“Is it over?” said I to Georges, who to my great surprise was very pale.

“Not yet, dear,” said he; “we must now go into the hall, where the marriage ceremony takes place.”

We entered a large, empty hall with bare walls; a bust of the Emperor was at the farther end over a raised platform, some armchairs, and some benches behind them, and dust upon everything. I must have been in a wrong mood, for it seemed to me I was entering the waiting-room at a railway-station; nor could I help looking at my aunts, who were very merry, over the empty chairs. The gentlemen, who no doubt affected not to think as we did, were, on the contrary, all very serious, and I could discern very well that Georges was actually trembling. At length the Mayor came in by a little door and appeared before us, awkward and podgy in his dress-coat, which was too large for him, and which his scarf caused to rise up. He was a very respectable man who had amassed a decent fortune from the sale of iron bedsteads; yet how could I bring myself to think that this embarrassed-looking, ill-dressed, timid little creature could, with a word hesitatingly uttered, unite me in eternal bonds? Moreover, he had a fatal likeness to my piano-tuner.

The Mayor, after bowing to us, as a man bows when without his hat, and in a white cravat, that is to say, clumsily, blew his nose, to the great relief of his two arms which he did not know what to do with, and briskly began the little ceremony. He hurriedly mumbled over several passages of the Code, giving the numbers of the paragraphs; and I was given confusedly to understand that I was threatened with the police if I did not blindly obey all the orders and crotchets of my husband, and if I did not follow wherever he might choose to take me, even if it should be to a sixth floor in the Rue-Saint-Victor. A score of times I was on the point of

interrupting the Mayor, and saying, “Excuse me, Monsieur, but those remarks are hardly polite as regards myself, and you yourself must know that they are devoid of meaning.”

But I restrained myself for fear I might frighten the magistrate, who seemed to me to be in a hurry to finish. He added, however, a few words on the mutual duties of husband and wife—copartnership—paternity, etc., etc.; but all these things, which would perhaps have made me weep anywhere else, seemed grotesque to me, and I could not forget that dozen of soldiers playing piquet round the stove, and that row of doors on which I had read “Public Health,” “Burials,” “Deaths,” “Expropriations,” etc. I should have been aggrieved at this dealer in iron bedsteads touching on my cherished dreams if the comic side of the situation had not absorbed my whole attention, and if a mad wish to laugh outright had not seized me.

“Monsieur Georges————, do you swear to take for your wife Mademoiselle————-,” said the Mayor, bending forward.

My husband bowed and answered “Yes” in a very low voice. He has since acknowledged to me that he never felt more emotion in his life than in uttering that “Yes.”

“Mademoiselle Berthe————,” continued the magistrate, turning to me, “do you swear to take for your husband————-”

I bowed, with a smile, and said to myself: “Certainly; that is plain enough; I came here for that express purpose.”

That was all. I was married!

My father and my husband shook hands like men who had not met for twenty years; the eyes of both were moist. As for myself, it was impossible for me to share their emotion. I was very hungry, and mamma and I had the carriage pulled up at the pastry-cook’s before going on to the dressmaker’s.

The next morning was the great event, and when I awoke it was hardly daylight. I opened the door leading into the drawing-room; there my dress was spread out on the sofa, the veil folded beside it, my shoes, my

wreath in a large white box, nothing was lacking. I drank a glass of water. I was nervous, uneasy, happy, trembling. It seemed like the morning of a battle when one is sure of winning a medal. I thought of neither my past nor my future; I was wholly taken up with the idea of the ceremony, of that sacrament, the most solemn of all, of the oath I was about to take before God, and also by the thought of the crowd gathered expressly to see me pass.

We breakfasted early. My father was in his boots, his trousers, his white tie, and his dressing-gown. My mother also was half dressed. It seemed to me that the servants took greater pains in waiting on me and showed me more respect. I even remember that Marie said, "The hairdresser has come, Madame." Madame! Good girl, I have not forgotten it.

It was impossible for me to eat; my throat was parched and I experienced all over me shudders of impatience, something like the sensation one has when one is very-thirsty and is waiting for the sugar to melt. The tones of the organ seemed to haunt me, and the wedding of Emma and Louis recurred to my mind. I dressed; the hairdresser called me "Madame" too, and arranged my hair so nicely that I said, I remember, "Things are beginning well; this coiffure is a good omen." I stopped Marie, who wished to lace me tighter than usual. I know that white makes one look stouter and that Marie was right; but I was afraid lest it should send the blood to my head. I have always had a horror of brides who looked as if they had just got up from table. Religious emotions should be too profound to be expressed by anything save pallor. It is silly to blush under certain circumstances.

When I was dressed I entered the drawing-room to have a little more room and to spread out my trailing skirts. My father and Georges were already there, talking busily.

"Have the carriages come?—yes—and about the 'Salutaris'?—very good, then, you will see to everything—and the marriage coin—certainly, I have the ring—Mon Dieu! where is my certificate of confession? Ah! good, I left it in the carriage."

They were saying all this hurriedly and gesticulating like people having great business on hand. When Georges caught sight of me he kissed my hand, and while the maids kneeling about me were settling the skirt, and the hairdresser was clipping the tulle of the veil, he said in a husky voice, “You look charming, dear.”

He was not thinking in the least of what he was saying, and I answered mechanically:

“Do you think so? Not too short, the veil, Monsieur Silvani. Don’t forget the bow on the bodice, Marie.”

When one has to look after everything, one needs all one’s wits. However, Georges’ husky voice recurred to me, and I said to myself, “I am sure that he has caught a cold; it is plain that he has had his hair cut too short.”

I soon got at the true state of the case.

“You have a cold, my dear fellow,” said my father.

“Don’t speak of it,” he answered in a low voice. And still lower, and with a somewhat embarrassed smile: “Will you be so kind as to give me an extra pocket-handkerchief? I have but one—”

“Certainly, my dear boy.”

“Thanks, very much.”

It was a trifle, to be sure, but I felt vexed, and I remember that, when going downstairs with them holding up my train behind me, I said to myself, “I do hope that he does not sneeze at the altar.”

I soon forgot all about it. We got into the carriage; I felt that every one was looking at me, and I caught sight of groups of spectators in the street beyond the carriage gates. What I felt is impossible to describe, but it was something delightful. The sound of the beadles’ canes on the pavement will forever reecho in my heart. We halted for a moment on the red drugget. The great organ poured forth the full tones of a triumphal march; thousands of eager faces turned toward me, and there

in the background, amidst an atmosphere of sunshine, incense, velvet, and gold, were two gilt armchairs for us to seat ourselves on before the altar.

I do not know why an old engraving in my father's study crossed my mind. It represents the entry of Alexander the Great into Babylon; he is on an elephant which is glittering with precious stones. You must know it. Only, Alexander was a heathen who had many things to reproach himself with, while I was not.

God smiled on me, and with His paternal hand invited me to seat myself in His house, on His red drugget, in His gilt armchair. The heavens, full of joy, made music for me, and on high, through the glittering stained-glass windows, the archangels, full of kind feeling, whispered as they watched me. As I advanced, heads were bent as a wheat-field bends beneath the breeze. My friends, my relatives, my enemies, bowed to us, and I saw—for one sees everything in spite of one's self on these solemn occasions—that they did not think that I looked ugly. On reaching the gilt chair, I bent forward with restrained eagerness—my chignon was high, revealing my neck, which is passable—and thanked the Lord. The organ ceased its triumphal song and I could hear my poor mother bursting into tears beside me. Oh! I understand what a mother's heart must feel during such a ceremony. While watching with satisfaction the clergy who were solemnly advancing, I noticed Georges; he seemed irritated; he was stiff, upright, his nostrils dilated, and his lips set. I have always been rather vexed at him for not having been a little more sensible to what I was experiencing that day, but men do not understand this kind of poetry.

The discourse of his Reverence who married us was a masterpiece, and was delivered, moreover, with that unction, that dignity, that persuasive charm peculiar to him. He spoke of our two families "in which pious belief was hereditary, like honor." You could have heard a pin drop, such was the attention with which the prelate's voice was listened to. Then at one point he turned toward me, and gave me to understand with a thousand delicacies that I was wedding one of the

noblest officers in the army. “Heaven smiles,” said he, “on the warrior who places at the service of his country a sword blessed by God, and who, when he darts into the fray, can place his hand upon his heart and shout to the enemy that noble war-cry, ‘I believe!’” How well that was turned! What grandeur in this holy eloquence! A thrill ran through the assembly. But that was not all. His Lordship then addressed Georges in a voice as soft and unctuous as it had before been ringing and enthusiastic.

“Monsieur, you are about to take as your companion a young girl”—I scarcely dare recall the graceful and delicate things that his Reverence said respecting me—“piously reared by a Christian mother who has been able to share with her, if I may say so, all the virtues of her heart, all the charms of her mind.” (Mamma was sobbing.) “She will love her husband as she has loved her father, that father full of kindness, who, from the cradle, implanted in her the sentiments of nobility and disinterestedness which—” (Papa smiled despite himself.) “Her father, whose name is known to the poor, and who in the house of God has his place marked among the elect.” (Since his retirement, papa has become churchwarden.) “And you, Monsieur, will respect, I feel certain, so much purity, such ineffable candor”—I felt my eyes grow moist—“and without forgetting the physical and perishable charms of this angel whom God bestows upon you, you will thank Heaven for those qualities a thousand times more precious and more lasting contained in her heart and her mind.”

We were bidden to stand up, and stood face to face with one another like the divine spouses in the picture of Raphael. We exchanged the golden ring, and his Reverence, in a slow, grave voice, uttered some Latin words, the sense of which I did not understand, but which greatly moved me, for the prelate’s hand, white, delicate, and transparent, seemed to be blessing me. The censer, with its bluish smoke, swung by the hands of children, shed in the air its holy perfume. What a day, great heavens! All that subsequently took place grows confused in my

memory. I was dazzled, I was transported. I can remember, however, the bonnet with white roses in which Louise had decked herself out. Strange it is how some people are quite wanting in taste!

Going to the vestry, I leaned on the General's arm, and it was then that I saw the spectators' faces. All seemed touched.

Soon they thronged round to greet me. The vestry was full, they pushed and pressed round me, and I replied to all these smiles, to all these compliments, by a slight bow in which religious emotion peeped forth in spite of me. I felt conscious that something solemn had just taken place before God and man; I felt conscious of being linked in eternal bonds. I was married!

By a strange fancy I then fell to thinking of the pitiful ceremony of the day before. I compared—God forgive me for doing so!—the ex-dealer in iron bedsteads, ill at ease in his dress-coat, to the priest; the trivial and commonplace words of the mayor, with the eloquent outbursts of the venerable prelate. What a lesson! There earth, here heaven; there the coarse prose of the man of business, here celestial poesy.

Georges, to whom I lately spoke about this, said:

"But, my dear, perhaps you don't know that marriage at the Town Hall before the registrar is gratis, while—" I put my hand over his mouth to prevent him from finishing; it seemed to me that he was about to utter some impiety.

Gratis, gratis. That is exactly what I find so very unseemly.

CHAPTER XI. A WEDDING NIGHT

Thanks to country manners and the solemnity of the occasion, the guests had left fairly early. Almost every one had shaken hands with me, some with a cunning smile and others with a foolish one, some with an officious gravity that suggested condolence, and others with a stupid cordiality verging on indiscretion.

General de S. and the prefect, two old friends of the family, were lingering over a game of ecarte, and frankly, in spite of all the good-will I bore toward them, I should have liked to see them at the devil, so irritable did I feel that evening.

All this took place, I had forgotten to tell you, the very day of my marriage, and I was really rather tired. Since morning I had been overwhelmed by an average of about two hundred people, all actuated by the best intentions, but as oppressive as the atmosphere before a storm. Since morning I had kept up a perpetual smile for all, and then the good village priest who had married us had thought it his duty, in a very neat sermon so far as the rest of it went, to compare me to Saint Joseph, and that sort of thing is annoying when one is Captain in a lancer regiment. The Mayor, who had been good enough to bring his register to the chateau, had for his part not been able, on catching sight of the prefect, to resist the pleasure of crying, “Long live the Emperor!” On quitting the church they had fired off guns close to my ears and presented me with an immense bouquet. Finally—I tell you this between ourselves—since eight o’clock in the morning I had had on a pair of boots rather too tight for me, and at the moment this narrative begins it was about half an hour after midnight.

I had spoken to every one except my dear little wife, whom they seemed to take pleasure in keeping away from me. Once, however, on ascending the steps, I had squeezed her hand on the sly. Even then this

rash act had cost me a look, half sharp and half sour, from my mother-in-law, which had recalled me to a true sense of the situation. If, Monsieur, you happen to have gone through a similar day of violent effusion and general expansion, you will agree with me that during no other moment of your life were you more inclined to irritability.

What can you say to the cousins who kiss you, to the aunts who cling round your neck and weep into your waistcoat, to all these smiling faces ranged one beyond the other before you, to all those eyes which have been staring at you for twelve hours past, to all those outbursts of affection which you have not sought, but which claim a word from the heart in reply?

At the end of such a day one's very heart is foundered. You say to yourself: "Come, is it all over? Is there yet a tear to wipe away, a compliment to receive, an agitated hand to clasp? Is every one satisfied? Have they seen enough of the bridegroom? Does any one want any more of him? Can I at length give a thought to my own happiness, think of my dear little wife who is waiting for me with her head buried in the folds of her pillow? Who is waiting for me!" That flashes through your mind all at once like a train of powder. You had not thought of it. During the whole of the day this luminous side of the question had remained veiled, but the hour approaches, at this very moment the silken laces of her bodice are swishing as they are unloosed; she is blushing, agitated, and dare not look at herself in the glass for fear of noting her own confusion. Her aunt and her mother, her cousin and her bosom friend, surround and smile at her, and it is a question of who shall unhook her dress, remove the orange-blossoms from her hair, and have the last kiss.

Good! now come the tears; they are wiped away and followed by kisses. The mother whispers something in her ear about a sacrifice, the future, necessity, obedience, and finds means to mingle with these simple but carefully prepared words the hope of celestial benedictions and of the intercession of a dove or two hidden among the curtains.

The poor child does not understand anything about it, except it be that something unheard-of is about to take place, that the young man—she dare not call him anything else in her thoughts—is about to appear as a conqueror and address her in wondrous phrases, the very anticipation of which makes her quiver with impatience and alarm. The child says not a word—she trembles, she weeps, she quivers like a partridge in a furrow. The last words of her mother, the last farewells of her family, ring confusedly in her ears, but it is in vain that she strives to seize on their meaning; her mind—where is that poor mind of hers? She really does not know, but it is no longer under her control.

"Ah! Captain," I said to myself, "what joys are hidden beneath these alarms, for she loves you. Do you remember that kiss which she let you snatch coming out of church that evening when the Abbe What's-his-name preached so well, and those hand-squeezings and those softened glances, and—happy Captain, floods of love will inundate you; she is awaiting you!"

Here I gnawed my moustache, I tore my gloves off and then put them on again, I walked up and down the little drawing-room, I shifted the clock, which stood on the mantel-shelf; I could not keep still. I had already experienced such sensations on the morning of the assault on the Malakoff. Suddenly the General, who was still going on with his eternal game at ecarte with the prefect, turned round.

"What a noise you are making, Georges!" said he. "Cards, if you please, Prefect."

"But, General, the fact is that I feel, I will not conceal from you, a certain degree of emotion and—"

"The king-one-and four trumps. My dear friend, you are not in luck," said he to the prefect, and pulling up with an effort the white waistcoat covering his stomach, he slipped some louis which were on the table L931 into his fob; then bethinking himself, he added: "In fact, my poor fellow, you think yourself bound to keep us company. It is late and we have three leagues to cover from here to B. Every one has left, too."

At last he departed. I can still see his thick neck, the back of which formed a roll of fat over his ribbon of the Legion of Honor. I heard him get into his carriage; he was still laughing at intervals. I could have thrashed him.

"At last!" I said to myself; "at last!" I mechanically glanced at myself in the glass. I was crimson, and my boots, I am ashamed to say, were horribly uncomfortable. I was furious that such a grotesque detail as tight boots should at such a moment have power to attract my attention; but I promised to be sincere, and I am telling you the whole truth.

Just then the clock struck one, and my mother-in-law made her appearance. Her eyes were red, and her ungloved hand was crumpling up a handkerchief visibly moistened.

At the sight of her my first movement was one of impatience. I said to myself, "I am in for a quarter of an hour of it at least."

Indeed, Madame de C. sank down on a couch, took my hand, and burst into tears. Amid her sobs she ejaculated, "Georges—my dear boy—Georges—my son."

I felt that I could not rise to the occasion. "Come, Captain," I said to myself, "a tear; squeeze forth a tear. You can not get out of this becomingly without a tear, or it will be, 'My son-in-law, it is all off.'"

When this stupid phrase, derived from I do not know where—a Palais Royal farce, I believe—had once got into my head, it was impossible for me to get rid of it, and I felt bursts of wild merriment welling up to my lips.

"Calm yourself, Madame; calm yourself."

"How can I, Georges? Forgive me, my dear boy."

"Can you doubt me, Madame?"

I felt that "Madame" was somewhat cold, but I was afraid of making Madame de C. seem old by calling her "mother." I knew her to be somewhat of a coquette.

"Oh, I do not doubt your affection; go, my dear boy, go and make her happy; yes, oh, yes! Fear nothing on my account; I am strong."

Nothing is more unbearable than emotion when one does not share it. I murmured “Mother!” feeling that after all she must appreciate such an outburst; then approaching, I kissed her, and made a face in spite of myself—such a salt and disagreeable flavor had been imparted to my mother-in-law’s countenance by the tears she had shed.

CHAPTER XII. THE HONEYMOON

It had been decided that we should pass the first week of our honeymoon at Madame de C.'s chateau. A little suite of apartments had been fitted up for us, upholstered in blue chintz, delightfully cool-looking. The term "cool-looking" may pass here for a kind of bad joke, for in reality it was somewhat damp in this little paradise, owing to the freshly repaired walls.

A room had been specially reserved for me, and it was thither that, after heartily kissing my dear mother-in-law, I flew up the stairs four at a time. On an armchair, drawn in front of the fire, was spread out my maroon velvet dressing-gown and close beside it were my slippers. I could not resist, and I frantically pulled off my boots. Be that as it may, my heart was full of love, and a thousand thoughts were whirling through my head in frightful confusion. I made an effort, and reflected for a moment on my position:

"Captain," said I to myself, "the approaching moment is a solemn one. On the manner in which you cross the threshold of married life depends your future happiness. It is not a small matter to lay the first stone of an edifice. A husband's first kiss"—I felt a thrill run down my back—"a husband's first kiss is like the fundamental axiom that serves as a basis for a whole volume. Be prudent, Captain. She is there beyond that wall, the fair young bride, who is awaiting you; her ear on the alert, her neck outstretched, she is listening to each of your movements. At every creak of the boards she shivers, dear little soul."

As I said this, I took off my coat and my cravat. "Your line of conduct lies before you ready traced out," I added; "be impassioned with due restraint, calm with some warmth, good, kind, tender; but at the same time let her have a glimpse of the vivacities of an ardent affection and the attractive aspect of a robust temperament." Suddenly I put my coat

on again. I felt ashamed to enter my wife's room in a dressing-gown and night attire. Was it not equal to saying to her: "My dear, I am at home; see how I make myself so"? It was making a show of rights which I did not yet possess, so I rearranged my dress, and after the thousand details of a careful toilette I approached the door and gave three discreet little taps. Oh! I can assure you that I was all in a tremble, and my heart was beating so violently that I pressed my hand to my chest to restrain its throbs.

She answered nothing, and after a moment of anguish I decided to knock again. I felt tempted to say in an earnest voice, "It is I, dear; may I come in?" But I also felt that it was necessary that this phrase should be delivered in the most perfect fashion, and I was afraid of marring its effect; I remained, therefore, with a smile upon my lips as if she had been able to see me, and I twirled my moustache, which, without affectation, I had slightly perfumed.

I soon heard a faint cough, which seemed to answer me and to grant me admission. Women, you see, possess that exquisite tact, that extreme delicacy, which is wholly lacking to us. Could one say more cleverly, in a more charming manner, "Come, I await you, my love, my spouse"? Saint Peter would not have hit upon it. That cough was heaven opening to me. I turned the handle, the door swept noiselessly over the soft carpet. I was in my wife's room.

A delightful warmth met me face to face, and I breathed a vague perfume of violets and orris-root, or something akin, with which the air of the room was laden. A charming disorder was apparent, the ball dress was spread upon a lounging-chair, two candles were discreetly burning beneath rose-colored shades.

I drew near the bed where Louise was reposing, on the farther side of it, with her face to the wall, and her head buried in the pillows. Motionless and with closed eyes she appeared to be asleep, but her heightened color betrayed her emotion. I must acknowledge that at that moment I felt the most embarrassed of mankind. I resolved humbly to request hospitality. That would be delicate and irreproachable. Oh! you

who have gone through these trials, search your memories and recall that ridiculous yet delightful moment, that moment of mingled anguish and joy, when it becomes necessary, without any preliminary rehearsal, to play the most difficult of parts, and to avoid the ridicule which is grinning at you from the folds of the curtains; to be at one and the same time a diplomatist, a barrister, and a man of action, and by skill, tact, and eloquence render the sternest of realities acceptable without banishing the most ideal of dreams.

I bent over the bed, and in the softest notes, the sweetest tones my voice could compass, I murmured, “Well, darling?”

One does what one can at such moments; I could not think of anything better, and yet, Heaven knows, I had tried.

No reply, and yet she was awake. I will admit that my embarrassment was doubled. I had reckoned—I can say as much between ourselves—upon more confidence and greater yielding. I had calculated on a moment of effusiveness, full of modesty and alarm, it is true, but, at any rate, I had counted upon such effusiveness, and I found myself strangely disappointed. The silence chilled me.

“You sleep very soundly, dear. Yet I have a great many things to say; won’t you talk a little?”

As I spoke I—touched her shoulder with the tip of my finger, and saw her suddenly shiver.

“Come,” said I; “must I kiss you to wake you up altogether?”

She could not help smiling, and I saw that she was blushing.

“Oh! do not be afraid, dear; I will only kiss the tips of your fingers gently, like that,” and seeing that she let me do so, I sat down on the bed.

She gave a little cry. I had sat down on her foot, which was straying beneath the bedclothes.

“Please let me go to sleep,” she said, with a supplicating air; “I am so tired.”

“And how about myself, my dear child? I am ready to drop. See, I am in evening dress, and have not a pillow to rest my head on, not one, except this one.” I had her hand in mine, and I squeezed it while kissing it. “Would you be very vexed to lend this pillow to your husband? Come, are you going to refuse me a little bit of room? I am not troublesome, I can assure you.”

I thought I noted a smile on her lips, and, impatient to escape from my delicate position, in a moment I rose, and, while continuing to converse, hastelessly and noiselessly undressed. I was burning my ships. When my ships were burned there was absolutely nothing left for me to do but to get into bed.

Louise gave a little cry, then she threw herself toward the wall, and I heard a kind of sob.

I had one foot in bed and the other out, and remained petrified, a smile on my lips, and supporting myself wholly on one arm.

“What is the matter-dear; what is the matter? Forgive me if I have offended you.”

I brought my head closer to her own, and, while inhaling the perfume of her hair, whispered in her ear:

“I love you, my dear child; I love you, little wife; don’t you think that I do?”

She turned toward me her eyes, moistened with tears, and said in a voice broken by emotion and so soft, so low, so tender, that it penetrated to the marrow of my bones:

“I love you, too. But let me sleep!”

“Sleep, my loved angel; sleep fearlessly, my love. I am going away; sleep while I watch over you,” I said.

Upon my honor I felt a sob rise to my throat, and yet the idea that my last remark was not badly turned shot through my brain. I pulled the coverings over her again and tucked her up like a child. I can still see her rosy face buried in that big pillow, the curls of fair hair escaping from under the lace of her little nightcap. With her left hand she held the

counterpane close up under her chin, and I saw on one of her fingers the new and glittering wedding-ring I had given her that morning. She was charming, a bird nestling in cottonwool, a rosebud fallen amid snow. When she was settled I bent over her and kissed her on the forehead.

"I am repaid," said I to her, laughing; "are you comfortable, Louise?"

She did not answer, but her eyes met mine and I saw in them a smile which seemed to thank me, but a smile so subtle that in any other circumstances I should have seen a shadow of raillery in it.

"Now, Captain, settle yourself in this armchair and goodnight!" I said this to myself, and I made an effort to raise my unfortunate foot which I had forgotten, a heroic effort, but it was impossible to accomplish it. The leg was so benumbed that I could not move it. As well as I could I hoisted myself upon the other leg, and, hobbling, reached my armchair without appearing too lame. The room seemed to me twice as wide to cross as the Champ de Mars, for hardly had I taken a step in its chilly atmosphere—the fire had gone out, it was April, and the chateau overlooked the Loire—when the cold reminded me of the scantiness of my costume. What! to cross the room before that angel, who was doubtless watching me, in the most grotesque of costumes, and with a helpless leg into the bargain! Why had I forgotten my dressing-gown? However, I reached the armchair, into which I sank. I seized my dress-coat which was beside me, threw it over my shoulders, twisted my white cravat round my neck, and, like a soldier bivouacking, I sought a comfortable position.

It would have been all very well without the icy cold that assailed my legs, and I saw nothing in reach to cover me. I said to myself, "Captain, the position is not tenable," when at length I perceived on the couch—One sometimes is childishly ashamed, but I really dared not, and I waited for a long minute struggling between a sense of the ridiculous and the cold which I felt was increasing. At last, when I heard my wife's breathing become more regular and thought that she must be asleep, I stretched out my arm and pulled toward me her wedding-gown which was on the couch—the silk rustled enough to wake the dead—and with

the energy which one always finds on an emergency, wrapped it round me savagely like a railway rug. Then yielding to an involuntary fit of sybaritism, I unhooked the bellows and tried to get the fire to burn.

"After all," I said to myself, arranging the blackened embers and working the little instrument with a thousand precautions, "after all, I have behaved like a gentleman. If the General saw me at this moment he would laugh in my face; but no matter, I have acted rightly."

Had I not sworn to be sincere, I do not know whether I should acknowledge to you that I suddenly felt horrible tinglings in the nasal regions. I wished to restrain myself, but the laws of nature are those which one can not escape. My respiration suddenly ceased, I felt a superhuman power contract my facial muscles, my nostrils dilated, my eyes closed, and all at once I sneezed with such violence that the bottle of Eau des Carmes shook again. God forgive me! A little cry came from the bed, and immediately afterward the most silvery frank and ringing outbreak of laughter followed. Then she added in her simple, sweet, musical tones:

"Have you hurt yourself—, Georges?" She had said Georges after a brief silence, and in so low a voice that I scarcely heard it.

"I am very ridiculous, am I not, dear? and you are quite right to laugh at me. What would you have? I am camping out and I am undergoing the consequences."

"You are not ridiculous, but you are catching cold," and she began to laugh again.

"Naughty girl!"

"Cruel one, you ought to say, and you would not be wrong if I were to let you fall ill." She said this with charming grace. There was a mingling of timidity and tenderness, modesty and raillery, which I find it impossible to express, but which stupefied me. She smiled at me, then I saw her move nearer to the wall in order to leave room for me, and, as I hesitated to cross the room.

"Come, forgive me," she said.

I approached the bed; my teeth were chattering.

"How kind you are to me, dear," she said to me after a moment or so; "will you wish me good-night?" and she held out her cheek to me. I approached nearer, but as the candle had just gone out I made a mistake as to the spot, and my lips brushed hers. She quivered, then, after a brief silence, she murmured in a low tone, "You must forgive me; you frightened me so just now."

"I wanted to kiss you, dear."

"Well, kiss me, my husband."

Within the trembling young girl the coquetry of the woman was breaking forth in spite of herself.

I could not help it; she exhaled a delightful perfume which mounted to my brain, and the contact of this dear creature whom I touched, despite myself, swept away all my resolutions.

My lips—I do not know how it was—met hers, and we remained thus for a long moment; I felt against my breast the echo of the beating heart, and her rapid breathing came full into my face.

"You do love me a little, dear?" I whispered in her ear.

I distinguished amid a confused sigh a little "Yes!" that resembled a mere breath.

"I don't frighten you any longer?"

"No," she murmured, very softly.

"You will be my little wife, then, Louise; you will let me teach you to love me as I love you?"

"I do love you," said she, but so softly and so gently that she seemed to be dreaming.

How many times have we not laughed over these recollections, already so remote.

BOOK 2.

CHAPTER XIII. THE BLUE NOTE-BOOK

Toward midnight mamma made a sign to me with her eyes, and under cover of a lively waltz we slipped out of the drawing-room. In the hall the servants, who were passing to and fro, drew aside to let us go by them, but I felt that their eyes were fixed upon me with the curiosity which had pursued me since the morning. The large door giving on to the park was open, although the night was cool, and in the shadow I could make out groups of country folk gathered there to catch a glimpse of the festivities through the windows. These good people were laughing and whispering; they were silent for a moment as we advanced to ascend the staircase, but I once more felt that I was the mark of these inquisitive looks and the object of all these smiles. The face of mamma, who accompanied me, was much flushed, and large tears were flowing from her eyes.

How was it that an event so gay for some was so sad for others?

When I think over it now I can hardly keep my countenance. What silly terrors at that frightful yet charming moment! Yet, after all, one exaggerates things a great deal.

On reaching the first floor mamma stopped, choking, took my head in her hands, and kissed me on the forehead, and exclaimed, “Valentine!” I was not greatly moved by this outburst, knowing that mamma, since she has grown a little too stout, has some difficulty in getting upstairs. I judged, therefore, that the wish to take breath for a moment without appearing to do so had something to do with this sudden halt.

We entered the nuptial chamber; it was as coquettish as possible, refreshing to the eye, snug, elegant, and adorned with fine Louis XVI furniture, upholstered in Beauvais tapestry. The bed, above all, was a marvel of elegance, but to tell the truth I had no idea of it till a week

later. At the outside it seemed to me that I was entering an austere-looking locality; the very air we breathed appeared to me to have something solemn and awe-striking about it.

“Here is your room, child,” said mamma; “but first of all come and sit here beside me, my dear girl.”

At these words we both burst into tears, and mamma then expressed herself as follows:

“The kiss you are giving me, Valentine, is the last kiss that I shall have from you as a girl. Your husband—for Georges is that now—”

At these words I shuddered slightly, and by a singular freak of my brain pictured to myself Monsieur Georges—Georges—my husband—in a cotton night cap and a dressing-gown. The vision flashed across my mind in the midst of the storm. I saw him just as plainly as if he had been there. It was dreadful. The nightcap came over his forehead, down to his eyebrows, and he said to me, pressing my hand; “At last, Valentine; you are mine; do you love me? oh! tell me, do you love me?” And as his head moved as he uttered these words, the horrible tuft at the end of his nightcap waggled as an accompaniment.

“No,” I said to myself, “it is impossible for my husband to appear in such a fashion; let me banish this image—and yet my father wears the hideous things, and my brother, who is quite young, has them already. Men wear them at all ages, unless though—” It is frightful to relate, but Georges now appeared to me with a red-and-green bandanna handkerchief tied round his head. I would have given ten years of my life to be two hours older, and hurriedly passed my hand across my eyes to drive away these diabolical visions.

However, mamma, who had been still speaking all the time, attributing this movement to the emotion caused by her words, said, with great sweetness:

“Do not be alarmed, my dear Valentine; perhaps I am painting the picture in too gloomy colors; but my experience and my love render this duty incumbent upon me.”

I have never heard mamma express herself so fluently. I was all the more surprised as, not having heard a word of what she had already said, this sentence seemed suddenly sprung upon me. Not knowing what to answer, I threw myself into the arms of mamma, who, after a minute or so, put me away gently, saying, “You are suffocating me, dear.”

She wiped her eyes with her little cambric handkerchief, which was damp, and said, smilingly:

“Now that I have told you what my conscience imposed on me, I am strong. See, dear, I think that I can smile. Your husband, my dear child, is a man full of delicacy. Have confidence; accept all without misgiving.”

Mamma kissed me on the forehead, which finished off her sentence, and added:

“Now, dear one, I have fulfilled a duty I regarded as sacred. Come here and let me take your wreath off.”

“By this time,” I thought, “they have noticed that I have left the drawing-room. They are saying, ‘Where is the bride?’ and smiling, ‘Monsieur Georges is getting uneasy. What is he doing? what is he thinking? where is he?’”

“Have you tried on your nightcap, dear?” said mamma, who had recovered herself; “it looks rather small to me, but is nicely embroidered. Oh, it is lovely!”

And she examined it from every point of view.

At that moment there was a knock at the door. “It is I,” said several voices, among which I distinguished the flute-like tones of my aunt Laura, and those of my godmother. Madame de P., who never misses a chance of pressing her two thick lips to some one’s cheeks, accompanied them. Their eyes glittered, and all three had a sly and triumphant look, ferreting and inquisitive, which greatly intimidated me. Would they also set about fulfilling a sacred duty?

“Oh, you are really too pretty, my angel!” said Madame de P., kissing me on the forehead, after the moist fashion peculiar to her, and then sitting down in the large Louis XVI armchair.

My maid had not been allowed to undress me, so that all of them, taking off their gloves, set to work to render me this service. They tangled the laces, caught their own lace in the hooks, and laughed heartily all the while.

"It is the least that the oldest friend of the family,"—she loved to speak of herself as such—"should make herself useful at such a moment," muttered Madame de P., holding her eyeglass in one hand and working with the other.

I passed into a little boudoir to complete my toilette for the night, and found on the marble of the dressing-table five or six bottles of scent, tied up with red, white, and blue ribbons—an act of attention on the part of my Aunt Laura. I felt the blood flying to my head; there was an unbearable singing in my ears. Now that I can coolly weigh the impressions I underwent, I can tell that what I felt above all was anger. I would have liked to be in the farthest depths of the wildest forest in America, so unseemly did I find this curious kindness which haunted me with its attentions. I should have liked to converse a little with myself, to fathom my own emotion somewhat, and, in short, to utter a brief prayer before throwing myself into the torrent.

However, through the open door, I could hear the four ladies whispering together and stifling their outbursts of laughter; I had never seen them so gay. I made up my mind. I crossed the room, and, shaking off the pretty little white slippers which my mother had embroidered for me, jumped into bed. I was not long in finding out that it was no longer my own narrow little bed. It was immense, and I hesitated a moment, not knowing which way to turn. I felt nevertheless a feeling of physical comfort. The bed was warm, and I do not know what scent rose from its silken coverlet. I felt myself sink into the mass of feathers, the pillows, twice over too large and trimmed with embroidery, gave way as it were beneath me, burying me in a soft and perfumed abyss.

At length the ladies rose, and after giving a glance round the room, doubtless to make sure that nothing was lacking, approached the bed.

"Good-night, my dear girl," said my mother, bending over me.

She kissed me, carried her handkerchief, now reduced to a wet dab, to her eyes, and went out with a certain precipitation.

“Remember that the old friend of the family kissed you on this night, my love,” said Madame de P., as she moistened my forehead.

“Come, my little lamb, good-night and sleep well,” said my aunt, with her smile that seemed to issue from her nose. She added in a whisper: “You love him, don’t you? The slyboots! she won’t answer! Well, since you love him so much, don’t tell him so, my dear. But I must leave you; you are sleepy. Goodnight.”

And she went away, smiling.

At length I was alone. I listened; the doors were being closed, I heard a carriage roll along the road; the flame of the two candles placed upon the mantelshelf quivered silently and were reflected in the looking-glass.

I thought about the ceremony of that morning, the dinner, the ball. I said to myself, clenching my fists to concentrate my thoughts: “How was Marie dressed? She was dressed in—dressed in—dressed in—” I repeated the words aloud to impart more authority to them and oblige my mind to reply; but do what I would, it was impossible for me to drive away the thought that invaded my whole being.

“He is coming. What is he doing? Where is he? Perhaps he is on the stairs now. How shall I receive him when he comes?”

I loved him; oh! with my whole soul, I can acknowledge it now; but I loved him quite at the bottom of my heart. In order to think of him I went down into the very lowest chamber of my heart, bolted the door, and crouched down in the darkest corner.

At last, at a certain moment, the floor creaked, a door was opened in the passage with a thousand precautions, and I heard the tread of a boot —a boot!

The boot ceased to creak, and I heard quite close to me, on the other side of the wall, which was nothing but a thin partition, an armchair being rolled across the carpet, and then a little cough, which seemed to me to vibrate with emotion. It was he! But for the partition I could have

touched him with my finger. A few moments later I could distinguish the almost imperceptible sound of footsteps on the carpet; this faint sound rang violently in my head. All at once my breathing and my heart both stopped together; there was a tap at the door. The tapping was discreet, full of entreaty and delicacy. I wanted to reply, “Come in,” but I had no longer any voice; and, besides, was it becoming to answer like that, so curtly and plainly? I thought “Come in” would sound horribly unseemly, and I said nothing. There was another tap. I should really have preferred the door to have been broken open with a hatchet or for him to have come down the chimney. In my agony I coughed faintly among my sheets. That was enough; the door opened, and I divined from the alteration in the light shed by the candles that some one at whom I did not dare look was interposing between them and myself.

This some one, who seemed to glide across the carpet, drew near the bed, and I could distinguish out of the corner of my eye his shadow on the wall. I could scarcely restrain my joy; my Captain wore neither cotton nightcap nor bandanna handkerchief. That was indeed something. However, in this shadow which represented him in profile, his nose had so much importance that amid all my uneasiness a smile flitted across my lips. Is it not strange how all these little details recur to your mind? I did not dare turn round, but I devoured with my eyes this shadow representing my husband; I tried to trace in it the slightest of his gestures; I even sought the varying expressions of his physiognomy, but, alas! in vain.

I do not know how to express in words all that I felt at that moment; my pen seems too clumsy to write my sensations, and, besides, did I really see deep into my heart?

Do men comprehend all this? Do they understand that the heart requires gradual changes, and that if a half-light awakens, a noon-day blaze dazzles and burns? It is not that the poor child, who is trembling in a corner, refuses to learn; far from that, she has aptitude, good-will, and a quick and ready intelligence; she knows she has reached the age at which it is necessary to know how to read; she rejects neither the science

nor even the teacher. It is the method of instruction that makes her uneasy. She is afraid lest this young professor, whose knowledge is so extensive, should turn over the pages of the book too quickly and neglect the A B C.

A few hours back he was the submissive, humble lover, ready to kneel down before her, hiding his knowledge as one hides a sin, speaking his own language with a thousand circumspections. At any moment it might have been thought that he was going to blush. She was a queen, he a child; and now all at once the roles are changed; it is the submissive subject who arrives in the college cap of a professor, hiding under his arm an unknown and mysterious book. Is the man in the college cap about to command, to smile, to obtrude himself and his books, to speak Latin, to deliver a lecture?

She does not know that this learned individual is trembling, too; that he is greatly embarrassed over his opening lesson, that emotion has caused him to forget his Latin, that his throat is parched and his legs are trembling beneath him. She does not know this, and I tell you between ourselves, it is not her self-esteem that suffers least at this conjecture. She suffers at finding herself, after so many signatures, contracts, and ceremonies-still a charming child, and nothing more.

I believe that the first step in conjugal life will, according to the circumstances accompanying it, give birth to captivating sympathies or invincible repulsion. But to give birth to these sympathies, to strike the spark that is to set light to this explosion of infinite gratitude and joyful love—what art, what tact, what delicacy, and at the same time what presence of mind are needed.

How was it that at the first word Georges uttered my terrors vanished? His voice was so firm and so sweet, he asked me so gayly for leave to draw near the fire and warm his feet, and spoke to me with such ease and animation of the incidents of the day. I said to myself, “It is impossible for the least baseness to be hidden under all this.” In presence of so much good-humor and affability my scaffolding fell to pieces. I ventured a look from beneath the sheets: I saw him comfortably

installed in the big armchair, and I bit my lips. I am still at a loss to understand this little fit of ill-temper. When one is reckoning on a fright, one is really disappointed at its delaying itself. Never had Georges been more witty, more affectionate, more well-bred; he was still the man of the day before. He must really have been very excited.

"You are tired out, I am certain, darling," he said.

The word "darling" made me start, but did not frighten me; it was the first time he had called me so, but I really could not refuse him the privilege of speaking thus. However it may be, I maintained my reserve, and in the same tone as one replies, "No thanks, I don't take tea," I answered:

"Oh, yes! I am worn out."

"I thought so," he added, approaching the bed; "you can not keep your eyes open; you can not even look at me, my dear little wife."

"I will leave you," continued he. "I will leave you; you need repose." And he drew still more closely to me, which was not natural. Then, stretching out his hand, which I knew was white and well cared for: "Won't you give me a little shake of the hand, dear? I am half asleep, too, my pretty little wife." His face wore an expression which was alarming, though not without its charm; as he said this, I saw clearly that he had lied to me like a demon, and that he was no more sleepy than I was.

However that may be, I was guilty of the fault, the carelessness that causes disaster, of letting him take my hand, which was straying by chance under the lace of the pillows.

I was that evening in a special condition of nervous sensibility, for at this contact a strange sensation ran through me from head to foot. It was not that the Captain's hand had the softness of satin—I believe that physical sensations, in us women, have causes directly contrary to those which move men; for that which caused me such lively emotion was precisely its firmness. There was something strong, manly, and powerful about it. He squeezed my hand rather strongly.

My rings, which I have a fancy for wearing all at once, hurt me, and—I really should not have believed it—I liked it very much, perhaps too much. For the first time I found an inexplicable, an almost intoxicating, charm in this intimate contact with a being who could have crushed me between his fingers, and that in the middle of the night too, in silence, without any possibility of help. It was horribly delicious.

I did not withdraw my hand, which he kissed, but lingeringly. The clock struck two, and the last sound had long since died away when his lips were still there, quivering with rapid little movements, which were so many imperceptible kisses, moist, warm, burning. I felt gleams of fire flashing around me. I wished to draw away my hand, but could not; I remember perfectly well that I could not. His moustache pricked me, and whiffs of the scent with which he perfumed it reached me and completed my trouble. I felt my nostrils dilating despite myself, and, striving but in vain to take refuge in my inmost being, I exclaimed inwardly: "Protect me, Lord, but this time with all your might. A drop of water, Lord; a drop of water!" I waited—no appreciable succor reached from above. It was not till a week afterward that I understood the intentions of Providence.

"You told me you were sleepy," I murmured, in a trembling voice. I was like a shipwrecked person clutching at a floating match-box; I knew quite well that the Captain would not go away.

"Yes, I was sleepy, pet," said Georges, approaching his face to mine; "but now I am athirst." He put his lips to my ear and whispered softly, "Athirst for a kiss from you, love."

This "love" was the beginning of another life. The spouse now appeared, the past was fleeing away, I was entering on the future. At length I had crossed the frontier; I was in a foreign land. Oh! I acknowledge—for what is the use of feigning?—that I craved for this love, and I felt that it engrossed me and spread itself through me. I felt that I was getting out of my depth, I let go the last branch that held me to the shore, and to myself I repeated: "Yes, I love you; yes, I am willing to follow you; yes, I am yours, love, love, love!"

“Won’t you kiss your husband; come, won’t you?”

And his mouth was so near my own that it seemed to meet my lips.

“Yes,” said I.

. . . . . .

August 7th, 185-How many times have I not read through you during the last two years, my little blue note-book! How many things I might add as marginal notes if you were not doomed to the flames, to light my first fire this autumn! How could I have written all this, and how is it that having done so I have not dared to complete my confidences! No one has seen you, at any rate; no one has turned your pages. Go back into your drawer, dear, with, pending the first autumn fire, a kiss from your Valentine.

NOTE.—Owing to what circumstances this blue note-book, doomed to the flames, was discovered by me in an old Louis XVI chiffonnier I had just bought does not greatly matter to you, dear reader, and would be out of my power to explain even if it did.

CHAPTER XIV. THE BLUE NOTE-BOOK AGAIN

Only to think that I was going to throw you into the fire, poor dear! Was I not foolish? In whom else could I confide? If I had not you, to whom could I tell all those little things at which every one laughs, but which make you cry!

This evening, for instance, I dined alone, for Georges was invited out; well, to whom else can I acknowledge that when I found myself alone, face to face with a leg of mutton, cooked to his liking, and with the large carving-knife which is usually beside his plate, before me, I began to cry like a child? To whom else can I admit that I drank out of the Bohemian wine-glass he prefers, to console me a little?

But if I were to mention this they would laugh in my face. Father Cyprien himself, who nevertheless has a heart running over with kindness, would say to me:

“Let us pass that by, my dear child; let us pass that by.”

I know him so well, Father Cyprien; while you, you always listen to me, my poor little note-book; if a tear escapes me, you kindly absorb it and retain its trace like a good-hearted friend. Hence I love you.

And, since we are tete-a-tete, let us have a chat. You won’t be angry with me for writing with a pencil, dear. You see I am very comfortably settled in my big by-by and I do not want to have any ink-stains. The fire sparkles on the hearth, the street is silent; let us forget that George will not return till midnight, and turn back to the past.

I can not recall the first month of that dear past without laughing and weeping at one and the same time.

How foolish we were! How sweet it was! There is a method of teaching swimming which is not the least successful, I am told. It consists in throwing the future swimmer into the water and praying God to help

him. I am assured that after the first lesson he keeps himself afloat.

Well, I think that we women are taught to be wives in very much the same fashion.

Happy or otherwise—the point is open to discussion marriage is a hurricane—something unheard-of and alarming.

In a single night, and without any transition, everything is transformed and changes color; the erst while-cravatted, freshly curled, carefully dressed gentleman makes his appearance in a dressing-gown. That which was prohibited becomes permissible, the code is altered, and words acquire a meaning they never had before, et cetera, et cetera.

It is not that all this is so alarming, if taken the right way—a woman with some courage in her heart and some flexibility in her mind supports the shock and does not die under it; but the firmest of us are amazed at it, and stand open-mouthed amid all these strange novelties, like a penniless gourmand in the shop of Potel and Chabot.

They dare not touch these delicacies surrounding them, though invited to taste. It is not that the wish or the appetite is lacking to them, but all these fine fruits have been offered them so lately that they have still the somewhat acid charm of green apples or forbidden fruit. They approach, but they hesitate to bite.

After all, why complain? What would one have to remember if one had entered married life like an inn, if one had not trembled a little when knocking at the door? And it is so pleasant to recall things, that one would sometimes like to deck the future in the garments of the past.

It was, I recollect, two days after the all-important one. I had gone into his room, I no longer remember why—for the pleasure of going in, I suppose, and thereby acting as a wife. A strong desire is that which springs up in your brain after leaving church to look like an old married woman. You put on caps with ribbons, you never lay aside your cashmere shawl, you talk of “my home”—two sweet words—and then you bite your lips to keep from breaking out into a laugh; and “my husband,”

and “my maid,” and the first dinner you order, when you forget the soup. All this is charming, and, however ill at ease you may feel at first in all these new clothes, you are quite eager to put them on.

So I had gone into the dressing-room of my husband, who, standing before the glass, very lightly clad, was prosaically shaving.

“Excuse me, dear,” said he, laughing, and he held up his shaving-brush, covered with white lather. “You will pardon my going on with this. Do you want anything?”

“I came, on the contrary,” I answered, “to see whether you had need of anything;” and, greatly embarrassed myself, for I was afraid of being indiscreet, and I was not sure whether one ought to go into one’s husband’s room like this, I added, innocently, “Your shirts have buttons, have they not?”

“Oh, what a good little housewife I have married! Do not bother yourself about such trifles, my pet. I will ask your maid to look after my buttons,” said he.

I felt confused; I was afraid of appealing too much of a schoolgirl in his eyes. He went on working his soap into a lather with his shaving-brush. I wanted to go away, but I was interested in such a novel fashion by the sight of my husband, that I had not courage to do so. His neck was bare—a thick, strong neck, but very white and changing its shape at every movement—the muscles, you know. It would have been horrible in a woman, that neck, and yet it did not seem ugly to me. Nor was it admiration that thus inspired me; it was rather like gluttony. I wanted to touch it. His hair, cut very short—according to regulation—grew very low, and between its beginning and the ear there was quite a smooth white place. The idea at once occurred to me that if ever I became brave enough, it was there that I should kiss him oftenest; it was strange, that presentiment, for it is in fact on that little spot that I—

He stopped short. I fancied I understood that he was afraid of appearing comical in my eyes, with his face smothered in lather; but he was wrong. I felt myself all in a quiver at being beside a man—the word man is rather distasteful to me, but I can not find another, for husband

would not express my thoughts—at being beside a man in the making of his toilette. I should have liked him to go on without troubling himself; I should have liked to see how he managed to shave himself without encroaching on his moustache, how he made his parting and brushed his hair with the two round brushes I saw on the table, what use he made of all the little instruments set out in order on the marble-tweezers, scissors, tiny combs, little pots and bottles with silver tops, and a whole arsenal of bright things, that aroused quite a desire to beautify one's self.

I should have liked him while talking to attend to the nails of his hands, which I was already very fond of; or, better still, to have handed them over to me. How I should have rummaged in the little corners, cut, filed, arranged all that.

"Well, dear, what are you looking at me like that for?" said he, smiling.

I lowered my eyes at once, and felt that I was blushing. I was uneasy, although charmed, amid these new surroundings. I did not know what to answer, and mechanically I dipped the tip of my finger into the little china pot in which the soap was being lathered.

"What is the matter, darling?" said he, approaching his face to mine; "have I offended you?"

I don't know what strange idea darted through my mind, but I suddenly took my hand from the pot and stuck the big ball of lather at the end of my finger on the tip of his nose. He broke out into a hearty laugh, and so did I; though I trembled for a moment, lest he should be angry.

"So that's the way in which you behave to a captain in the lancers? You shall pay for this, you wicked little darling;" and, taking the shaving brush in his hand, he chased me round the room. I dodged round the table, I took refuge behind the armchair, upsetting his boots with my skirt, getting the tongs at the same time entangled in it. Passing the sofa, I noticed his uniform laid out—he had to wait on the General that morning—and, seizing his schapska, I made use of it as a buckler. But laughter paralyzed me, and besides, what could a poor little woman do against a soldier, even with a buckler?

He ended by catching me—the struggle was a lovely one. It was all very well for me to scream, as I threw my head backward over the arm by which he clasped me; I none the less saw the frightful brush, like a big snowball, at the end of a little stick, come nearer and yet nearer.

But he was merciful; he was satisfied with daubing a little white spot on my chin and exclaiming, “The cavalry have avenged themselves.”

Seizing the brush in turn, I said to him roguishly, “Captain, let me lather your face,” for I did so want to do that.

In answer, he held his face toward me, and, observing that I was obliged to stand on the tips of my toes and to support myself a little on his shoulder, he knelt down before me and yielded his head to me.

With the tip of my finger I made him bend his face to the right and the left, backward and forward, and I lathered and lathered, giggling like a schoolgirl. It amused me so to see my Captain obey me like a child; I would have given I don’t know what if he had only had his sword and spurs on at that moment. Unfortunately, he was in his slippers. I spread the lather over his nose and forehead; he closed his eyes and put his two arms round me, saying:

“Go on, my dear, go on; but see that you don’t put any into my mouth.”

At that moment I experienced a very strange feeling. My laughter died away all at once; I felt ashamed at seeing my husband at my feet and at thus amusing myself with him as if he were a doll.

I dropped the shaving-brush; I felt my eyes grow moist; and, suddenly, becoming more tender, I bent toward him and kissed him on the neck, which was the only spot left clear.

Yet his ear was so near that, in passing it, my lips moved almost in spite of myself, and I whispered:

“Don’t be angry, dear,” then, overcome by emotion and repentance, I added: “I love you, I do love you.”

“My own pet!” he said, rising suddenly. His voice shook.

What delightful moments these were! Unfortunately, oh! yes, indeed, unfortunately, he could not press his lathered face to mine!

“Wait a little,” he exclaimed, darting toward the washbasin, full of water, “wait an instant!”

But it seemed as if it took him a week to wash it off.

CHAPTER XV. MY WIFE GOES TO A DANCE

Madame—Ah! it is so nice of you to come home early! (Looking at the clock.) A quarter to six. But how cold you are! your hands are frozen; come and sit by the fire. (She puts a log on the fire.) I have been thinking of you all day. It is cruel to have to go out in such weather. Have you finished your doubts? are you satisfied?

Monsieur—Quite well satisfied, dear. (Aside.) But I have never known my wife to be so amiable. (Aloud, taking up the bellows.) Quite well satisfied, and I am very hungry. Has my darling been good?

Madame—You are hungry. Good! (Calling out.) Marie, call into the kitchen that your master wants to dine early. Let them look after everything—and send up a lemon.

Monsieur—A mystery?

Madame—Yes, Monsieur, I have a little surprise for you, and I fancy that it will delight you.

Monsieur—Well, what is the surprise?

Madame—Oh! it is a real surprise. How curious you look! your eyes are glittering already. Suppose I were not to tell you anything?

Monsieur—Then you would vex me very much.

Madame—There, I don't want to vex you. You are going to have some little green oysters and a partridge. Am I good?

Monsieur—Oysters and a partridge! You are an angel. (He kisses her.) An angel. (Aside.) What on earth is the matter with her? (Aloud.) Have you had visitors to-day?

Madame—I saw Ernestine this morning, but she only stayed a moment. She has just discharged her maid. Would you believe it, that girl was seen the night before last dressed up as a man, and in her

master's clothes, too! That was going too far.

Monsieur—That comes of having confidential servants. And you just got a sight of Ernestine?

Madame—And that was quite enough, too. (With an exclamation.) How stupid I am! I forgot. I had a visit from Madame de Lyr as well.

Monsieur—God bless her! But does she still laugh on one side of her mouth to hide her black tooth?

Madame-How cruel you are! Yet, she likes you very well. Poor woman! I was really touched by her visit. She came to remind me that we—now you will be angry. (She kisses him and sits down beside him.)

Monsieur—Be angry! be angry! I'm not a Turk. Come, what is it?

Madame—Come, we shall go to dinner. You know that there are oysters and a partridge. I won't tell you—you are already in a bad temper. Besides, I all but told her that we are not going.

Monsieur—(raising his hands aloft)—I thought so. She and her evening may go to the dogs. What have I done to this woman that she should so pester me?

Madame—But she thinks she is affording you pleasure. She is a charming friend. As for me, I like her because she always speaks well of you. If you had been hidden in that cabinet during her visit, you could not have helped blushing. (He shrugs his shoulders.) "Your husband is so amiable," she said to me, "so cheery, so witty. Try to bring him; it is an honor to have him." I said, "Certainly," but without meaning it, you know. But I don't care about it at all. It is not so very amusing at Madame de Lyr's. She always invites such a number of serious people. No doubt they are influential people, and may prove useful, but what does that matter to me? Come to dinner. You know that there is a bottle left of that famous Pomard; I have kept it for your partridge. You can not imagine what pleasure I feel in seeing you eat a partridge. You eat it with such a gusto. You are a glutton, my dear. (She takes his arm.) Come, I can hear your rascal of a son getting impatient in the dining-room.

Monsieur—(with a preoccupied air)—Hum! and when is it?

Madame—When is what?

Monsieur—The party, of course.

Madame—Ah! you mean the ball—I was not thinking of it. Madame de Lyr's ball. Why do you ask me that, since we are not going? Let us make haste, dinner is getting cold.... This evening.

Monsieur—(stopping short)—What! this party is a ball, and this ball is for this evening. But, hang it! people don't invite you to a ball like that. They always give notice some time beforehand.

Madame—But she sent us an invitation a week ago, though I don't know what became of the card. I forgot to show it to you.

Monsieur—You forgot! you forgot!

Madame—Well, it is all for the best; I know you would have been sulky all the week after. Come to dinner.

They sat down to table. The cloth was white, the cutlery bright, the oysters fresh; the partridge, cooked to perfection, exhaled a delightful odor. Madame was charming, and laughed at everything. Monsieur unbent his brows and stretched himself on the chair.

Monsieur—This Pomard is very good. Won't you have some, little dear?

Madame—Yes, your little dear will. (She pushes forward her glass with a coquettish movement.)

Monsieur—Ah! you have put on your Louis Seize ring. It is a very pretty ring.

Madame—(putting her hand under her husband's nose)—Yes; but look—see, there is a little bit coming off.

Monsieur—(kissing his wife's hand)—Where is the little bit?

Madame—(smiling)—You jest at everything. I am speaking seriously. There—look—it is plain enough! (They draw near once another and bend their heads together to see it.) Don't you see it? (She points out a spot on the ring with a rosy and slender finger.) There! do you see now—there?

Monsieur—That little pearl which—What on earth have you been putting on your hair, my dear? It smells very nice—You must send it to the jeweller. The scent is exquisite. Curls don't become you badly.

Madame—Do you think so? (She adjusts her coiffure with her white hand.) I thought you would like that scent; now, if I were in your place I should—

Monsieur—What would you do in my place, dear?

Madame—I should—kiss my wife.

Monsieur—(kissing her)—Well, I must say you have very bright ideas sometimes. Give me a little bit more partridge, please. (With his mouth full.) How pretty these poor little creatures look when running among the corn. You know the cry they give when the sun sets?—A little gravy.—There are moments when the poetic side of country life appeals to one. And to think that there are barbarians who eat them with cabbage. But (filling his glass) have you a gown ready?

Madame—(with innocent astonishment.)—What for, dear?

Monsieur—Why, for Madame de Lyr's—

Madame—For the ball?—What a memory you have—There you are still thinking of it—No, I have not—ah! yes, I have my tarletan, you know; but then a woman needs so little to make up a ball-room toilette.

Monsieur—And the hairdresser, has he been sent for?

Madame—No, he has not been sent for; but I am not anxious to go to this ball. We will settle down by the fireside, read a little, and go to bed early. You remind me, however, that, on leaving, Madame de Lyr did say, "Your hairdresser is the same as mine, I will send him word." How stupid I am; I remember now that I did not answer her. But it is not far, I can send Marie to tell him not to come.

Monsieur—Since this blessed hairdresser has been told, let him come and we will go and—amuse ourselves a little at Madame de Lyr's. But on one condition only; that I find all my dress things laid out in readiness on my bed with my gloves, you know, and that you tie my necktie.

Madame—A bargain. (She kisses him.) You are a jewel of a husband. I am delighted, my poor dear, because I see you are imposing a sacrifice upon yourself in order to please me; since, as to the ball itself, I am quite indifferent about it. I did not care to go; really now I don't care to go.

Monsieur—Hum. Well, I will go and smoke a cigar so as not to be in your way, and at ten o'clock I will be back here. Your preparations will be over and in five minutes I shall be dressed. Adieu.

Madame—Au revoir.

Monsieur, after reaching the street, lit his cigar and buttoned up his great-coat. Two hours to kill. It seems a trifle when one is busy, but when one has nothing to do it is quite another thing. The pavement is slippery, rain is beginning to fall—fortunately the Palais Royal is not far off. At the end of his fourteenth tour round the arcades, Monsieur looks at his watch. Five minutes to ten, he will be late. He rushes home.

In the courtyard the carriage is standing waiting.

In the bedroom two unshaded lamps shed floods of light. Mountains of muslin and ribbons are piled on the bed and the furniture. Dresses, skirts, petticoats, and underpetticoats, lace, scarfs, flowers, jewels, are mingled in a charming chaos. On the table there are pots of pomade, sticks of cosmetic, hairpins, combs and brushes, all carefully set out. Two artificial plaits stretch themselves languishingly upon a dark mass not unlike a large handful of horsehair. A golden hair net, combs of pale tortoise-shell and bright coral, clusters of roses, sprays of white lilac, bouquets of pale violets, await the choice of the artist or the caprice of the beauty. And yet, must I say it? amidst this luxury of wealth Madame's hair is undressed, Madame is uneasy, Madame is furious.

Monsieur—(looking at his watch)—Well, my dear, is your hair dressed?

Madame—(impatiently)—He asks me whether my hair is dressed? Don't you see that I have been waiting for the hairdresser for an hour and a half? Can't you see that I am furious, for he won't come, the horrid wretch?

Monsieur—The monster!

Madame—Yes, the monster; and I would advise you not to joke about it.

There is a ring. The door opens and the lady's-maid exclaims, "It is he, Madame!"

Madame—It is he!

Monsieur—It is he!

The artist enters hurriedly and bows while turning his sleeves up.

Madame—My dear Silvani, this is unbearable.

Silvani—Very sorry, very, but could not come any sooner. I have been dressing hair since three o'clock in the afternoon. I have just left the Duchesse de W., who is going to the Ministry this evening. She sent me home in her brougham. Lisette, give me your mistress's combs, and put the curling-tongs in the fire.

Madame—But, my dear Silvani, my maid's name is not Lisette.

Silvani—You will understand, Madame, that if I had to remember the names of all the lady's-maids who help me, I should need six clerks instead of four. Lisette is a pretty name which suits all these young ladies very well. Lisette, show me your mistress's dress. Good. Is the ball an official one?

Madame—But dress my hair, Silvani.

Silvani—It is impossible for me to dress your hair, Madame, unless I know the circle in which the coiffure will be worn. (To the husband, seated in the corner.) May I beg you, Monsieur, to take another place? I wish to be able to step back, the better to judge the effect.

Monsieur—Certainly, Monsieur Silvani, only too happy to be agreeable to you. (He sits down on a chair.)

Madame—(hastily)—Not there, my dear, you will rumple my skirt. (The husband gets up and looks for another seat.) Take care behind you, you are stepping on my bustle.

Monsieur—(turning round angrily)—Her bustle! her bustle!

Madame—Now you go upsetting my pins.

Silvani—May I beg a moment of immobility, Madame?

Monsieur—Come, calm yourself, I will go into the drawing-room; is there a fire there?

Madame—(inattentively)—But, my dear, how can you expect a fire to be in the drawing-room?

Monsieur—I will go to my study, then.

Madame—There is none there, either. What do you want a fire in your study for? What a singular idea! High up, you know, Silvani, and a dash of disorder, it is all the rage.

Silvani—Would you allow a touch of brown under the eyes? That would enable me to idealize the coiffure.

Monsieur—(impatiently)—Marie, give me my top-coat and my cap. I will walk up and down in the anteroom. (Aside.) Madame de Lyr shall pay for this.

Silvani—(crimping)—I leave your ear uncovered, Madame; it would be a sin to veil it. It is like that of the Princesse de K., whose hair I dressed yesterday. Lisette, get the powder ready. Ears like yours, Madame, are not numerous.

Madame—You were saying—

Silvani—Would your ear, Madame, be so modest as not to listen?

Madame's hair is at length dressed. Silvani sheds a light cloud of scented powder over his work, on which he casts a lingering look of satisfaction, then bows and retires.

In passing through the anteroom, he runs against Monsieur, who is walking up and down.

Silvani—A thousand pardons, I have the honor to wish you good night.

Monsieur—(from the depths of his turned-up collar) Good-night.

A quarter of an hour later the sound of a carriage is heard. Madame is ready, her coiffure suits her, she smiles at herself in the glass as she slips the glove-stretchers into the twelve-button gloves.

Monsieur has made a failure of his necktie and broken off three buttons. Traces of decided ill-humor are stamped on his features.

Monsieur—Come, let us go down, the carriage is waiting; it is a quarter past eleven. (Aside.) Another sleepless night. Sharp, coachman; Rue de la Pepiniere, number 224.

They reach the street in question. The Rue de la Pepiniere is in a tumult. Policemen are hurriedly making way through the crowd. In the distance, confused cries and a rapidly approaching, rumbling sound are heard. Monsieur thrusts his head out of the window.

Monsieur—What is it, Jean?

Coachman—A fire, Monsieur; here come the firemen.

Monsieur—Go on all the same to number 224.

Coachman—We are there, Monsieur; the fire is at number 224.

Doorkeeper of the House—(quitting a group of people and approaching the carriage)—You are, I presume, Monsieur, one of the guests of Madame de Lyr? She is terror-stricken; the fire is in her rooms. She can not receive any one.

Madame—(excitedly)—It is scandalous.

Monsieur—(humming)—Heart-breaking, heartbreaking! (To the coachman.) Home again, quickly; I am all but asleep. (He stretches himself out and turns up his collar.) (Aside.) After all, I am the better for a well-cooked partridge.

CHAPTER XVI. A FALSE ALARM

Every time I visit Paris, which, unhappily, is too often, it rains in torrents. It makes no difference whether I change the time of starting from that which I had fixed upon at first, stop on the way, travel at night, resort, in short, to a thousand devices to deceive the barometer-at ten leagues from Paris the clouds begin to pile up and I get out of the train amidst a general deluge.

On the occasion of my last visit I found myself as usual in the street, followed by a street porter carrying my luggage and addressing despairing signals to all the cabs trotting quickly past amid the driving rain. After ten minutes of futile efforts a driver, more sensible than the others, and hidden in his triple cape, checks his horses. With a single bound I am beside the cab, and opening, the door with a kind of frenzy, jump in.

Unfortunately, while I am accomplishing all this on one side, a gentleman, similarly circumstanced, opens the other door and also jumps in. It is easy to understand that there ensues a collision.

“Devil take you!” said my rival, apparently inclined to push still farther forward.

I was about to answer him, and pretty sharply, too, for I hail from the south of France and am rather hotheaded, when our eyes met. We looked one another in the face like two lions over a single sheep, and suddenly we both burst out laughing. This angry gentleman was Oscar V., that dear good fellow Oscar, whom I had not seen for ten years, and who is a very old friend of mine, a charming fellow whom I used to play with as a boy.

We embraced, and the driver, who was looking at us through the window, shrugged his shoulders, unable to understand it all. The two porters, dripping with water, stood, one at each door, with a trunk on his shoulder. We had the luggage put on the cab and drove off to the Hotel du Louvre, where Oscar insisted on dropping me.

"But you are travelling, too, then?" said I to my friend, after the first moments of expansion. "Don't you live in Paris?"

"I live in it as little as possible and have just come up from Les Roches, an old-fashioned little place I inherited from my father, at which I pass a great deal of the year. Oh! it is not a chateau; it is rustic, countrified, but I like it, and would not change anything about it. The country around is fresh and green, a clear little river flows past about forty yards from the house, amid the trees; there is a mill in the background, a spreading valley, a steeple and its weather-cock on the horizon, flowers under the windows, and happiness in the house. Can I grumble? My wife makes exquisite pastry, which is very agreeable to me and helps to whiten her hands. By the way, I did not tell you that I am married. My dear fellow, I came across an angel, and I rightly thought that if I let her slip I should not find her equal. I did wisely. But I want to introduce you to my wife and to show you my little place. When will you come and see me? It is three hours from Paris—time to smoke a couple of cigars. It is settled, then—I am going back to-morrow morning and I will have a room ready for you. Give me your card and I will write down my address on it."

All this was said so cordially that I could not resist my friend's invitation, and promised to visit him.

Three or four days later, Paris being empty and the recollection of my old companion haunting me, I felt a strong desire to take a peep at his conjugal felicity and to see with my own eyes this stream, this mill, this steeple, beside all which he was so happy.

I reached Les Roches at about six in the evening and was charmed at the very first glance. Oscar's residence was a little Louis Quinze chateau buried in the trees; irregularly built, but charmingly picturesque. It had been left unaltered for a century at least, and everything, from the

blackened mansard roofs with their rococo weather-cocks, to the bay windows with their tiny squares of glass and the fantastic escutcheon over the door, was in keeping. Over the thick tiles of the somewhat sunken roof, the rough-barked old chestnuts lazily stretched their branches. Creepers and climbing roses wantoned over the front, framing the windows, peeping into the garrets, and clinging to the waterspouts, laden with large bunches of flowers which swayed gently in the air. Amid all these pointed roofs and this profusion of verdure and trees the blue sky could only be caught a glimpse of here and there.

The first person I saw was Oscar, clad in white from head to foot, and wearing a straw hat. He was seated on an enormous block of stone which seemed part and parcel of the house, and appeared very much interested in a fine melon which his gardener had just brought to him. No sooner had he caught sight of me than he darted forward and grasped me by the hand with such an expression of good-humor and affection that I said to myself, "Yes, certainly he was not deceiving me, he is happy." I found him just as I had known him in his youth, lively, rather wild, but kind and obliging.

"Pierre," said he to the gardener, "take this gentleman's portmanteau to the lower room," and, as the gardener bestirred himself slowly and with an effort, Oscar seized the portmanteau and swung it, with a jerk, on to the shoulders of the poor fellow, whose legs bent under the weight.

"Lazybones," said Oscar, laughing heartily. "Ah! now I must introduce you to my little queen. My wife, where is my wife?"

He ran to the bell and pulled it twice. At once a fat cook with a red face and tucked-up sleeves, and behind her a man-servant wiping a plate, appeared at the ground-floor windows. Had they been chosen on purpose? I do not know, but their faces and bearing harmonized so thoroughly with the picture that I could not help smiling.

"Where is your mistress?" asked Oscar, and as they did not answer quickly enough he exclaimed, "Marie, Marie, here is my friend George."

A young girl, fair as a lily, appeared at a narrow, little window, the one most garlanded by, flowers, on the first floor. She was clad in a white dressing-gown of some particular shape; I could not at first make out. With one hand she gathered its folds about her, and with the other restrained her flowing hair. Hardly had she seen me when she blushed, somewhat ashamed, no doubt, at having been surprised in the midst of her toilet, and, giving a most embarrassed yet charming bow; hurriedly disappeared. This vision completed the charm; it seemed to me that I had suddenly been transported into fairy-land. I had fancied when strapping my portmanteau that I should find my friend Oscar installed in one of those pretty, little, smart-looking houses, with green shutters and gilt lightning-conductor, dear to the countrified Parisian, and here I found myself amid an ideal blending of time-worn stones hidden in flowers, ancient gables, and fanciful ironwork reddened by rust. I was right in the midst of one of Morin's sketches, and, charmed and stupefied, I stood for some moments with my eyes fixed on the narrow window at which the fair girl had disappeared.

"I call her my little queen," said Oscar, taking my arm. "It is my wife. Come this way, we shall meet my cousin who is fishing, and two other friends who are strolling about in this direction, good fellows, only they do not understand the country as I do—they have on silk stockings and pumps, but it does not matter, does it? Would you like a pair of slippers or a straw hat?

"I hope you have brought some linen jackets. I won't offer you a glass of Madeira—we shall dine at once. Ah! my dear fellow, you have turned up at the right moment; we are going to taste the first melon of the year this evening."

"Unfortunately, I never eat melons, though I like to see others do so."

"Well, then, I will offer you consolation by seeking out a bottle of my old Pomard for you. Between ourselves, I don't give it to every one; it is a capital wine which my poor father recommended to me on his deathbed; poor father, his eyes were closed, and his head stretched back on the pillow. I was sitting beside his bed, my hand in his, when I felt it feebly

pressed. His eyes half opened, and I saw him smile. Then he said in a weak, slow, and the quavering voice of an old man who is dying: 'The Pomard at the farther end—on the left—you know, my boy—only for friends.' He pressed my hand again, and, as if exhausted, closed his eyes, though I could see by the imperceptible motion of his lips that he was still smiling inwardly. Come with me to the cellar," continued Oscar, after a brief silence, "at the farther end to the left, you shall hold the lantern for me."

When we came up from the cellar, the bell was ringing furiously, and flocks of startled birds were flying out of the chestnut-trees. It was for dinner. All the guests were in the garden. Oscar introduced me in his off-hand way, and I offered my arm to the mistress of the house to conduct her to the dining-room.

On examining my friend's wife, I saw that my first impression had not been erroneous—she was literally a little angel, and a little angel in the shape of a woman, which is all the better. She was delicate, slender as a young girl; her voice was as thrilling and harmonious as the chaffinch, with an indefinable accent that smacked of no part of the country in particular, but lent a charm to her slightest word. She had, moreover, a way of speaking of her own, a childish and coquettish way of modulating the ends of her sentences and turning her eyes toward her husband, as if to seek for his approbation. She blushed every moment, but at the same time her smile was so bewitching and her teeth so white that she seemed to be laughing at herself. A charming little woman! Add to this a strange yet tasteful toilette, rather daring, perhaps, but suiting this little queen, so singular in herself. Her beautiful fair hair, twisted up apparently at hazard, was fixed rather high up on the head by a steel comb worn somewhat on one side; and her white muslin dress trimmed with wide, flat ruches, cut square at the neck, short in the skirt, and looped up all round, had a delicious eighteenth-century appearance. The angel was certainly a trifle coquettish, but in her own way, and yet her way was exquisite.

Hardly were we seated at table when Oscar threw toward his little queen a rapid glance, but one so full of happiness and-why should I not say it?—love that I experienced a kind of shiver, a thrill of envy, astonishment, and admiration, perhaps. He took from the basket of flowers on the table a red rose, scarcely opened, and, pushing it toward her, said with a smile:

"For your hair, Madame."

The fair girl blushed deeply, took the flower, and, without hesitation, quickly and dexterously stuck it in her hair, high up on the left, just in the right spot, and, delightedly turning round to each of us, repeated several times, amid bursts of laughter, "Is it right like that?"

Then she wafted a tiny kiss with the tips of her fingers to her husband, as a child of twelve would have done, and gayly plunged her spoon into the soup, turning up her little finger as she did so.

The other guests had nothing very remarkable about them; they laughed very good-naturedly at these childish ways, but seemed somewhat out of place amid all this charming freedom from restraint. The cousin, above all, the angler, with his white waistcoat, his blue tie, his full beard, and his almond eyes, especially displeased me. He rolled his r's like an actor at a country theatre. He broke his bread into little bits and nibbled them as he talked. I divined that the pleasure of showing off a large ring he wore had something to do with this fancy for playing with his bread. Once or twice I caught a glance of melancholy turned toward the mistress of the house, but at first I did not take much notice of it, my attention being attracted by the brilliant gayety of Oscar.

It seemed to me, however, at the end of a minute or so, that this young man was striving in a thousand ways to engage the attention of the little queen.

The latter, however, answered him in the most natural way in the world, neither betraying constraint nor embarrassment. I was mistaken, no doubt. Have you ever noticed, when you are suddenly brought into the midst of a circle where you are unacquainted, how certain little details, matters of indifference to every one else, assume importance in

your eyes? The first impression is based upon a number of trifles that catch your attention at the outset. A stain in the ceiling, a nail in the wall, a feature of your neighbor's countenance impresses itself upon your mind, installs itself there, assumes importance, and, in spite of yourself, all the other observations subsequently made by you group around this spot, this nail, this grimace. Think over it, dear reader, and you will see that every opinion you may have as to a fact, a person, or an object has been sensibly influenced by the recollection of the little trifle that caught your eye at the first glance. What young girl victim of first impressions has not refused one or two husbands on account of a waistcoat too loose, a cravat badly tied, an inopportune sneeze, a foolish smile, or a boot too pointed at the toe?

One does not like admitting to one's self that such trifles can serve as a base to the opinion one has of any one, and one must seek attentively in order to discover within one's mind these unacknowledged germs.

I recollect quite well that the first time I had the honor of calling on Madame de M., I noticed that one of her teeth, the first molar on the right, was quite black. I only caught a glimpse of the little black monster, such was the care taken to hide it, yet I could not get this discovery out of my head. I soon noticed that Madame de M. made frightful grimaces to hide her tooth, and that she took only the smallest possible mouthfuls at table to spare the nervous susceptibilities of the little monster.

I arrived at the pitch of accounting for all the mental and physical peculiarities of Madame de M. by the presence of this slight blemish, and despite myself this black tooth personified the Countess so well that even now, although it has been replaced by another magnificent one, twice as big and as white as the bottom of a plate, even now, I say, Madame de M. can not open her mouth without my looking naturally at it.

But to return to our subject. Amid all this conjugal happiness, so delightfully surrounded, face to face with dear old Oscar, so good, so confiding, so much in love with this little cherub in a Louis XV dress, who carried grace and naivete to so strange a pitch, I had been struck by the too well combed and foppish head of the cousin in the white

waistcoat. This head had attracted my attention like the stain on the ceiling of which I spoke just now, like the Countess's black tooth, and despite myself I did not take my eyes off the angler as he passed the silver blade of his knife through a slice of that indigestible fruit which I like to see on the plates of others, but can not tolerate on my own.

After dinner, which lasted a very long time, we went into the garden, where coffee had been served, and stretched ourselves out beatifically, cigar in mouth. All was calm and silent about us, the insects had ceased their music, and in an opaline sky little violet clouds were sleeping.

Oscar, with a happy air, pointed out to me the famous mill, the quiet valley, and farther on his loved stream, in which the sun, before setting, was reflecting itself amid the reeds. Meanwhile the little queen on her high heels flitted round the cups like a child playing at party-giving, and with a thousand charming touches poured out the boiling coffee, the odor of which blended deliciously with the perfume of the flowers, the hay, and the woods.

When she had finished she sat down beside her husband, so close that her skirt half hid my friend, and unceremoniously taking the cigar from his lips, held it at a distance, with a little pout, that meant, "Oh, the horrid thing!" and knocked off with her little finger the ash which fell on the gravel. Then she broke into a laugh, and put the cigar back between the lips of her husband held out to her.

It was charming. Oscar was no doubt accustomed to this, for he did not seem astonished, but placed his hand on his wife's shoulder, as one would upon a child's, and, kissing her on the forehead, said, "Thanks, my dear."

"Yes, but you are only making fun of me," said the young wife, in a whisper, leaning her head against her husband's arm.

I could not help smiling, there was so much coaxing childishness and grace in this little whispered sentence. I do not know why I turned toward the cousin who had remained a little apart, smoking in silence.

He seemed to me rather pale; he took three or four sudden puffs, rose suddenly under the evident influence of some moral discomfort, and walked away beneath the trees.

"What is the matter with cousin?" said Oscar, with some interest. "What ails him?"

"I don't know," answered the little queen, in the most natural manner in the world, "some idea about fishing, no doubt."

Night began to fall; we had remained as I have said a long time at table. It was about nine o'clock. The cousin returned and took the seat he had occupied before, but from this moment it seemed to me that a strange constraint crept in among us, a singular coolness showed itself. The talk, so lively at first, slackened gradually and, despite all my efforts to impart a little life to it, dragged wretchedly. I myself did not feel very bright; I was haunted by the most absurd notions in the world; I thought I had detected in the sudden departure of the cousin, in his pallor, in his embarrassed movements, the expression of some strong feeling which he had been powerless to hide. But how was it that that adorable little woman with such a keen intelligent look did not understand all this, since I understood it myself? Had not Oscar, however confiding he might be, noted that the departure of the cousin exactly coincided with the kiss he had given his wife? Were these two blind, or did they pretend not to see, or was I myself the victim of an illusion? However, conversation had died away; the mistress of the house, singular symptom, was silent and serious, and Oscar wriggled in his chair, like a man who is not altogether at ease. What was passing in their minds?

Soon we heard the clock in the drawing-room strike ten, and Oscar, suddenly rising, said: "My dear fellow, in the country it is Liberty Hall, you know; so I will ask your permission to go in—I am rather tired this evening. George," he added to me, "they will show you your room; it is on the ground floor; I hope that you will be comfortable there."

Everybody got up silently, and, after bidding one another good-night in a somewhat constrained manner, sought their respective rooms. I thought, I must acknowledge, that they went to bed rather too early at

my friend's. I had no wish to sleep; I therefore examined my room, which was charming. It was completely hung with an old figured tapestry framed in gray wainscot. The bed, draped in dimity curtains, was turned down and exhaled that odor of freshly washed linen which invites one to stretch one's self in it. On the table, a little gem dating from the beginning of the reign of Louis XVI, were four or five books, evidently chosen by Oscar and placed there for me. These little attentions touch one, and naturally my thoughts recurred to the dear fellow, to the strange incident of the evening, to the vexations and tortures hidden, perhaps, by this apparent happiness. I was ridiculous that night—I already pitied him, my poor friend.

I felt quite touched, and, full of melancholy, went and leaned against the sill of the open window. The moon had just risen, the sky was beautifully clear, whiffs of delicious perfumes assailed my nostrils. I saw in the shadow of the trees glowworms sparkling on the grass, and, in the masses of verdure lit up mysteriously by the moon, I traced strange shapes of fantastic monsters. There was, above all, a little pointed roof surmounted by a weathercock, buried in the trees at about fifty paces from my window, which greatly interested me. I could not in the obscurity make out either door or windows belonging to this singular tower. Was it an old pigeon-house, a tomb, a deserted summer-house? I could not tell, but its little pointed roof, with a round dormer window, was extremely graceful. Was it chance or an artist lull of taste that had covered this tower with creepers and flowers, and surrounded it with foliage in such capricious fashion that it seemed to be hiding itself in order to catch all glances? I was gazing at all this when I heard a faint noise in the shrubbery. I looked in that direction and I saw—really, it was an anxious moment—I saw a phantom clad in a white robe and walking with mysterious and agitated rapidity. At a turning of the path the moon shone on this phantom. Doubt was impossible; I had before my eyes my friend's wife. Her gait no longer had that coquettish ease which I had noticed, but clearly indicated the agitation due to some strong emotion.

I strove to banish the horrible suspicion which suddenly forced itself into my mind. “No,” I said to myself, “so much innocence and beauty can not be capable of deception; no doubt she has forgotten her fan or her embroidery, on one of the benches there.” But instead of making her way toward the benches I noticed on the right, the young wife turned to the left, and soon disappeared in the shadow of the grove in which was hidden the mysterious turret.

My heart ached. “Where is she going, the hapless woman?” I exclaimed to myself. “At any rate, I will not let her imagine any one is watching her.” And I hurriedly blew out my candle. I wanted to close my window, go to bed, and see nothing more, but an invincible curiosity took me back to the window. I had only been there a few minutes when I plainly distinguished halting and timid footsteps on the gravel. I could see no one at first, but there was no doubt that the footsteps were those of a man. I soon had a proof that I was not mistaken; the elongated outline of the cousin showed up clearly against the dark mass of shrubbery. I should have liked to have stopped him, the wretch, for his intention was evident; he was making his way toward the thicket in which the little queen had disappeared. I should have liked to shout to him, “You are a villain; you shall go no farther.” But had I really any right to act thus? I was silent, but I coughed, however, loud enough to be heard by him.

He suddenly paused in his uneasy walk, looked round on all sides with visible anxiety, then, seized by I know not what impulse, darted toward the pavilion. I was overwhelmed. What ought I to do? Warn my friend, my childhood’s companion? Yes, no doubt, but I felt ashamed to pour despair into the mind of this good fellow and to cause a horrible exposure. “If he can be kept in ignorance,” I said to myself, “and then perhaps I am wrong—who knows? Perhaps this rendezvous is due to the most natural motive possible.”

I was seeking to deceive myself, to veil the evidence of my own eyes, when suddenly one of the house doors opened noisily, and Oscar—Oscar himself, in all the disorder of night attire, his hair rumpled, and his

dressing-gown floating loosely, passed before my window. He ran rather than walked; but the anguish of his heart was too plainly revealed in the strangeness of his movements. He knew all. I felt that a mishap was inevitable. “Behold the outcome of all his happiness, behold the bitter poison enclosed in so fair a vessel!” All these thoughts shot through my mind like arrows. It was necessary above all to delay the explosion, were it only for a moment, a second, and, beside myself, without giving myself time to think of what I was going to say to him, I cried in a sharp imperative tone:

“Oscar, come here; I want to speak to you.”

He stopped as if petrified. He was ghastly pale, and, with an infernal smile, replied, “I have no time-later on.”

“Oscar, you must, I beg of you—you are mistaken.”

At these words he broke into a fearful laugh.

“Mistaken—mistaken!”

And he ran toward the pavilion.

Seizing the skirt of his dressing-gown, I held him tightly, exclaiming:

“Don’t go, my dear fellow, don’t go; I beg of you on my knees not to go.”

By way of reply he gave me a hard blow on the arm with his fist, exclaiming:

“What the devil is the matter with you?”

“I tell you that you can not go there, Oscar,” I said, in a voice which admitted of no contradiction.

“Then why did not you tell me at once.”

And feverishly snatching his dressing-gown from my grasp, he began to walk frantically up and down.

CHAPTER XVII. I SUP WITH MY WIFE

That evening, which chanced to be Christmas Eve, it was infernally cold. The snow was falling in heavy flakes, and, driven by the wind, beat furiously against the window panes. The distant chiming of the bells could just be heard through this heavy and woolly atmosphere. Foot-passengers, wrapped in their cloaks, slipped rapidly along, keeping close to the house and bending their heads to the wintry blast.

Enveloped in my dressing-gown, and tapping with my fingers on the window-panes, I was smiling at the half-frozen passers-by, the north wind, and the snow, with the contented look of a man who is in a warm room and has on his feet comfortable flannel-lined slippers, the soles of which are buried in a thick carpet. At the fireside my wife was cutting out something and smiling at me from time to time; a new book awaited me on the mantelpiece, and the log on the hearth kept shooting out with a hissing sound those little blue flames which invite one to poke it.

“There is nothing that looks more dismal than a man tramping through the snow, is there?” said I to my wife.

“Hush,” said she, lowering the scissors which she held in her hand; and, after smoothing her chin with her fingers, slender, rosy, and plump at their tips, she went on examining the pieces of stuff she had cut out.

“I say that it is ridiculous to go out in the cold when it is so easy to remain at home at one’s own fireside.”

“Hush.”

“But what are you doing that is so important?”

“I—I am cutting out a pair of braces for you,” and she set to work again. But, as in cutting out she kept her head bent, I noticed, on passing behind her, her soft, white neck, which she had left bare that evening by dressing her hair higher than usual. A number of little downy hairs were

curling there. This kind of down made me think of those ripe peaches one bites so greedily. I drew near, the better to see, and I kissed the back of my wife's neck.

"Monsieur!" said Louise, suddenly turning round.

"Madame," I replied, and we both burst out laughing.

"Christmas Eve," said I.

"Do you wish to excuse yourself and to go out?"

"Do you mean to complain?"

"Yes, I complain that you are not sufficiently impressed by the fact of its being Christmas Eve. The ding-ding-dong of the bells of Notre Dame fails to move you; and just now when the magic-lantern passed beneath the window, I looked at you while pretending to work, and you were quite calm."

"I remain calm when the magic-lantern is going by! Ah! my dear, you are very severe on me, and really—"

"Yes, yes, jest about it, but it was none the less true that the recollections of your childhood have failed."

"Now, my dear, do you want me to leave my boots out on the hearth this evening on going to bed? Do you want me to call in the magic-lantern man, and to look out a big sheet and a candle end for him, as my poor mother used to do? I can still see her as she used to entrust her white sheet to him. 'Don't make a hole in it, at least,' she would say. How we used to clap our hands in the mysterious darkness! I can recall all those joys, my dear, but you know so many other things have happened since then. Other pleasures have effaced those."

"Yes, I can understand, your bachelor pleasures; and, there, I am sure that this Christmas Eve is the first you have passed by your own fireside, in your dressing-gown, without supper; for you used to sup on Christmas Eve."

"To sup, to sup."

"Yes, you supped; I will wager you did."

“I have supped two or three times, perhaps, with friends, you know; two sous’ worth of roasted chestnuts and—”

“A glass of sugar and water.”

“Oh, pretty nearly so. It was all very simple; as far as I can recollect. We chatted a little and went to bed.”

“And he says that without a smile. You have never breathed a word to me of all these simple pleasures.”

“But, my dear, all that I am telling you is strictly true. I remember that once, however, it was rather lively. It was at Ernest’s, and we had some music. Will you push that log toward me? But, never mind; it will soon be midnight, and that is the hour when reasonable people—”

Louise, rising and throwing her arms around my neck, interrupted me with: “Well, I don’t want to be reasonable, I want to wipe out all your memories of chestnuts and glasses of sugar and water.”

Then pushing me into my dressing-room she locked the door.

“But, my dear, what is the matter with you?” said I through the keyhole.

“I want ten minutes, no more. Your newspaper is on the mantelpiece; you have not read it this evening. There are some matches in the corner.”

I heard a clatter of crockery, a rustling of silk my wife mad?

Louise soon came and opened the door.

“Don’t scold me for having shut you up,” she said, kissing me. “Look how I have beautified myself? Do you recognize the coiffure you are so fond of, the chignon high, and the neck bare? Only as my poor neck is excessively timid, it would have never consented to show itself thus if I had not encouraged it a little by wearing my dress low. And then one must put on full uniform to sup with the authorities.”

“To sup?”

“Certainly, to sup with you; don’t you see my illuminations and this table covered with flowers and a heap of good things? I had got it all ready in the alcove; but you understand that to roll the table up to the

fire and make a little toilette, I wanted to be alone. Come, Monsieur, take your place at table. I am as hungry as a hunter. May I offer you a wing of cold chicken?"

"Your idea is charming, but, dear, really I am ashamed; I am in my dressing-gown."

"Take off your dressing-gown if it incommodes you, Monsieur, but don't leave this chicken wing on my hands. I want to serve you myself." And, rising, she turned her sleeves up to the elbow, and placed her table napkin on her arm.

"It is thus that the waiters at the restaurant do it, is it not?"

"Exactly; but, waiter, allow me at least to kiss your hand."

"I have no time," said she, laughing, sticking the corkscrew into the neck of the bottle. "Chambertin—it is a pretty name; and then do you remember that before our marriage (how hard this cork is!) you told me that you liked it on account of a poem by Alfred de Musset? which, by the way, you have not let me read yet. Do you see the two little Bohemian glasses which I bought expressly for this evening? We will drink each other's health in them."

"And his, too, eh?"

"The heir's, poor dear love of an heir! I should think so. And then I will put away the two glasses against this time next year; they shall be our Christmas Eve glasses? Every year we will sup like this together, however old we may get."

"But, my dear, how about the time when we have no longer any teeth?"

"Well, we will sup on good strong soups; it will be very nice, all the same. Another piece, please, with some of the jelly. Thanks."

As she held out her plate I noticed her arm, the outline of which was lost in lace.

"Why are you looking up my sleeve instead of eating?"

“I am looking at your arm, dear. You are charming, let me tell you, this evening. That coiffure suits you so well, and that dress which I was unacquainted with.”

“Well, when one seeks to make a conquest—”

“How pretty you look, pet!”

“Is it true that you think me charming, pretty, and a pet this evening? Well, then,” lowering her eyes and smiling at her bracelets, “in that case I do not see why—”

“What is it you do not see, dear?”

“I do not see any reason why you should not come and give me just a little kiss.”

And as the kiss was prolonged, she said to me, amid bursts of laughter, her head thrown back, and showing the double row of her white teeth: “I should like some pie; yes, some brie! You will break my Bohemian glass, the result of my economy. You always cause some mishap when you want to kiss me. Do you recollect at Madame de Brill’s ball, two days before our marriage, how you tore my skirt while waltzing in the little drawing-room?”

“Because it is difficult to do two things at once-to keep step and to kiss one’s partner.”

“I recollect, too, when mamma asked how my skirt had got torn, I felt that I was blushing up to my ears. And Madame D., that old jaundiced fairy, who said to me with her Lenten smile, ‘How flushed you are tonight, my dear child!’ I could have strangled her! I said it was the key of the door that had caught it. I looked at you out of the corner of my eye; you were pulling your moustache and seemed greatly annoyed—you are keeping all the truffles for yourself; that is kind—not that one; I want the big black one there in the corner-it was very wrong all the same, for—oh! not quite full—I do not want to be tipsy—for, after all, if we had not been married—and that might have happened, for you know they say

that marriages only depend on a thread. Well, if the thread had not been strong enough, I should have remained a maid with a kiss on my shoulder, and a nice thing that would have been."

"Bah! it does not stain."

"Yes, Monsieur, it does, I beg your pardon. It stains so much that there are husbands, I believe, who even shed their blood to wash out such little stains."

"But I was joking, dear. Hang it!—don't you think—yes, certainly, hang it!"

"Ah! that's right, I like to see you angry. You are a trifle jealous, dear—oh! that is too bad; I asked you for the big black one, and you have gone and eaten it."

"I am sorry, dear; I quite forgot about it."

"It was the same at the Town Hall, where I was obliged to jog your elbow to make you answer 'Yes' to the Mayor's kind words."

"Kind!"

"Yes, kind. I thought him charming. No one could have been more graceful than he was in addressing me. 'Mademoiselle, will you consent to accept for your husband that great, ugly fellow standing beside you?'" (Laughing, with her mouth full.) "I wanted to say to him, 'Let us come to an understanding, Mr. Mayor; there is something to be said on either side.' I am choking!"—she bursts out laughing—"I was wrong not to impose restrictions. Your health, dear! I am teasing you; it is very stupid. I said 'Yes' with all my heart, I can assure you, dear, and I thought the word too weak a one. When I think that all women, even the worst, say that word, I feel ashamed not to have found another." Holding out her glass: "To our golden wedding—will you touch glasses?"

"And to his baptism, little mamma."

In a low voice: "Tell me—are you sorry you married me?"

Laughing, "Yes." Kissing her on the shoulder, "I think I have found the stain again; it was just there."

“It is two in the morning, the fire is out, and I am a little—you won’t laugh now? Well, I am a little dizzy.”

“A capital pie, eh?”

“A capital pie! We shall have a cup of tea for breakfast tomorrow, shall we not?”

CHAPTER XVIII. FROM ONE THING TO ANOTHER

SCENE.—The country in autumn—The wind is blowing without—MADAME, seated by the fireside in a large armchair, is engaged in needlework —MONSIEUR, seated in front of her, is watching the flames of the fire—A long silence.

Monsieur—Will you pass me the poker, my dear?

Madame—(humming to herself)—"And yet despite so many fears." (Spoken.) Here is the poker. (Humming.) "Despite the painful——"

Monsieur—That is by Mehul, is it not, my dear? Ah! that is music—I saw Delaunay Riquier in Joseph. (He hums as he makes up the fire.) "Holy pains." (Spoken.) One wonders why it does not burn, and, by Jove! it turns out to be green wood. Only he was a little too robust—Riquier. A charming voice, but he is too stout.

Madame—(holding her needlework at a distance, the better to judge of the effect)—Tell me, George, would you have this square red or black? You see, the square near the point. Tell me frankly.

Monsieur—(singing) "If you can repent." (Spoken without turning his head.) Red, my dear; red. I should not hesitate; I hate black.

Madame—Yes, but if I make that red it will lead me to—(She reflects.)

Monsieur—Well, my dear, if it leads you away, you must hold fast to something to save yourself.

Madame—Come, George, I am speaking seriously. You know that if this little square is red, the point can not remain violet, and I would not change that for anything.

Monsieur—(slowly and seriously)—My dear, will you follow the advice of an irreproachable individual, to whose existence you have linked your fate? Well, make that square pea-green, and so no more about it. Just look whether a coal fire ever looked like that.

Madame—I should only be too well pleased to use up my pea-green wool; I have a quantity of it.

Monsieur—Then where lies the difficulty?

Madame—The difficulty is that pea-green is not sufficiently religious.

Monsieur—Hum! (Humming.) Holy pains! (Spoken.) Will you be kind enough to pass the bellows? Would it be indiscreet to ask why the poor pea-green, which does not look very guilty, has such an evil reputation? You are going in for religious needlework, then, my dear?

Madame—Oh, George! I beg of you to spare me your fun. I have been familiar with it for a long time, you know, and it is horribly disagreeable to me. I am simply making a little mat for the confessional-box of the vicar. There! are you satisfied? You know what it is for, and you must understand that under the present circumstances pea-green would be altogether out of place.

Monsieur—Not the least in the world. I can swear to you that I could just as well confess with pea-green under my feet. It is true that I am naturally of a resolute disposition. Use up your wool; I can assure you that the vicar will accept it all the same. He does not know how to refuse. (He plies the bellows briskly.)

Madame—You are pleased, are you not?

Monsieur—Pleased at what, dear?

Madame—Pleased at having vented your sarcasm, at having passed a jest on one who is absent. Well, I tell you that you are a bad man, seeing that you seek to shake the faith of those about you. My beliefs had need be very fervent, principles strong, and have real virtue, to resist these incessant attacks. Well, why are you looking at me like that?

Monsieur—I want to be converted, my little apostle. You are so pretty when you speak out; your eyes glisten, your voice rings, your gestures—I am sure that you could speak like that for a long time, eh? (He kisses her hand, and takes two of her curls and ties them under hey chin.) You are looking pretty, my pet.

Madame—Oh! you think you have reduced me to silence because you have interrupted me. Ah! there, you have tangled my hair. How provoking you are! It will take me an hour to put it right. You are not satisfied with being a prodigy of impiety, but you must also tangle my hair. Come, hold out your hands and take this skein of wool.

Monsieur—(sitting down on a stool, which he draws as closely as possible to Madame, and holding up his hands) My little Saint John!

Madame—Not so close, George; not so close. (She smiles despite herself.) How silly you are! Please be careful; you will break my wool.

Monsieur—Your religious wool.

Madame—Yes, my religious wool. (She gives him a little pat on the cheek.) Why do you part your hair so much on one side, George? It would suit you much better in the middle, here. Yes, you may kiss me, but gently.

Monsieur—Can you guess what I am thinking of?

Madame—How do you imagine I could guess that?

Monsieur—Well, I am thinking of the barometer which is falling and of the thermometer which is falling too.

Madame—You see, cold weather is coming on and my mat will never be finished. Come, let us make haste.

Monsieur—I was thinking of the thermometer which is falling and of my room which faces due north.

Madame—Did you not choose it yourself? My wool! Good gracious! my wool! Oh! the wicked wretch!

Monsieur—In summer my room with the northern aspect is, no doubt, very pleasant; but when autumn comes, when the wind creeps in, when the rain trickles down the windowpanes, when the fields, the country,

seem hidden under a huge veil of sadness, when the spoils of our woodlands strew the earth, when the groves have lost their mystery and the nightingale her voice—oh! then the room with the northern aspect has a very northern aspect, and—

Madame—(continuing to wind her wool)—What nonsense you are talking!

Monsieur—I protest against autumns, that is all. God's sun is hidden and I seek another. Is not that natural, my little fairhaired saint, my little mystic lamb, my little blessed palmbranch? This new sun I find in you, pet—in your look, in the sweet odor of your person, in the rustling of your skirt, in the down on your neck which one notices by the lamp-light when you bend over the vicar's mat, in your nostril which expands when my lips approach yours—

Madame—Will you be quiet, George? It is Friday, and Ember week.

Monsieur—And your dispensation? (He kisses her.) Don't you see that your hand shakes, that you blush, that your heart is beating?

Madame—George, will you have done, sir? (She pulls away her hand, throws herself back in the chair, and avoids her husband's glance.)

Monsieur—Your poor little heart beats, and it is right, dear; it knows that autumn is the time for confidential chats and evening caresses, the time for kisses. And you know it too, for you defend yourself poorly, and I defy you to look me in the face. Come! look me in the face.

Madame—(she suddenly leans toward hey husband, the ball of wool rolling into the fireplace, the pious task falling to the ground. She takes his head between her hands)—Oh, what a dear, charming husband you would be if you had—

Monsieur—If I had what? Tell me quickly.

Madame—If you had a little religion. I should only ask for such a little at the beginning. It is not very difficult, I can assure you. While, now, you are really too—

Monsieur—Pea-green, eh?

Madame—Yes, pea-green, you great goose. (She laughs frankly.)

Monsieur—(lifting his hands in the air)—Sound trumpets! Madame has laughed; Madame is disarmed. Well, my snow-white lamb, I am going to finish my story; listen properly, there, like that—your hands here, my head so. Hush! don't laugh. I am speaking seriously. As I was saying to you, the north room is large but cold, poetic but gloomy, and I will add that two are not too many in this wintry season to contend against the rigors of the night. I will further remark that if the sacred ties of marriage have a profoundly social significance, it is—do not interrupt me—at that hour of one's existence when one shivers on one's solitary couch.

Madame—You can not be serious.

Monsieur—Well, seriously, I should like the vicar's mat piously spread upon your bed, to keep us both warm together, this very evening. I wish to return as speedily as possible to the intimacy of conjugal life. Do you hear how the wind blows and whistles through the doors? The fire splutters, and your feet are frozen. (He takes her foot in his hands.)

Madame—But you are taking off my slipper, George.

Monsieur—Do you think, my white lamb, that I am going to leave your poor little foot in that state? Let it stay in my hand to be warmed. Nothing is so cold as silk. What! openwork stockings? My dear, you are rather dainty about your foot-gear for a Friday. Do you know, pet, you can not imagine how gay I wake up when the morning sun shines into my room. You shall see. I am no longer a man; I am a chaffinch; all the joys of spring recur to me. I laugh, I sing, I speechify, I tell tales to make one die of laughter. Sometimes I even dance.

Madame—Come now! I who in the morning like neither noise nor broad daylight—how little all that suits!

Monsieur—(suddenly changing his tone)—Did I say that I liked all that? The morning sun? Never in autumn, my sweet dove, never. I awake, on the contrary full of languor and poesy; I was like that in my very cradle. We will prolong the night, and behind the drawn curtain, behind the closed shutter, we will remain asleep without sleeping. Buried in silence and shadow, delightfully stretched beneath your warm

eider-down coverlets, we will slowly enjoy the happiness of being together, and we will wish one another good-morning only on the stroke of noon. You do not like noise, dear. I will not say a word. Not a murmur to disturb your unfinished dream and warn you that you are no longer sleeping; not a breath to recall you to reality; not a movement to rustle the coverings. I will be silent as a shade, motionless as a statue; and if I kiss you—for, after all, I have my weaknesses—it will be done with a thousand precautions, my lips will scarcely brush your sleeping shoulder; and if you quiver with pleasure as you stretch out your arms, if your eye half uncloses at the murmur of my kiss, if your lips smile at me, if I kiss you, it would be because you would like me to, and I shall have nothing to reproach myself with.

Madame—(her eyes half closed, leaning back in hey armchair, her head bent with emotion, she places her hands before his mouth. In a low voice)—Hush, hush! Don't say that, dear; not another word! If you knew how wrong it was!

Monsieur—Wrong! What is there that is wrong? Is your heart of marble or adamant, that you do not see that I love you, you naughty child? That I hold out my arms to you, that I long to clasp you to my heart, and to fall asleep in your hair? What is there more sacred in the world than to love one's wife or love one's husband? (Midnight strikes.)

Madame—(she suddenly changes hey expression at the sound, throws her arms round her husband, and hurriedly kisses him thrice)—You thought I did not love you, eh, dear? Oh, yes! I love you. Great baby! not to see that I was waiting the time.

Monsieur—What time, dear?

Madame—The time. It has struck twelve, see. (She blushes crimson.) Friday is over. (She holds out her hand for him to kiss.)

Monsieur—Are you sure the clock is not five minutes fast, love?

CHAPTER XIX. A LITTLE CHAT

MADAME F——-MADAME H———

(These ladies are seated at needlework as they talk.)

Madame F—For myself, you know, my dear, I fulfil my duties tolerably, still I am not what would be called a devotee. By no means. Pass me your scissors. Thanks.

Madame H—You are quite welcome, dear. What a time those little squares of lace must take. I am like yourself in respect of religion; in the first place, I think that nothing should be overdone. Have you ever-I have never spoken to any one on the subject, but I see your ideas are so in accordance with my own that—

Madame F—Come, speak out, dear; you trust me a little, I hope.

Madame H—Well, then, have you—tell me truly—ever had any doubts?

Madame F—(after reflecting for a moment)—Doubts! No. And you?

Madame H—I have had doubts, which has been a real grief to me. Heavens! how I have wept.

Madame F—I should think so, my poor dear. For my own part, my faith is very strong. These doubts must have made you very unhappy.

Madame H—Terribly so. You know, it seems as if everything failed you; there is a vacancy all about you—I have never spoken about it to my husband, of course—Leon is a jewel of a man, but he will not listen to anything of that kind. I can still see him, the day after our marriage; I was smoothing my hair—broad bands were then worn, you know.

Madame F—Yes, yes; they were charming. You will see that we shall go back to them.

Madame H—I should not be surprised; fashion is a wheel that turns. Leon, then, said to me the day after our wedding: “My dear child, I shall not hinder you going to church, but I beg you, for mercy’s sake, never to say a word to me about it.”

Madame F—Really, Monsieur H. said that to you?

Madame H—Upon my honor. Oh! my husband is all that is most—or, if you prefer it, all that is least—

Madame F—Yes, yes, I understand. That is a grief, you know. Mine is only indifferent. From time to time he says some disagreeable things to me on the question, but I am sure he could be very easily brought back to the right. At the first illness he has, you shall see. When he has only a cold in the head, I notice the change. You have not seen my thimble?

Madame H—Here it is. Do not be too sure of that, dear; men are not to be brought back by going “chk, chk” to them, like little chickens. And then, though I certainly greatly admire the men who observe religious practices, you know me well enough not to doubt that—I think, as I told you, that nothing should be exaggerated. And yourself, pet, should you like to see your husband walking before the banner with a great wax taper in his right hand and a bouquet of flowers in his left?

Madame F—Oh! no, indeed. Why not ask me at once whether I should like to see Leon in a black silk skull cap, with cotton in his ears and a holy water sprinkler in his hand? One has no need to go whining about a church with one’s nose buried in a book to be a pious person; there is a more elevated form of religion, which is that of—of refined people, you know.

Madame H—Ah! when you speak like that, I am of your opinion. I think, for instance, that there is nothing looks finer than a man while the host is being elevated. Arms crossed, no book, head slightly bowed, grave look, frock coat buttoned up. Have you seen Monsieur de P. at mass? How well he looks!

Madame F—He is such a fine man, and, then, he dresses so well. Have you seen him on horseback? Ah! so you have doubts; but tell me what they are, seeing we are indulging in confidences.

Madame H—I can hardly tell you. Doubts, in short; about hell, for instance, I have had horrible doubts. Oh! but do not let us speak about that; I believe it is wrong even to think of it.

Madame F—I have very broad views on that point; I never think about it. Besides, my late confessor helped me. “Do not seek too much,” he always said to me, “do not try to understand that which is unfathomable.” You did not know Father Gideon? He was a jewel of a confessor; I was extremely pleased with him. Not too tedious, always discreet, and, above all, well-bred. He turned monk from a romantic cause—a penitent was madly in love with him.

Madame H—Impossible!

Madame F—Yes, really. What! did you not know about it? The success of the monastery was due to that accident. Before the coming of Father Gideon it vegetated, but on his coming the ladies soon flocked there in crowds. They organized a little guild, entitled “The Ladies of the Agony.” They prayed for the Chinese who had died without confession, and wore little death’s heads in aluminum as sleeve-links. It became very fashionable, as you are aware, and the good fathers organized, in turn, a registry for men servants; and the result is that, from one thing leading to another, the community has become extremely wealthy. I have even heard that one of the most important railway stations in Paris is shortly to be moved, so that the size of their garden can be increased, which is rather restricted at present.

Madame H—As to that, it is natural enough that men should want a place to walk in at home; but what I do not understand is that a woman, however pious she may be, should fall in love with a priest. It is all very well, but that is no longer piety; it is—fanaticism. I venerate priests, I can say so truly, but after all I can not imagine myself—you will laugh at me—ha, ha, ha!

Madame F—Not at all. Ha, ha, ha! what a child you are!

Madame H—(working with great briskness)—Well, I can not imagine that they are men—like the others.

Madame F—(resuming work with equal ardor)—And yet, my dear, people say they are.

Madame H—There are so many false reports set afloat. (A long silence.)

Madame F—(in a discreet tone of voice)—After all, there are priests who have beards—the Capuchins, for instance.

Madame H—Madame de V. has a beard right up to her eyes, so that counts for nothing, dear.

Madame F—That counts for nothing. I do not think so. In the first place, Madame de V.'s beard is not a perennial beard; her niece told me that she sheds her moustaches every autumn. What can a beard be that can not stand the winter? A mere trifle.

Madame H—A mere trifle that is horribly ugly, my dear.

Madame F—Oh! if Madame de V. had only moustaches to frighten away people, one might still look upon her without sorrow, but—

Madame H—I grant all that. Let us allow that the Countess's moustache and imperial are a nameless species of growth. I do not attach much importance to the point, you understand. She has a chin of heartbreaking fertility, that is all.

Madame F—To return to what we were saying, how is it that the men who are strongest, most courageous, most manly—soldiers, in fact—are precisely those who have most beard?

Madame H—That is nonsense, for then the pioneers would be braver than the Generals; and, in any case, there is not in France, I am sure, a General with as much beard as a Capuchin. You have never looked at a Capuchin then?

Madame F—Oh, yes! I have looked at one quite close. It is a rather funny story. Fancy Clementine's cook having a brother a Capuchin—an ex-jeweller, a very decent man. In consequence of misfortunes in business—it was in 1848, business was at a stand-still—in short, he lost his senses—no, he did not lose his senses, but he threw himself into the arms of Heaven.

Madame H—Oh! I never knew that! When? Clementine—

Madame F—I was like you, I would not believe it, but one day Clementine said to me: “Since you will not believe in my Capuchin, come and see me tomorrow about three o’clock; he will be paying a visit to his sister. Don’t have lunch first; we will lunch together.” Very good. I went the next day with Louise, who absolutely insisted upon accompanying me, and I found at Clementine’s five or six ladies installed in the drawing-room and laughing like madcaps. They had all come to see the Capuchin. “Well,” said I, as I went in, when they all began to make signs to me and whisper, “Hush, hush!” He was in the kitchen.

Madame H—And what was he like?

Madame F—Oh! very nice, except his feet; you know how it always gives one a chill to look at their feet; but, in short, he was very amiable. He was sent for into the drawing-room, but he would not take anything except a little biscuit and a glass of water, which took away our appetites. He was very lively; told us that we were coquettes with our little bonnets and our full skirts. He was very funny, always a little bit of the jeweller at the bottom, but with plenty of good nature and frankness. He imitated the buzzing of a fly for us; it was wonderful. He also wanted to show us a little conjuring trick, but he needed two corks for it, and unfortunately his sister could only find one.

Madame H—No matter, I can not understand Clementine engaging a servant like that.

Madame F—Why? The brother is a guarantee.

Madame H—Of morality, I don’t say no; but it seems to me that a girl like that can not be very discreet in her ways.

Madame F—How do you make that out?

Madame H—I don’t know, I can not reason the matter out, but it seems to me that it must be so, that is all,... besides, I should not like to see a monk in my kitchen, close to the soup. Oh, mercy! no!

Madame F—What a child you are!

Madame H—That has nothing to do with religious feelings, my dear; I do not attack any dogma. Ah! if I were to say, for instance—come now, if I were to say, what now?

Madame F—In point of fact, what really is dogma?

Madame H—Well, it is what can not be attacked. Thus, for instance, a thing that is evident, you understand me, is unassailable,... or else it should be assailed,... in short, it can not be attacked. That is why it is monstrous to allow the Jewish religion and the Protestant religion in France, because these religions can be assailed, for they have no dogma. I give you this briefly, but in your prayer-book you will find the list of dogmas. I am a rod of iron as regards dogmas. My husband, who, as I said, has succeeded in inspiring me with doubts on many matters—without imagining it, for he has never required anything of me; I must do him that justice—but who, at any rate, has succeeded in making me neglect many things belonging to religion, such as fasting, vespers, sermons,... confession.

Madame F—Confession! Oh! my dear, I should never have believed that.

Madame H—It is in confidence, dear pet, that I tell you this. You will swear never to speak of it?

Madame F—Confession! Oh! yes, I swear it. Come here, and let me kiss you.

Madame H—You pity me, do you not?

Madame F—I can not pity you too much, for I am absolutely in the same position.

Madame H—You, too! Good heavens! how I love you. What can one do, eh? Must one not introduce some plan of conciliation into the household, sacrifice one's belief a little to that of one's husband?

Madame F—No doubt. For instance, how would you have me go to high mass, which is celebrated at my parish church at eleven o'clock exactly? That is just our breakfast time. Can I let my husband breakfast alone? He would never hinder me from going to high mass, he has said

so a thousand times, only he has always added, “When you want to go to mass during breakfast time, I only ask one thing—it is to give me notice the day before, so that I may invite some friends to keep me company.”

Madame H—But only fancy, pet, our two husbands could not be more alike if they were brothers. Leon has always said, “My dear little chicken —”

Madame F—Ha! ha! ha!

Madame H—Yes, that is his name for me; you know how lively he is. He has always said to me, then, “My dear little chicken, I am not a man to do violence to your opinions, but in return give way to me as regards some of your pious practices.” I only give you the mere gist of it; it was said with a thousand delicacies, which I suppress. And I have agreed by degrees,... so that, while only paying very little attention to the outward observances of religion, I have remained, as I told you, a bar of iron as regards dogmas. Oh! as to that, I would not give way an inch, a hair-breadth, and Leon is the first to tell me that I am right. After all, dogma is everything; practice, well, what would you? If I could bring Leon round, it would be quite another thing. How glad I am to have spoken to you about all this.

Madame F—Have we not been chattering? But it is half-past five, and I must go and take my cinchona bark. Thirty minutes before meals, it is a sacred duty. Will you come, pet?

Madame H—Stop a moment, I have lost my thimble again and must find it.

BOOK 3.

CHAPTER XX. THE HOT-WATER BOTTLE

When midnight strikes, when the embers die away into ashes, when the lamp burns more feebly and your eyes close in spite of yourself, the best thing to do, dear Madame, is to go to bed.

Get up from your armchair, take off your bracelets, light your rosecolored taper, and proceed slowly, to the soft accompaniment of your trailing skirt, rustling across the carpet, to your dressing-room, that perfumed sanctuary in which your beauty, knowing itself to be alone, raises its veils, indulges in self-examination, revels in itself and reckons up its treasures as a miser does his wealth.

Before the muslin-framed mirror, which reveals all that it sees so well, you pause carelessly and with a smile give one long satisfied look, then with two fingers you withdraw the pin that kept up your hair, and its long, fair tresses unroll and fall in waves, veiling your bare shoulders. With a coquettish hand, the little finger of which is turned up, you caress, as you gather them together, the golden flood of your abundant locks, while with the other you pass through them the tortoiseshell comb that buries itself in the depths of this fair forest and bends with the effort.

Your tresses are so abundant that your little hand can scarcely grasp them. They are so long that your outstretched arm scarcely reaches their extremity. Hence it is not without difficulty that you manage to twist them up and imprison them in your embroidered night-cap.

This first duty accomplished, you turn the silver tap, and the pure and limpid water pours into a large bowl of enamelled porcelain. You throw in a few drops of that fluid which perfumes and softens the skin, and like a nymph in the depths of a quiet wood preparing for the toilet, you remove the drapery that might encumber you.

But what, Madame, you frown? Have I said too much or not enough? Is it not well known that you love cold water; and do you think it is not guessed that at the contact of the dripping sponge you quiver from head to foot?

But what matters it, your toilette for the night is completed, you are fresh, restored, and white as a nun in your embroidered dressing-gown, you dart your bare feet into satin slippers and reenter your bedroom, shivering slightly. To see you walking thus with hurried steps, wrapped tightly in your dressing-gown, and with your pretty head hidden in its nightcap, you might be taken for a little girl leaving the confessional after confessing some terrible sin.

Gaining the bedside, Madame lays aside her slippers, and lightly and without effort, bounds into the depths of the alcove.

However, Monsieur, who was already asleep with his nose on the Moniteur, suddenly wakes up at the movement imparted to the bed.

"I thought that you were in bed already, dear," he murmurs, falling off to sleep again. "Good-night."

"If I had been in bed you would have noticed it." Madame stretches out her feet and moves them about; she seems to be in quest of something. "I am not in such a hurry to go to sleep as you are, thank goodness."

Monsieur, suddenly and evidently annoyed, says: "But what is the matter, my dear? You fidget and fidget—I want to sleep." He turns over as he speaks.

"I fidget! I am simply feeling for my hot-water bottle; you are irritating."

"Your hot-water bottle?" is Monsieur's reply, with a grunt.

"Certainly, my hot-water bottle, my feet are frozen." She goes on feeling for it. "You are really very amiable this evening; you began by dozing over the 'Revue des Deux Mondes', and I find you snoring over the 'Moniteur'. In your place I should vary my literature. I am sure you have taken my hot-water bottle."

“I have been doing wrong. I will subscribe to the ‘Tintamarre’ in future. Come, good-night, my dear.” He turns over. “Hello, your hot-water bottle is right at the bottom of the bed; I can feel it with the tips of my toes.”

“Well, push it up; do you think that I can dive down there after it?”

“Shall I ring for your maid to help you?” He makes a movement of ill-temper, pulls the clothes up to his chin, and buries his head in the pillow. “Goodnight, my dear.”

Madame, somewhat vexed, says: “Good-night, goodnight.”

The respiration of Monsieur grows smooth, and even his brows relax, his forehead becomes calm, he is on the point of losing all consciousness of the realities of this life.

Madame taps lightly on her husband’s shoulder.

“Hum,” growls Monsieur.

Madame taps again.

“Well, what is it?”

Madame, in an angelic tone of voice, “My dear, would you put out the candle?”

Monsieur, without opening his eyes, “The hot-water bottle, the candle, the candle, the hot-water bottle.”

“Good heavens! how irritable you are, Oscar. I will put it out myself. Don’t trouble yourself. You really have a very bad temper, my dear; you are angry, and if you were goaded a little, you would, in five minutes, be capable of anything.”

Monsieur, his voice smothered in the pillow, “No, not at all; I am sleepy, dear, that is all. Good-night, my dear.”

Madame, briskly, “You forget that in domestic life good feeling has for its basis reciprocal consideration.”

“I was wrong—come, good-night.” He raises himself up a little. “Would you like me to kiss you?”

“I don’t want you to, but I permit.” She puts her face toward that of her husband, who kisses her on the forehead. “You are really too good, you have kissed my nightcap.”

Monsieur, smiling, “Your hair smells very nice... You see I am so sleepy. Ah! you have it in little plaits, you are going to wave it to-morrow.”

“To wave it. You were the first to find that that way of dressing it became me, besides, it is the fashion, and tomorrow is my reception day. Come, you irritable man, embrace me once for all and snore at your ease, you are dying to do so.”

She holds her neck toward her husband.

Monsieur, laughing, “In the first place, I never snore. I never joke.” He kisses his wife’s neck, and rests his head on her shoulder.

“Well, what are you doing there?” is her remark.

“I am digesting my kiss.”

Madame affects the lackadaisical, and looks sidewise at her husband with an eye half disarmed. Monsieur sniffs the loved perfume with open nostrils.

After a period of silence he whispers in his wife’s ear, “I am not at all sleepy now, dear. Are your feet still cold? I will find the hot-water bottle.”

“Oh, thanks, put out the light and let us go to sleep; I am quite tired out.”

She turns round by resting her arm on his face.

“No, no, I won’t have you go to sleep with your feet chilled; there is nothing worse. There, there is the hot-water bottle, warm your poor little feet... there... like that.”

“Thanks, I am very comfortable. Good-night, dear, let us go to sleep.”

“Good-night, my dear.”

After a long silence Monsieur turns first on one side and then on the other, and ends by tapping lightly on his wife’s shoulder.

Madame, startled, “What is the matter? Good heavens! how you startled me!”

Monsieur, smiling, “Would you be kind enough to put out the candle?”

“What! is it for that you wake me up in the middle of my sleep? I shall not be able to doze again. You are unbearable.”

“You find me unbearable?” He comes quite close to his wife; “Come, let me explain my idea to you.”

Madame turns round—her eye meets the eye... full of softness.. of her husband. “Dear me,” she says, “you are a perfect tiger.”

Then, putting her mouth to his ear, she murmurs with a smile, “Come, explain your idea, for the sake of peace and quiet.”

Madame, after a very long silence, and half asleep, “Oscar!”

Monsieur, his eyes closed, in a faint voice, “My dear.”

“How about the candle? it is still alight.”

“Ah! the candle. I will put it out. If you were very nice you would give me a share of your hot-water bottle; one of my feet is frozen. Good-night.”

“Good-night.”

They clasp hands and fall asleep.

CHAPTER XXI. A LONGING

MONSIEUR and MADAME are quietly sitting together—The clock has just struck ten—MONSIEUR is in his dressing-gown and slippers, is leaning back in an armchair and reading the newspaper—MADAME is carelessly working squares of laces.

Madame—Such things have taken place, have they not, dear?

Monsieur—(without raising his eyes)—Yes, my dear.

Madame—There, well I should never have believed it. But they are monstrous, are they not?

Monsieur—(without raising his eyes)—Yes, my dear.

Madame—Well, and yet, see how strange it is, Louise acknowledged it to me last month, you know; the evening she called for me to go to the perpetual Adoration, and our hour of adoration, as it turned out, by the way, was from six to seven; impossible, too, to change our turn; none of the ladies caring to adore during dinner-time, as is natural enough. Good heavens, what a rage we were in! How good God must be to have forgiven you. Do you remember?

Monsieur—(continuing to read)—Yes, dear.

Madame—Ah! you remember that you said, 'I don't care a...' Oh! but I won't repeat what you said, it is too naughty. How angry you were! 'I will go and dine at the restaurant, confound it!' But you did not say confound, ha! ha! ha! Well, I loved you just the same at that moment; it vexed me to see you in a rage on God's account, but for my own part I was pleased; I like to see you in a fury; your nostrils expand, and then your moustache bristles, you put me in mind of a lion, and I have always liked lions. When I was quite a child at the Zoological Gardens they

could not get me away from them; I threw all my sous into their cage for them to buy gingerbread with; it was quite a passion. Well, to continue my story. (She looks toward her husband who is still reading, and after a pause,) Is it interesting-that which you are reading?

Monsieur—(like a man waking up)—What is it, my dear child? What I am reading? Oh, it would scarcely interest you. (With a grimace.) There are Latin phrases, you know, and, besides, I am hoarse. But I am listening, go, on. (He resumes his newspaper.)

Madame—Well, to return to the perpetual Adoration, Louise confided to me, under the pledge of secrecy, that she was like me.

Monsieur—Like you? What do you mean?

Madame—Like me; that is plain enough.

Monsieur—You are talking nonsense, my little angel, follies as great as your chignon. You women will end by putting pillows into your chignons.

Madame—(resting her elbows on her husband's knees)—But, after all, the instincts, the resemblances we have, must certainly be attributed to something. Can any one imagine, for instance, that God made your cousin as stupid as he is, and with a head like a pear?

Monsieur—My cousin! my cousin! Ferdinand is only a cousin by marriage. I grant, however, that he is not very bright.

Madame—Well, I am sure that his mother must have had a longing, or something.

Monsieur—What can I do to help it, my angel?

Madame—Nothing at all; but it clearly shows that such things are not to be laughed at; and if I were to tell you that I had a longing—

Monsieur—(letting fall his newspaper)—The devil! a longing for what?

Madame—Ah! there your nostrils are dilating; you are going to resemble a lion again, and I never shall dare to tell you. It is so extraordinary, and yet my mother had exactly the same longing.

Monsieur—Come, tell it me, you see that I am patient. If it is possible to gratify it, you know that I love you, my... Don't kiss me on the neck; you will make me jump up to the ceiling, my darling.

Madame—Repeat those two little words. I am your darling, then?

Monsieur—Ha! ha! ha! She has little fingers which—ha! ha!—go into your neck—ha! ha!—you will make me break something, nervous as I am.

Madame—Well, break something. If one may not touch one's husband, one may as well go into a convent at once. (She puts her lips to MONSIEUR'S ear and coquettishly pulls the end of his moustache.) I shall not be happy till I have what I am longing for, and then it would be so kind of you to do it.

Monsieur—Kind to do what? Come, dear, explain yourself.

Madame—You must first of all take off that great, ugly dressing-gown, pull on your boots, put on your hat and go. Oh, don't make any faces; if you grumble in the least all the merit of your devotedness will disappear ... and go to the grocer's at the corner of the street, a very respectable shop.

Monsieur—To the grocer's at ten o'clock at night! Are you mad? I will ring for John; it is his business.

Madame (staying his hand) You indiscreet man. These are our own private affairs; we must not take any one into our confidence. I will go into your dressing-room to get your things, and you will put your boots on before the fire comfortably... to please me, Alfred, my love, my life. I would give my little finger to have...

Monsieur—To have what, hang it all, what, what, what?

Madame—(her face alight and fixing her eyes on him)—I want a sou's worth of paste. Had not you guessed it?

Monsieur—But it is madness, delirium, fol—

Madame—I said paste, dearest; only a sou's worth, wrapped in strong paper.

Monsieur—No, no. I am kind-hearted, but I should reproach myself—

Madame—(closing his mouth with her little hands)—Oh, not a word; you are going to utter something naughty. But when I tell you that I have a mad longing for it, that I love you as I have never loved you yet, that my mother had the same desire—Oh! my poor mother (she weeps in her hands), if she could only know, if she were not at the other end of France. You have never cared for my parents; I saw that very well on our wedding-day, and (she sobs) it will be the sorrow of my whole life.

Monsieur—(freeing himself and suddenly rising)—Give me my boots.

Madame—(with effusion)—Oh, thanks, Alfred, my love, you are good, yes, you are good. Will you have your walking-stick, dear?

Monsieur—I don't care. How much do you want of that abomination—a franc's worth, thirty sous' worth, a louis' worth?

Madame—You know very well that I would not make an abuse of it-only a sou's worth. I have some sous for mass; here, take one. Adieu, Alfred; be quick; be quick!

(Exit MONSIEUR.)

Left alone, Madame wafts a kiss in her most tender fashion toward the door Monsieur has just closed behind him, then goes toward the glass and smiles at herself with pleasure. Then she lights the wax candle in a little candlestick, and quietly makes her way to the kitchen, noiselessly opens a press, takes out three little dessert plates, bordered with gold and ornamented with her initials, next takes from a box lined with white leather, two silver spoons, and, somewhat embarrassed by all this luggage, returns to her bedroom.

Then she pokes the fire, draws a little buhl table close up to the hearth, spreads a white cloth, sets out the plates, puts the spoons by them, and enchanted, impatient, with flushed complexion, leans back in an armchair. Her little foot rapidly taps the floor, she smiles, pouts—she is waiting.

At last, after an interval of some minutes, the outer door is heard to close, rapid steps cross the drawingroom, Madame claps her hands and Monsieur comes in. He does not look very pleased, as he advances

holding awkwardly in his left hand a flattened parcel, the contents of which may be guessed.

Madame—(touching a gold-bordered plate and holding it out to her husband)—Relieve yourself of it, dear. Could you not have been quicker?

Monsieur—Quicker?

Madame—Oh! I am not angry with you, that is not meant for a reproach, you are an angel; but it seems to me a century since you started.

Monsieur—The man was just going to shut his shop up. My gloves are covered with it... it's sticky... it's horrid, pah! the abomination! At last I shall have peace and quietness.

Madame—Oh! no harsh words, they hurt me so. But look at this pretty little table, do you remember how we supped by the fireside? Ah! you have forgotten it, a man's heart has no memory.

Monsieur—Are you so mad as to imagine that I am going to touch it? Oh! indeed! that is carrying—

Madame—(sadly)—See what a state you get in over a little favor I ask of you. If in order to please me you were to overcome a slight repugnance, if you were just to touch this nice, white jelly with you lips, where would be the harm?

Monsieur—The harm! the harm! it would be ridiculous. Never.

Madame—That is the reason? "It would be absurd." It is not from disgust, for there is nothing disgusting there, it is flour and water, nothing more. It is not then from a dislike, but out of pride that you refuse?

Monsieur—(shrugging his shoulders)—What you say is childish, puerile, silly. I do not care to answer it.

Madame—And what you say is neither generous nor worthy of you, since you abuse your superiority. You see me at your feet pleading for an insignificant thing, puerile, childish, foolish, perhaps, but one which would give me pleasure, and you think it heroic not to yield. Do you want me to speak out, well? then, you men are unfeeling.

Monsieur—Never.

Madame—Why, you admitted it to me yourself one night, on the Pont des Arts, as we were walking home from the theatre.

Monsieur—After all, there is no great harm in that.

Madame—(sadly)—I am not angry with you, this sternness is part of your nature, you are a rod of iron.

Monsieur—I have some energy when it is needed, I grant you, but I have not the absurd pride you imagine, and there (he dips his finger in the paste and carries it to his lips), is the proof, you spoilt child. Are you satisfied? It has no taste, it is insipid.

Madame—You were pretending.

Monsieur—I swear to you…

Madame (taking a little soon, filling it with her precious paste and holding it to her husband's lips)—I want to see the face you will make, love.

Monsieur—(Puts out his lips, buries his two front teeth, with marked disgust, in the paste, makes a horrible face and spits into the fireplace)—Eugh.

Madame—(still holding the spoon and with much interest) Well?

Monsieur—Well! it is awful! oh! awful! taste it.

Madame—(dreamily stirring the paste with the spoon, her little finger in the air)—I should never have believed that it was so nasty.

Monsieur—You will soon see for yourself, taste it, taste it.

Madame—I am in no hurry, I have plenty of time.

Monsieur—To see what it is like. Taste a little, come.

Madame—(pushing away the plate with a look of horror)—Oh! how you worry me. Be quiet, do; for a trifle I could hate you. It is disgusting, this paste of yours!

CHAPTER XXII. FAMILY LIFE

It was the evening of the 15th of February. It was dreadfully cold. The snow drove against the windows and the wind whistled furiously under the doors. My two aunts, seated at a table in one corner of the drawing-room, gave vent from time to time to deep sighs, and, wriggling in their armchairs, kept casting uneasy glances toward the bedroom door. One of them had taken from a little leather bag placed on the table her blessed rosary and was repeating her prayers, while her sister was reading a volume of Voltaire's correspondence which she held at a distance from her eyes, her lips moving as she perused it.

For my own part, I was striding up and down the room, gnawing my moustache, a bad habit I have never been able to get rid of, and halting from time to time in front of Dr. C., an old friend of mine, who was quietly reading the paper in the most comfortable of the armchairs. I dared not disturb him, so absorbed did he seem in what he was reading, but in my heart I was furious to see him so quiet when I myself was so agitated.

Suddenly he tossed the paper on to the couch and, passing his hand across his bald and shining head, said:

"Ah! if I were a minister, it would not take long, no, it would not be very long.... You have read that article on Algerian cotton. One of two things, either irrigation.... But you are not listening to me, and yet it is a more serious matter than you think."

He rose, and with his hands in his pocket, walked across the room humming an old medical student's song. I followed him closely.

"Jacques," said I, as he turned round, "tell me frankly, are you satisfied?"

“Yes, yes, I am satisfied... observe my untroubled look,” and he broke into his hearty and somewhat noisy laugh.

“You are not hiding anything from me, my dear fellow?”

“What a donkey you are, old fellow. I tell you that everything is going on well.”

And he resumed his song, jingling the money in his pockets.

“All is going on well, but it will take some time,” he went on. “Let me have one of your dressing-gowns. I shall be more comfortable for the night, and these ladies will excuse me, will they not?”

“Excuse you, I should think so, you, the doctor, and my friend!” I felt devotedly attached to him that evening.

“Well, then, if they will excuse me, you can very well let me have a pair of slippers.”

At this moment a cry came from the next room and we distinctly heard these words in a stifled voice:

“Doctor... oh! mon Dieu!... doctor!”

“It is frightful,” murmured my aunts.

“My dear friend,” I exclaimed, seizing the doctor’s arm, “you are quite sure you are not concealing anything from me?”

“If you have a very loose pair they will suit me best; I have not the foot of a young girl.... I am not concealing anything, I am not concealing anything.... What do you think I should hide from you? It is all going on very well, only as I said it will take time—By the way, tell Joseph to get me one of your smokingcaps; once in dressing-gown and slippers a smokingcap is not out of the way, and I am getting bald, my dear Captain. How infernally cold it is here! These windows face the north, and there are no sand-bags. Mademoiselle de V.,” he added, turning to my aunt, “you will catch cold.”

Then as other sounds were heard, he said: “Let us go and see the little lady.”

“Come here,” said my wife, who had caught sight of me, in a low voice, “come here and shake hands with me.” Then she drew me toward her and whispered in my ear: “You will be pleased to kiss the little darling, won’t you?” Her voice was so faint and so tender as she said this, and she added: “Do not take your hand away, it gives me courage.”

I remained beside her, therefore, while the doctor, who had put on my dressing-gown, vainly strove to button it.

From time to time my poor little wife squeezed my hand violently, closing her eyes, but not uttering a cry. The fire sparkled on the hearth. The pendulum of the clock went on with its monotonous ticking, but it seemed to me that all this calm was only apparent, that everything about me must be in a state of expectation like myself and sharing my emotion. In the bedroom beyond, the door of which was ajar, I could see the end of the cradle and the shadow of the nurse who was dozing while she waited.

What I felt was something strange. I felt a new sentiment springing up in my heart, I seemed to have some foreign body within my breast, and this sweet sensation was so new to me that I was, as it were, alarmed at it. I felt the little creature, who was there without yet being there, clinging to me; his whole life unrolled itself before me. I saw him at the same time a child and a grown-up man; it seemed to me that my own life was about to be renewed in his and I felt from time to time an irresistible need of giving him something of myself.

Toward half-past eleven, the doctor, like a captain consulting his compass, pulled out his watch, muttered something and drew near the bed.

“Come, my dear lady,” said he to my wife, “courage, we are all round you and all is going well; within five minutes you will hear him cry out.”

My mother-in-law, almost beside herself, was biting her lips and each pang of the sufferer was reflected upon her face. Her cap had got disarranged in such a singular fashion that, under any other circumstances, I should have burst out laughing. At that moment I heard

the drawing-room door open and saw the heads of my aunts, one above the other, and behind them that of my father, who was twisting his heavy white moustache with a grimace that was customary to him.

"Shut the door," cried the doctor, angrily, "don't bother me."

And with the greatest coolness in the world he turned to my mother-in-law and added, "I ask a thousand pardons."

But just then there was something else to think of than my old friend's bluntness.

"Is everything ready to receive him?" he continued, growling.

"Yes, my dear doctor," replied my mother-in-law.

At length, the doctor lifted into the air a little object which almost immediately uttered a cry as piercing as a needle. I shall never forget the impression produced on me by this poor little thing, making its appearance thus, all of a sudden, in the middle of the family. We had thought and dreamed of it; I had seen him in my mind's eye, my darling child, playing with a hoop, pulling my moustache, trying to walk, or gorging himself with milk in his nurse's arms like a gluttonous little kitten; but I had never pictured him to myself, inanimate, almost lifeless, quite tiny, wrinkled, hairless, grinning, and yet, charming, adorable, and be loved in spite of all-poor, ugly, little thing. It was a strange impression, and so singular that it is impossible to understand it, without having experienced it.

"What luck you have!" said the doctor, holding the child toward me; "it is a boy."

"A boy!"

"And a fine one."

"Really, a boy!"

That was a matter of indifference to me now. What was causing me indescribable emotion was the living proof of paternity, this little being who was my own. I felt stupefied in presence of the great mystery of childbirth. My wife was there, fainting, overcame, and the little living creature, my own flesh, my own blood, was squalling and gesticulating in

the hands of Jacques. I was overwhelmed, like a workman who had unconsciously produced a masterpiece. I felt myself quite small in presence of this quivering piece of my own handiwork, and, frankly, a little bit ashamed of having made it so well almost without troubling about it. I can not undertake to explain all this, I merely relate my impressions.

My mother-in-law held out her apron and the doctor placed the child on his grandmother's knees, saying: "Come, little savage, try not to be any worse than your rascal of a father. Now for five minutes of emotion. Come, Captain, embrace me."

We did so heartily. The doctor's little black eyes twinkled more brightly than usual; I saw very well that he was moved.

"Did it make you feel queer, Captain? I mean the cry? Ah! I know it, it is like a needle through the heart.... Where is the nurse? Ah! here she is. No matter, he is a fine boy, your little lancer. Open the door for the prisoners in the drawing-room."

I opened the door. Every one was listening on the other side of it. My father, my two aunts, still holding in their hands, one her rosary and the other her Voltaire, my own nurse, poor old woman, who had come in a cab.

"Well," they exclaimed anxiously, "well?"

"It is all over, it is a boy; go in, he is there."

You can not imagine how happy I was to see on all their faces the reflection of my own emotion. They embraced me and shook hands with me, and I responded to all these marks of affection without exactly knowing where they came from.

"Damn it all!" muttered my father, in my ear, holding me in his arms, with his stick still in his hand and his hat on his head, "Damn it all!"

But he could not finish, however brave he might wish to appear; a big tear was glittering at the tip of his nose. He muttered "Hum!" under his moustache and finally burst into tears on my shoulder, saying: "I can not help it."

And I did likewise—I could not help it either.

However, everybody was flocking round the grandmamma, who lifted up a corner of her apron and said:

"How pretty he is, the darling, how pretty! Nurse, warm the linen, give me the caps."

"Smile at your aunty," said my aunt, jangling her rosary above the baby's head, "smile at aunty."

"Ask him at the same time to recite a fable," said the doctor.

Meanwhile my wife was coming to herself; she half opened her eyes and seemed to be looking for something.

"Where is he?" she murmured in a faint voice.

They showed her her mother's apron.

"A boy, is it not?"

Taking my hand, she drew me down toward her and said in a whisper, "Are you satisfied with me? I did my best, dear."

"Come, no emotion," exclaimed the doctor, "you shall kiss each other tomorrow. Colonel," he said to my father, who still retained his hat and stick, "keep them from kissing. No emotion, and every one outside. I am going to dress the little lancer. Give me the little man, grandmamma. Come here, little savage. You shall see whether I don't know how to fasten pins in."

He took the baby in his two large hands and sat down on a stool before the fire.

I watched my boy whom Jacques was turning about like a doll, but with great skill. He examined him all over, touching and feeling him, and at each test said with a smile:

"He is a fine one, he is a fine one."

Then he rolled him up in his clothes, put a triple cap on his little bald head, tied a folded ribbon under his chin to prevent his head falling backward, and then, satisfied with his work, said:

“You saw how I did it, nurse? Well, you must dress this lancer every morning in the same way. Nothing but a little sugar and water till to-morrow. The mother has no fever. Come, all is going on well.

“Lucky Captain! I am so hungry. Do you know that it is one in the morning? You haven’t got cold partridge or a bit of pie that you don’t know what to do with, have you? It would suit me down to the ground, with a bottle of something.”

We went both into the dining-room and laid the cloth without any more ceremony.

I never in my life ate and drank so much as on that occasion.

“Come, get off to bed,” said the doctor, putting on his coat. “To-morrow morning you shall have the wet-nurse. No, by the way, I’ll call for you, and we will go and choose her together; it is curious. Be under arms at half-past eight.”

CHAPTER XXIII. NEW YEAR'S DAY

It is barely seven o'clock. A pale ray of daylight is stealing through the double curtains, and already some one is tapping at the door. I can hear in the next room from the stifled laughter and the silvery tones of Baby, who is quivering with impatience, and asking leave to come in.

"Papa," he cries, "it is Baby, it is Baby come for the New Year."

"Come in, my darling; come quick, and kiss us."

The door opens and my boy, his eyes aglow, and his arms raised, rushes toward the bed. His curls, escaping from the nightcap covering his head, float on his forehead. His long, loose night-shirt, catching his little feet, increases his impatience, and causes him to stumble at every step.

At length he crosses the room, and, holding out his two hands to mine: "Baby wishes you a Happy New Year," he says, in an earnest voice.

"Poor little love, with his bare feet! Come, darling, and warm yourself under the counterpane."

I lift him toward me, but at this moment my wife, who is asleep, suddenly wakes.

"Who is there?" she exclaims, feeling for the bell. "Thieves!"

"It is we two, dear."

"Who? Good heavens! how you frightened me! I was dreaming the house was on fire, and that I heard your voice amid the raging flames. You were very indiscreet in shouting like that!"

"Shouting! but you forget, mamma, that it is New Year's Day, the day of smiles and kisses? Baby was waiting for you to wake up, as well as myself."

However, I wrap the little fellow up in the eiderdown quilt and warm his cold feet in my hands.

“Mamma, it is New Year’s Day,” he exclaims. With his arms he draws our two heads together, puts forward his own and kisses us at haphazard with his moist lips. I feel his dimpled fists digging into my neck, his little fingers entangled in my beard.

My moustache tickles the tip of his nose, and he bursts into a fit of joyous laughter as he throws his head back.

His mother, who has recovered from her fright, takes him in her arms and rings the bell.

“The year is beginning well, dear,” she says, “but we must have a little daylight.”

“Mamma, naughty children don’t have any new toys on New Year’s Day, do they?”

And as he says this the sly fellow eyes a pile of parcels and packages heaped up in one corner, visible despite the semidarkness.

Soon the curtains are drawn aside, and the shutters opened; daylight floods the room; the fire crackles merrily on the hearth, and two large parcels, carefully tied up, are placed on the bed. One is for my wife, and the other for my boy.

“What is it? What is it?” I have multiplied the knots and tripled the wrappings, and I gleefully follow their impatient fingers entangled among the strings.

My wife gets impatient, smiles, pouts, kisses me, and asks for the scissors.

Baby on his side tugs with all his might, biting his lips as he does so, and ends by asking my help. His look strives to penetrate the wrappers. All the signs of desire and expectation are stamped on his face. His hand, hidden under the coverlet, causes the silk to rustle with his convulsive movements, and his lips quiver as at the approach of some dainty.

At length the last paper falls aside. The lid is lifted, and joy breaks forth.

“A fur tippet!”

“A Noah’s ark!”

“To match my muff, dear, kind husband.”

“With a Noah on wheels, dear papa. I do love you so.”

They throw themselves on my neck, four arms are clasped round me at once. Emotion gets the better of me, and a tear steals into my eye. There are two in those of my wife, and Baby, losing his head, sobs as he kisses my hand.

It is absurd.

Absurd, I don’t know; but delightful, I can answer for it.

Does not grief, after all, call forth enough tears for us to forgive joy the solitary one she perchance causes us to shed!

Life is not so sweet for us to risk ourselves in it singlehanded, and when the heart is empty the way seems very long.

It is so pleasant to feel one’s self loved, to hear beside one the cadenced steps of one’s fellow-travellers, and to say, “They are here, our three hearts beat in unison.” So pleasant once a year, when the great clock strikes the first of January, to sit down beside the path, with hands locked together, and eyes fixed on the unknown dusty road losing itself in the horizon, and to say, while embracing one another, “We still love one another, my dear children; you rely on me, and I rely on you. Let us have confidence, and walk steadfastly.”

This is how I explain that one may weep a little while examining a new fur tippet and opening a Noah’s ark.

But breakfast time draws near. I have cut myself twice while shaving; I have stepped on my son’s wild beasts in turning round, and I have the prospect of a dozen duty calls, as my wife terms them, before me; yet I am delighted.

We sit down to the breakfast table, which has a more than usually festive aspect. A faint aroma of truffles perfumes the air, every one is smiling, and through the glass I see, startling sight! the doorkeeper, with his own hands, wiping the handrail of the staircase. It is a glorious day.

Baby has ranged his elephants, lions, and giraffes round his plate, and his mother, under pretext of a draught, breakfasts in her tippet.

“Have you ordered the carriage, dear, for our visits?” I ask.

“That cushion for Aunt Ursula will take up such a deal of room. It might be put beside the coachman.”

“Poor aunt.”

“Papa, don’t let us go to Aunt Ursula,” said Baby; “she pricks so when she kisses you.”

“Naughty boy.... Think of all we have to get into the carriage. Leon’s rocking-horse, Louise’s muff, your father’s slippers, Ernestine’s quilt, the bonbons, the work-box. I declare, aunt’s cushion must go under the coachman’s feet.”

“Papa, why doesn’t the giraffe eat cutlets?”

“I really don’t know, dear.”

“Neither do I, papa.”

An hour later we are ascending the staircase leading to Aunt Ursula’s. My wife counts the steps as she pulls herself up by the hand-rail, and I carry the famous cushion, the bonbons, and my son, who has insisted on bringing his giraffe with him.

Aunt Ursula, who produces the same effect on him as the sight of a rod would, is waiting us in her icy little drawing-room. Four square armchairs, hidden beneath yellow covers, stand vacant behind four little mats. A clock in the shape of a pyramid, surmounted on a sphere, ticks under a glass case.

A portrait on the wall, covered with fly-spots, shows a nymph with a lyre, standing beside a waterfall. This nymph was Aunt Ursula. How she has altered!

“My dear aunt, we have come to wish you a Happy New Year.”

“To express our hopes that—”

“Thank you, nephew, thank you, niece,” and she points to two chairs. “I am sensible of this step on your part; it proves to me that you have not altogether forgotten the duties imposed upon you by family ties.”

“You are reckoning, my dear aunt, without the affection we feel for you, and which of itself is enough… Baby, go and kiss your aunt.”

Baby whispers in my ear, “But, papa, I tell you she does prick.”

I place the bonbons on a side-table.

“You can, nephew, dispense with offering me that little gift; you know that sweetmeats disagree with me, and, if I were not aware of your indifference as to the state of my health, I should see in your offering a veiled sarcasm. But let that pass. Does your father still bear up against his infirmities courageously?”

“Thank you, yes.”

“I thought to please you, dear aunt,” observes my wife, “by embroidering for you this cushion, which I beg you to accept.”

“I thank you, child, but I can still hold myself sufficiently upright, thank God, not to have any need of a cushion. The embroidery is charming, it is an Oriental design. You might have made a better choice, knowing that I like things much more simple. It is charming, however, although this red next to the green here sets one’s teeth on edge. Taste in colors is, however, not given to every one. I have, in return, to offer you my photograph, which that dear Abbe Miron insisted on my having taken.”

“How kind you are, and how like you it is! Do you recognize your aunt, Baby?”

“Do not think yourself obliged to speak contrary to your opinion. This photograph does not in any way resemble me, my eyes are much brighter. I have also a packet of jujubes for your child. He seems to have grown.”

“Baby, go and kiss your aunt.”

“And then we shall go, mamma?”

“You are very rude, my dear.”

“Let him speak out; at any rate, he is frank. But I see that your husband is getting impatient, you have other… errands to fulfil; I will not keep you. Besides, I am going to church to pray for those who do not pray for themselves.”

From twelve duty calls, subtract one duty call, and eleven remain. Hum! “Coachman, Rue St. Louis au Marais.”

“Papa, has Aunt Ursula needles in her chin?”

Let us pass over the eleven duty calls, they are no more agreeable to write of than to make.

Toward seven o’clock, heaven be praised, the horses stop before my father’s, where dinner awaits us. Baby claps his hands, and smiles at old Jeannette, who, at the sound of the wheels, has rushed to the door. “Here they are,” she exclaims, and she carries off Baby to the kitchen, where my mother, with her sleeves turned up, is giving the finishing touch to her traditional plum cake.

My father, on his way to the cellar, lantern in hand, and escorted by his old servant, Jean, who is carrying the basket, halts. “Why, children, how late you are! Come to my arms, my dears; this is the day on which one kisses in good earnest. Jean, hold my lantern a minute.” And as my old father clasps me to his breast, his hand seeks out mine and grasps it, with a long clasp. Baby, who glides in between our legs, pulls our coat-tails and holds up his little mouth for a kiss too.

“But I am keeping you here in the anteroom and you are frozen; go into the drawing-room, there are a good fire and good friends there.”

They have heard us, the door opens, and a number of arms are held out to us. Amid handshakings, embracings, good wishes, and kisses, boxes are opened, bonbons are showered forth, parcels are undone, mirth becomes deafening, and good humor tumultuous. Baby standing amid his presents resembles a drunken man surrounded by a treasure, and from time to time gives a cry of joy on discovering some fresh toy.

“The little man’s fable,” exclaims my father, swinging his lantern which he has taken again from Jean.

A deep silence ensues, and the poor child, whose debut in the elocutionary art it is, suddenly loses countenance. He casts down his eyes, blushes and takes refuge in the arms of his mother, who, stooping down, whispers, “Come, darling, ‘A lamb was quenching’; you know the wolf and the lamb.”

“Yes, mamma, I know the little lamb that wanted to drink.” And in a contrite voice, his head bent down on his breast, he repeats with a deep sigh, “‘A little lamb was quenching his thirst in a clear stream.’”

We all, with ears on the alert and a smile on our lips, follow his delightful little jargon.

Uncle Bertrand, who is rather deaf, has made an ear trumpet of his hand and drawn his chair up. “Ah! I can follow it,” he says. “It is the fox and the grapes.” And as there is a murmur of “Hush,” at this interruption, he adds: “Yes, yes, he recites with intelligence, great intelligence.”

Success restores confidence to my darling, who finishes his fable with a burst of laughter. Joy is communicative, and we take our places at table amid the liveliest mirth.

“By the way,” says my father, “where the deuce is my lantern. I have forgotten all about the cellar. Jean, take your basket and let us go and rummage behind the fagots.”

The soup is smoking, and my mother, after having glanced smilingly round the table, plunges her ladle into the tureen. Give me the family dinner table at which those we love are seated, at which we may risk resting our elbows at dessert, and at which at thirty we once more taste the wine offered at our baptism.

CHAPTER XXIV. LETTERS OF A YOUNG MOTHER TO HER FRIEND.

The little caps are the ones I want, Marie. Be good enough to send me the pattern of the braces, those of your own invention, you know. Thanks for your coverlet, it is soft, flexible, warm, and charming, and Baby, amid its white wool, looks like a rosebud hidden in the snow. I am becoming poetical, am I not? But what would you have? My poor heart is overflowing with joy. My son, do you understand that, dear, my own son? When I heard the sharp cry of the little being whom my mother showed me lying in her apron, it seemed to me that a burning thrill of love shot through my veins. My old doctor's bald head was close to me, I caught hold of it and kissed him thrice.

"Calm yourself, my dear child," said he.

"Doctor, be quiet, or I will kiss you again. Give me my baby, my love. Are you quite sure it is a boy?"

And in the adjoining drawing-room, where the whole family were waiting, I could hear amid the sound of kisses, the delightful words, "It is a boy, a fine boy."

My poor husband, who for twelve hours had not left me, overcome with fatigue and emotion, was crying and laughing in one corner of the room.

"Come, nurse, swaddle him, quick now. No pins, confound it all, strings, I will have strings. What? Give me the child, you don't understand anything about it."

And the good doctor in the twinkling of an eye had dressed my child.

“He looks a Colonel, your boy. Put him into the cradle with... now be calm, my dear patient... with a hot-water bottle to his feet. Not too much fire, especially in the Colonel’s room. Now, no more noise, repose, and every one out of the way.”

And as through the opening of the door which was just ajar, Aunt Ursula whispered, “Doctor, let me come in; just to press her hand, doctor.”

“Confound it! every one must be off; silence and quiet are absolutely necessary.” They all left.

“Octave,” continued the doctor, “come and kiss your wife now, and make an end of it. Good little woman, she has been very brave.... Octave, come and kiss your wife, and be quick about it if you don’t want me to kiss her myself. I will do what I say,” he added, threatening to make good his words.

Octave, buried in his child’s cradle, did not hear.

“Good, now he is going to suffocate my Colonel for me.”

My husband came at length. He held out his hand which was quivering with emotion, and I grasped it with all my might. If my heart at that moment did not break from excess of feeling, it was because God no doubt knew that I should still have need of it.

You know, dear Marie, that before a child comes we love each other as husband and wife, but we love each other on our own account, while afterward we love each other on his, the dear love, who with his tiny hand has rivetted the chain forever. God, therefore, allows the heart to grow and swell. Mine was full; nevertheless, my baby came and took his place in it. Yet nothing overflowed, and I still feel that there is room for mother and yourself. You told me, and truly, that this would be a new life, a life of deep love and delightful devotion. All my past existence seems trivial and colorless to me, and I perceive that I am beginning to live. I am as proud as a soldier who has been in battle. Wife and mother, those words are our epaulettes. Grandmother is the field-marshal’s baton.

How sweet I shall render the existence of my two loved ones!

How I shall cherish them! I am wild, I weep, I should like to kiss you. I am afraid I am too happy.

My husband is really good. He holds the child with such pleasing awkwardness, it costs him such efforts to lift this slight burden. When he brings it to me, wrapped in blankets, he walks with slow and careful steps. One would think that the ground was going to crumble away beneath his feet. Then he places the little treasure in my bed, quite close to me, on a large pillow. We deck Baby; we settle him comfortably, and if after many attempts we get him to smile, it is an endless joy. Often my husband and I remain in the presence of this tiny creature, our heads resting on our hands. We silently follow the hesitating and charming movements of his little rosy-nailed hand on the silk, and we find in this so deep a charm that it needs a considerable counter-attraction to tear us away.

We have most amusing discussions on the shape of his forehead and the color of his eyes, which always end in grand projects for his future, very silly, no doubt, but so fascinating.

Octave wants him to follow a diplomatic career. He says that he has the eye of a statesman and that his gestures, though few, are full of meaning. Poor, dear little ambassador, with only three hairs on your head! But what dear hairs they are, those threads of gold curling at the back of his neck, just above the rosy fold where the skin is so fine and so fresh that kisses nestle there of themselves.

The whole of this little body has a perfume which intoxicates me and makes my heart leap. What, dear friend, are the invisible ties which bind us to our children? Is it an atom of our own soul, a part of our own life, which animates and vivifies them? There must be something of the kind, for I can read amid the mists of his little mind. I divine his wishes, I know when he is cold, I can tell when he is hungry.

Do you know the most delightful moment? It is when after having taken his evening meal and gorged himself with milk like a gluttonous little kitten, he falls asleep with his rosy cheek resting on my arm. His

limbs gently relax, his head sinks down on my breast, his eyes close, and his half-opened mouth continues to repeat the action of suckling.

His warm, moist breath brushes the hand that is supporting him. Then I wrap him up snugly in my turned-up skirt, hide his little feet under his clothes and watch my darling. I have him there, all to myself, on my knees. There is not a quiver of his being that escapes me or that does not vibrate in myself. I feel at the bottom of my heart a mirror that reflects them all. He is still part of me. Is it not my milk that nourishes him, my voice that hushes him off to sleep, my hand that dresses and caresses, encourages and supports him? The feeling that I am all in all for him further adds a delicious charm of protection to the delight of having brought him into the world.

When I think that there are women who pass by such joys without turning their heads. The fools!

Yes, the present is delightful and I am drunk with happiness. There is also the future, far away in the clouds. I often think of it, and I do not know why I shudder at the approach of a storm.

Madness! I shall love him so discreetly, I shall render the weight of my affection so light for him, that why should he wish to separate from me? Shall I not in time become his friend? Shall I not when a black down shadows those rosy little lips, when the bird, feeling its wings grown, seeks to leave the nest, shall I not be able to bring him back by invisible ties to the arms in which he now is sleeping? Perhaps at that wretched moment they call a man's youth you will forget me, my little darling! Other hands than mine perhaps will brush the hair away from your forehead at twenty. Alas! other lips, pressed burningly where mine are now pressed, will wipe out with a kiss twenty years of caresses. Yes, but when you return from this intoxicating and fatiguing journey, tired and exhausted, you will soon take refuge in the arms that once nursed you, you will rest your poor, aching head where it rests now, you will ask me to wipe away your tears and to make you forget the bruises received on the way, and I shall give you, weeping for joy, the kiss which at once consoles and fills with hope.

But I see that I am writing a whole volume, dear Marie. I will not re-read it or I should never dare to send it to you. What would you have? I am losing my head a little. I am not yet accustomed to all this happiness.

Yours affectionately.

CHAPTER XXV. FOUR YEARS LATER

Yes, my dear, he is a man and a man for good and all. He has come back from the country half as big again and as bold as a lion. He climbs on to the chairs, stops the clocks and sticks his hands in his pockets like a grown-up person.

When I see in the morning in the anteroom my baby's little shoes standing proudly beside the paternal boots, I experience, despite myself, a return toward that past which is yet so near. Yesterday swaddling clothes, today boots, tomorrow spurs. Ah! how the happy days fly by. Already four years old. I can scarcely carry him, even supposing he allowed me to, for his manly dignity is ticklish. He passes half his life armed for war, his pistols, his guns, his whips and his swords are all over the place. There is a healthy frankness about all his doings that charms me.

Do you imagine from this that my demon no longer has any good in him? At times he is an angel and freely returns the caresses I bestow upon him. In the evening after dinner he gets down into my armchair, takes my head in his hands and arranges my hair in his own way. His fresh little mouth travels all over my face. He imprints big sounding kisses on the back of my neck, which makes me shudder all over. We have endless talks together. "Why's" come in showers, and all these "why's" require real answers; for the intelligence of children is above all things logical. I will only give one of his sayings as a proof.

His grandmother is rather unwell, and every night he tacks on to his prayer these simple words, "Please God make Granny well, because I love her so." But for greater certainty he has added on his own account, "You know, God, Granny who lives in the Rue Saint-Louis, on the first

floor.” He says all this with an expression of simple confidence and such comic seriousness, the little love. You understand, it is to spare God the trouble of looking for the address.

I leave you; I hear him cough. I do not know whether he has caught cold, but I think he has been looking rather depressed since the morning. Do not laugh at me, I am not otherwise uneasy.

Yours most affectionately.

Yesterday there was a consultation. On leaving the house my old doctor’s eyes were moist; he strove to hide it, but I saw a tear. My child must be very ill then? The thought is dreadful, dear. They seek to reassure me, but I tremble.

The night has not brought any improvement. Still this fever. If you could see the state of the pretty little body we used to admire so. I will not think of what God may have in store for me. Ice has been ordered to be put to his head. His hair had to be cut off. Poor fair little curls that used to float in the wind as he ran after his hoop. It is terrible. I have dreadful forebodings.

My child, my poor child! He is so weak that not a word comes now from his pale parched lips. His large eyes that still shine in the depths of their sockets, smile at me from time to time, but this smile is so gentle, so faint, that it resembles a farewell. A farewell! But what would become of me?

This morning, thinking he was asleep, I could not restrain a sob. His lips opened, and he said, but in a whisper so low that I had to put my ear close down to catch it: “You do love me then, mamma?”

Do I love him? I should die.

NICE.

They have brought me here and I feel no better for it. Every day my weakness increases. I still spit blood. Besides, what do they seek to cure me of? Yours as ever.

If I should never return to Paris, you will find in my wardrobe his last toys; the traces of his little fingers are still visible on them. To the left is the branch of the blessed box that used to hang at his bedside. Let your hands alone touch all this. Burn these dear relics, this poor evidence of shattered happiness. I can still see… Sobs are choking me.

Farewell, dear friend. What would you? I built too high on too unstable a soil. I loved one object too well.

Yours from my heart.

CHAPTER XXVI. OLD RECOLLECTIONS

Cover yourselves with fine green leaves, tall trees casting your peaceful shade. Steal through the branches, bright sunlight, and you, studious promenaders, contemplative idlers, mammas in bright toilettes, gossiping nurses, noisy children, and hungry babies, take possession of your kingdom; these long walks belong to you.

It is Sunday. Joy and festivity. The gaufre seller decks his shop and lights his stove. The white cloth is spread on the table and piles of golden cakes attract the customer.

The woman who lets out chairs has put on her apron with its big pockets for sous. The park keeper, my dear little children, has curled his moustache, polished up his harmless sword and put on his best uniform. See how bright and attractive the marionette theatre looks in the sunshine, under its striped covering.

Sunday requires all this in its honor.

Unhappy are those to whom the tall trees of Luxembourg gardens do not recall one of those recollections which cling to the heart like its first perfume to a vase.

I was a General, under those trees, a General with a plume like a mourning coach-horse, and armed to the teeth. I held command from the hut of the newspaper vendor to the kiosk of the gaufre seller. No false modesty, my authority extended to the basin of the fountain, although the great white swans rather alarmed me. Ambushes behind the tree trunks, advanced posts behind the nursemaids, surprises, fights with cold steel; attacks by skirmishers, dust, encounters, carnage and no bloodshed. After which our mammas wiped our foreheads, rearranged our dishevelled hair, and tore us away from the battle, of which we dreamed all night.

Now, as I pass through the garden with its army of children and nurses, leaning on my stick with halting step, how I regret my General's cocked hat, my paper plume, my wooden sword and my pistol. My pistol that would snap caps and was the cause of my rapid promotion.

Disport yourselves, little folks; gossip, plump nurses, as you scold your soldiers. Embroider peaceably, young mothers, making from time to time a little game of your neighbors among yourselves; and you, reflective idlers, look at that charming picture-babies making a garden.

Playing in the sand, a game as old as the world and always amusing. Hillocks built up in a line with little bits of wood stuck into them, represent gardens in the walks of which baby gravely places his little uncertain feet. What would he not give, dear little man, to be able to complete his work by creating a pond in his park, a pond, a gutter, three drops of water?

Further on the sand is damper, and in the mountain the little fingers pierce a tunnel. A gigantic work which the boot of a passer-by will soon destroy. What passer-by respects a baby's mountain? Hence the young rascal avenges himself. See that gentleman in the brown frockcoat, who is reading the 'Revue des Deux Mondes' on the bench; our workers have piled up hillocks of sand and dust around him, the skirts of his coat have already lost their color.

But let this equipage noisily dashing along go by. Four horses, two bits of string, and a fifth horse who is the driver. That is all, and yet one fancies one's self in a postchaise. How many places has one not visited by nightfall?

There are drivers who prefer to be horses, there are horses who would rather be drivers; first symptoms of ambition.

And the solitary baby who slowly draws his omnibus round the gaufre seller, eyeing his shop! An indefatigable consumer, but a poor paymaster.

Do you see down there under the plane-trees that group of nurses, a herd of Burgundian milch kine, and at their feet, rolling on a carpet, all those little rosy cheeked philosophers who only ask God for a little

sunshine, pure milk, and quiet, in order to be happy. Frequently an accident disturbs the delightful calm. The Burgundian who mistrusted matters darts forward. It is too late.

"The course of a river is not to be checked," says Giboyer.

Sometimes the disaster is still more serious, and one repairs it as one can; but the philosopher who loves these disasters is indignant and squalls, swearing to himself to begin again.

Those little folk are delightful; we love children, but this affection for the species in general becomes yet more sweet when it is no longer a question of a baby, but of one's own baby.

Bachelors must not read what follows; I wish to speak to the family circle. Between those of a trade there is a better understanding.

I am a father, my dear madame, and have been of course the rejoicing papa of a matchless child. From beneath his cap there escaped a fair and curly tress that was our delight, and when I touched his white neck with my finger he broke into a laugh and showed me his little white pearls, as he clasped my head in his two chubby arms.

His first tooth was an event. We went into the light the better to see. The grandparents looked through their glasses at the little white spot, and I, with outstretched neck, demonstrated, explained and proved. And all at once I ran off to the cellar to seek out in the right corner a bottle of the best.

My son's first tooth. We spoke of his career during dinner, and at dessert grand-mamma gave us a song.

After this tooth came others, and with them tears and pain, but then when they were all there how proudly he bit into his slice of bread, how vigorously he attacked his chop in order to eat "like papa."

"Like papa," do you remember how these two words warm the heart, and how many transgressions they cause to be forgiven.

My great happiness,—is it yours too?—was to be present at my darling's awakening. I knew the time. I would gently draw aside the curtains of his cradle and watch him as I waited.

I usually found him stretched diagonally, lost in the chaos of sheets and blankets, his legs in the air, his arms crossed above his head. Often his plump little hand still clutched the toy that had helped to send him off to sleep, and through his parted lips came the regular murmur of his soft breathing. The warmth of his sleep had given his cheeks the tint of a well-ripened peach. His skin was warm, and the perspiration of the night glittered on his forehead in little imperceptible pearls.

Soon his hand would make a movement; his foot pushed away the blanket, his whole body stirred, he rubbed an eye, stretched out his arms, and then his look from under his scarcely raised eyelids would rest on me.

He would smile at me, murmuring softly, so softly that I would hold my breath to seize all the shades of his music.

"Dood mornin', papa."

"Good morning, my little man; have you slept well?"

We held out our arms to each other and embraced like old friends.

Then the talking would begin. He chatted as the lark would sing to the rising sun. Endless stories.

He would tell me his dreams, asking after each sentence for "his nice, warm bread and milk, with plenty of sugar." And when his breakfast came up, what an outburst of laughter, what joy as he drew himself up to reach it; then his eye would glitter with a tear in the corner, and the chatter begin again.

At other times he would come and surprise me in bed. I would pretend to be asleep, and he would pull my beard and shout in my ear. I feigned great alarm and threatened to be avenged. From this arose fights among the counterpanes, entrenchments behind the pillows. In sign of victory I would tickle him, and then he shuddered, giving vent to the frank and involuntary outburst of laughter of happy childhood. He buried his head between his two shoulders like a tortoise withdrawing into his shell, and threatened me with his plump rosy foot. The skin of his heel was so

delicate that a young girl's cheek would have been proud of it. How many kisses I would cover those dear little feet with when I warmed his long nightdress before the fire.

I had been forbidden to undress him, because it had been found that I entangled the knots instead of undoing them.

All this was charming, but when it was necessary to act rigorously and check the romping that was going too far, he would slowly drop his eyelids, while with dilated nostrils and trembling lips he tried to keep back the big tear glittering beneath his eyelid.

What courage was not necessary in order to refrain from calming with a kiss the storm on the point of bursting, from consoling the little swollen heart, from drying the tear that was overflowing and about to become a flood.

A child's expression is then so touching, there is so much grief in a warm tear slowly falling, in a little contracted face, a little heaving breast.

All this is long past. Yet years have gone by without effacing these loved recollections; and now that my baby is thirty years old and has a heavy moustache, when he holds out his large hand and says in his bass voice, "Good morning, father," it still seems to me that an echo repeats afar off the dear words of old, "Dood mornin', papa."

CHAPTER XXVII. THE LITTLE BOOTS

In the morning when I left my room, I saw placed in line before the door his boots and mine. His were little laced-up boots rather out of shape, and dulled by the rough usage to which he subjects them. The sole of the left boot was worn thin, and a little hole was threatening at the toe of the right. The laces, worn and slack, hung to the right and left. Swellings in the leather marked the places of his toes, and the accustomed movements of his little foot had left their traces in the shape of creases, slight or deep.

Why have I remembered all this? I really do not know, but it seems to me that I can still see the boots of the dear little one placed there on the mat beside my own, two grains of sand by two paving stones, a tom tit beside an elephant. They were his every-day boots, his playfellows, those with which he ascended sand hills and explored puddles. They were devoted to him, and shared his existence so closely that something of himself was met with again in them. I should have recognized them among a thousand; they had an especial physiognomy about them; it seemed to me that an invisible tie attached them to him, and I could not look at their undecided shape, their comic and charming grace, without recalling their little master, and acknowledging to myself that they resembled him.

Everything belonging to a baby becomes a bit babyish itself, and assumes that expression of unstudied and simple grace peculiar to a child.

Beside these laughing, gay, good-humored little boots, only asking leave to run about the country, my own seemed monstrous, heavy, coarse, ridiculous, with their heels. From their heavy and disabused air one felt that for them life was a grave matter, its journeys long, and the burden borne quite a serious one.

The contrast was striking, and the lesson deep. I would softly approach these little boots in order not to wake the little man who was still asleep in the adjoining room; I felt them, I turned them over, I looked at them on all sides, and I found a delightful smile rise to my lips. Never did the old violet-scented glove that lay for so long in the inmost recess of my drawer procure me so sweet an emotion.

Paternal love is no trifle; it has its follies and weaknesses, it is puerile and sublime, it can neither be analyzed nor explained, it is simply felt, and I yielded myself to it with delight.

Let the papa without weakness cast the first stone at me; the mammas will avenge me.

Remember that this little laced boot, with a hole in the toe, reminded me of his plump little foot, and that a thousand recollections were connected with that dear trifle.

I recalled him, dear child, as when I cut his toe nails, wriggling about, pulling at my beard, and laughing in spite of himself, for he was ticklish.

I recalled him as when of an evening in front of a good fire, I pulled off his little socks. What a treat.

I would say “one, two.” And he, clad in his long nightgown, his hands lost in the sleeves, would wait with glittering eyes, and ready to break into a fit of laughter for the “three.”

At last after a thousand delays, a thousand little teasings that excited his impatience and allowed me to snatch five or six kisses, I said “three.”

The sock flew away. Then there was a wild joy; he would throw himself back on my arm, waving his bare legs in the air. From his open mouth, in which two rows of shining little pearls could be distinguished, welled forth a burst of ringing laughter.

His mother, who, however, laughed too, would say the next minute, “Come, baby, come, my little angel, you will get cold… But leave off… Will you have done, you little demon?”

She wanted to scold, but she could not be serious at the sight of his fair-haired head, and flushed, smiling, happy face, thrown back on my knee.

She would look at me, and say:

"He is unbearable. Good gracious! what a child."

But I understood that this meant:

"Look how handsome, sturdy and healthy he is, our baby, our little man, our son."

And indeed he was adorable; at least I thought so.

I had the wisdom—I can say it now that my hair is white—not to let one of those happy moments pass without amply profiting by it, and really I did well. Pity the fathers who do not know how to be papas as often as possible, who do not know how to roll on the carpet, play at being a horse, pretend to be the great wolf, undress their baby, imitate the barking of the dog, and the roar of the lion, bite whole mouthfuls without hurting, and hide behind armchairs so as to let themselves be seen.

Pity sincerely these unfortunates. It is not only pleasant child's play that they neglect, but true pleasure, delightful enjoyment, the scraps of that happiness which is greatly calumniated and accused of not existing because we expect it to fall from heaven in a solid mass when it lies at our feet in fine powder. Let us pick up the fragments, and not grumble too much; every day brings us with its bread its ration of happiness.

Let us walk slowly and look down on the ground, searching around us and seeking in the corners; it is there that Providence has its hiding-places.

I have always laughed at those people who rush through life at full speed, with dilated nostrils, uneasy eyes, and glance rivetted on the horizon. It seems as though the present scorched their feet, and when you say to them, "Stop a moment, alight, take a glass of this good old wine, let us chat a little, laugh a little, kiss your child."

“Impossible,” they reply; “I am expected over there. There I shall converse, there I shall drink delicious wine, there I shall give expansion to paternal love, there I shall be happy!”

And when they do get “there,” breathless and tired out, and claim the price of their fatigue, the present, laughing behind its spectacles, says, “Monsieur, the bank is closed.”

The future promises, it is the present that pays, and one should have a good understanding with the one that keeps the keys of the safe.

Why fancy that you are a dupe of Providence?

Do you think that Providence has the time to serve up to each of you perfect happiness, already dressed on a golden plate, and to play music during your repast into the bargain? Yet that is what a great many people would like.

We must be reasonable, tuck up our sleeves and look after our cooking ourselves, and not insist that heaven should put itself out of the way to skim our soup.

I used to muse on all this of an evening when my baby was in my arms, and his moist, regular breathing fanned my hand. I thought of the happy moments he had already given me, and was grateful to him for them.

“How easy it is,” I said to myself, “to be happy, and what a singular fancy that is of going as far as China in quest of amusement.”

My wife was of my opinion, and we would sit for hours by the fire talking of what we felt.

“You, do you see, dear? love otherwise than I do,” she often said to me. “Papas calculate more. Their love requires a return. They do not really love their child till the day on which their self-esteem as its father is flattered. There is something of ownership in it. You can analyze paternal love, discover its causes, say ‘I love my child because he is so and so, or so and so.’ With the mother such analysis is impossible, she does not love her child because he is handsome or ugly, because he does or does not resemble her, has or has not her tastes. She loves him

because she can not help it, it is a necessity. Maternal love is an innate sentiment in woman. Paternal love is, in man, the result of circumstances. In her love is an instinct, in him a calculation, of which, it is true, he is unconscious, but, in short, it is the outcome of several other feelings."

"That is all very fine; go on," I said. "We have neither heart nor bowels, we are fearful savages. What you say is monstrous." And I stirred the logs furiously with the tongs.

Yet my wife was right, I acknowledged to myself. When a child comes into the world the affection of the father is not to be compared to that of the mother. With her it is love already. It seems that she has known him for a long time, her pretty darling. At his first cry it might be said that she recognized him. She seems to say, "It is he." She takes him without the slightest embarrassment, her movements are natural, she shows no awkwardness, and in her two twining arms the baby finds a place to fit him, and falls asleep contentedly in the nest created for him. It would be thought that woman serves a mysterious apprenticeship to maternity. Man, on the other hand, is greatly troubled by the birth of a child. The first wail of the little creature stirs him, but in this emotion there is more astonishment than love. His affection is not yet born. His heart requires to reflect and to become accustomed to these fondnesses so new to him.

There is an apprenticeship to be served to the business of a father. There is none to that of a mother.

If the father is clumsy morally in his love for his firstborn, it must be acknowledged that he is so physically in the manifestation of his fondness.

It is only tremblingly, and with contortions and efforts, that he lifts the slight burden. He is afraid of smashing the youngster, who knows this, and thence bawls with all the force of his lungs. He expands more strength, poor man, in lifting up his child than he would in bursting a door open. If he kisses him, his beard pricks him; if he touches him, his big fingers cause him some disaster. He has the air of a bear threading a needle.

And yet it must be won, the affection of this poor father, who, at the outset, meets nothing but misadventures; he must be captivated, captured, made to have a taste for the business, and not be left too long to play the part of a recruit.

Nature has provided for it, and the father rises to the rank of corporal the day the baby lisps his first syllables.

It is very sweet, the first lisping utterance of a child, and admirably chosen to move—the "pa-pa" the little creature first murmurs. It is strange that the first word of a child should express precisely the deepest and tenderest sentiment of all?

Is it not touching to see that the little creature finds of himself the word that is sure to touch him of whom he stands most in need; the word that means, "I am yours, love me, give me a place in your heart, open your arms to me; you see I do not know much as yet, I have only just arrived, but, already, I think of you, I am one of the family, I shall eat at your table, and bear your name, pa-pa, pa-pa."

He has discovered at once the most delicate of flatteries, the sweetest of caresses. He enters on life by a master stroke.

Ah! the dear little love! "Pa-pa, pa-pa," I still hear his faint, hesitating voice, I can still see his two coral lips open and close. We were all in a circle around him, kneeling down to be on a level with him. They kept saying to him, "Say it again, dear, say it again. Where is papa?" And he, amused by all these people about him, stretched out his arms, and turned his eyes toward me.

I kissed him heartily, and felt that two big tears hindered me from speaking.

From that moment I was a papa in earnest. I was christened.

CHAPTER XXVIII.
BABIES AND PAPAS

When the baby reaches three or four years of age, when his sex shows itself in his actions, his tastes and his eyes, when he smashes his wooden horses, cuts open his drums, blows trumpets, breaks the castors off the furniture, and evinces a decided hostility to crockery; in a word, when he is a man, it is then that the affection of a father for his son becomes love. He feels himself invaded by a need of a special fondness, of which the sweetest recollections of his past life can give no idea. A deep sentiment envelopes his heart, the countless roots of which sink into it in all directions. Defects or qualities penetrate and feed on this sentiment. Thus, we find in paternal love all the weaknesses and all the greatnesses of humanity. Vanity, abnegation, pride, and disinterestedness are united together, and man in his entirety appears in the papa.

It is on the day which the child becomes a mirror in which you recognize your features, that the heart is moved and awakens. Existence becomes duplicated, you are no longer one, but one and a half; you feel your importance increase, and, in the future of the little creature who belongs to you, you reconstruct your own past; you resuscitate, and are born again in him. You say to yourself: “I will spare him such and such a vexation which I had to suffer, I will clear from his path such and such a stone over which I stumbled, I will make him happy, and he shall owe all to me; he shall be, thanks to me, full of talents and attractions.” You give him, in advance, all that you did not get yourself, and in his future arrange laurels for a little crown for your own brows.

Human weakness, no doubt; but what matter, provided the sentiment that gives birth to this weakness is the strongest and purest of all? What matter if a limpid stream springs up between two paving stones? Are we to be blamed for being generous out of egotism, and for devoting ourselves to others for reasons of personal enjoyment?

Thus, in the father, vanity is the leading string. Say to any father: "Good heavens! how like you he is!" The poor man may hesitate at saying yes, but I defy him not to smile. He will say, "Perhaps.... Do you think so?... Well, perhaps so, side face."

And do not you be mistaken; if he does so, it is that you may reply in astonishment: "Why, the child is your very image."

He is pleased, and that is easily explained; for is not this likeness a visible tie between him and his work? Is it not his signature, his trade-mark, his title-deed, and, as it were, the sanction of his rights?

To this physical resemblance there soon succeeds a moral likeness, charming in quite another way. You are moved to tears when you recognize the first efforts of this little intelligence to grasp your ideas. Without check or examination it accepts and feeds on them. By degrees the child shares your tastes, your habits, your ways. He assumes a deep voice to be like papa, asks for your braces, sighs before your boots, and sits down with admiration on your hat. He protects his mamma when he goes out with her, and scolds the dog, although he is very much afraid of him; all to be like papa. Have you caught him at meals with his large observant eyes fixed on you, studying your face with open mouth and spoon in hand, and imitating his model with an expression of astonishment and respect. Listen to his long gossips, wandering as his little brain; does he not say:

"When I am big like papa I shall have a moustache and a stick like him, and I shall not be afraid in the dark, because it is silly to be afraid in the dark when you are big, and I shall say 'damn it,' for I shall then be grown up."

"Baby, what did you say, sir?"

"I said just as papa does."

What would you? He is a faithful mirror. You are for him an ideal, a model, the type of all that is great and strong, handsome and intelligent.

Often he makes mistakes, the little dear, but his error is all the more delicious in its sincerity, and you feel all the more unworthy of such frank admiration. You console yourself for your own imperfections in reflecting that he is not conscious of them.

The defects of children are almost always harrowed from their father; they are the consequences of a too literal copy. Provide, then, against them. Yes, no doubt, but I ask you what strength of mind is not needed by a poor man to undeceive his baby, to destroy, with a word, his innocent confidence, by saying to him: "My child, I am not perfect, and I have faults to be avoided?"

This species of devotion on the part of the baby for his father reminds me of the charming remark of one of my little friends. Crossing the road, the little fellow caught sight of a policeman. He examined him with respect, and then turning to me, after a moment's reflection, said, with an air of conviction: "Papa is stronger than all the policemen, isn't he?"

If I had answered "No," our intimacy would have been broken off short.

Was it not charming? One can truly say, "Like baby, like papa." Our life is the threshold of his. It is with our eyes that he has first seen.

Profit, young fathers, by the first moments of candor on the part of your dear baby, seek to enter his heart when this little heart opens, and establish yourself in it so thoroughly, that at the moment when the child is able to judge you, he will love you too well to be severe or to cease loving. Win his, affection, it is worth the trouble.

To be loved all your life by a being you love—that is the problem to be solved, and toward the solution of which all your efforts should be directed. To make yourself loved, is to store up treasures of happiness for the winter. Each year will take away a scrap of your life, contract the circle of interests and pleasures in which you live; your mind by degrees will lose its vigor, and ask for rest, and as you live less and less by the mind, you will live more and more by the heart. The affection of others

which was only a pleasant whet will become a necessary food, and whatever you may have been, statesmen or artists, soldiers or bankers, when your heads are white, you will no longer be anything but fathers.

But filial love is not born all at once, nor is it necessary it should be. The voice of nature is a voice rather poetical than truthful. The affection of children is earned and deserved; it is a consequence, not a cause, and gratitude is its commencement. At any cost, therefore, your baby must be made grateful. Do not reckon that he will be grateful to you for your solicitude, your dreams for his future, the cost of his nursing, and the splendid dowry that you are amassing for him; such gratitude would require from his little brain too complicated a calculation, besides social ideas as yet unknown to him. He will not be thankful to you for the extreme fondness you have for him; do not be astonished at it, and do not cry out at his ingratitude. You must first make him understand your affection; he must appreciate and judge it before responding to it; he must know his notes before he can play tunes.

The little man's gratitude will at first be nothing but a simple, egotistical and natural calculation. If you have made him laugh, if you have amused him, he will want you to begin again, he will hold out his little arms to you, crying: "Do it again." And the recollection of the pleasure you have given him becoming impressed upon his mind, he will soon say to himself: "No one amuses me so well as papa; it is he who tosses me into the air, plays at hide-and-seek with me and tells me tales." So, by degrees, gratitude will be born in him, as thanks spring to the lips of him who is made happy.

Therefore, learn the art of amusing your child, imitate the crowing of the cock, and gambol on the carpet, answer his thousand impossible questions, which are the echo of his endless dreams, and let yourself be pulled by the beard to imitate a horse. All this is kindness, but also cleverness, and good King Henry IV did not belie his skilful policy by walking on all fours on his carpet with his children on his back.

In this way, no doubt, your paternal authority will lose something of its austere prestige, but will gain the deep and lasting influence that affection gives. Your baby will fear you less but will love you more. Where is the harm.

Do not be afraid of anything; become his comrade, in order to have the right of remaining his friend. Hide your paternal superiority as the commissary of police does his sash. Ask with kindness for that which you might rightly insist upon having, and await everything from his heart if you have known how to touch it. Carefully avoid such ugly words as discipline, passive obedience and command; let his submission be gentle to him, and his obedience resemble kindness. Renounce the stupid pleasure of imposing your fancies upon him, and of giving orders to prove your infallibility.

Children have a keenness of judgment, and a delicacy of impression which would not be imagined, unless one has studied them. Justice and equity are easily born in their minds, for they possess, above all things, positive logic. Profit by all this. There are unjust and harsh words which remain graven on a child's heart, and which he remembers all his life. Reflect that, in your baby, there is a man whose affection will cheer your old age; therefore respect him so that he may respect you; and be sure that there is not a single seed sown in this little heart which will not sooner or later bear fruit.

But there are, you will say, unmanageable children, rebels from the cradle. Are you sure that the first word they heard in their lives has not been the cause of their evil propensities? Where there has been rebellion, there has been clumsy pressure; for I will not believe in natural vice. Among evil instincts there is always a good one, of which an arm can be made to combat the others. This requires, I know, extreme kindness, perfect tact, and unlimited confidence, but the reward is sweet. I think, therefore, in conclusion, that a father's first kiss, his first look, his first caresses, have an immense influence on a child's life. To love is a great deal. To know how to love is everything.

Even were one not a father, it is impossible to pass by the dear little ones without feeling touched, and without loving them. Muddy and ragged, or carefully decked out; running in the roadway and rolling in the dust, or playing at skipping rope in the gardens of the Tuileries; dabbling among the ducklings, or building hills of sand beside well-dressed mammas—babies are charming. In both classes there is the same grace, the same unembarrassed movements, the same comical seriousness, the same carelessness as to the effect created, in short, the same charm; the charm that is called childhood, which one can not understand without loving—which one finds just the same throughout nature, from the opening flower and the dawning day to the child entering upon life.

A baby is not an imperfect being, an unfinished sketch—he is a man. Watch him closely, follow every one of his movements; they will reveal to you a logical sequence of ideas, a marvellous power of imagination, such as will not again be found at any period of life. There is more real poetry in the brain of these dear loves than in twenty epics. They are surprised and unskilled, no doubt; but nothing equals the vigor of these minds, unexperienced, fresh, simple, sensible of the slightest impressions, which make their way through the midst of the unknown.

What immense labor is gone through by them in a few months! To notice noises, classify them, understand that some of these sounds are words, and that these words are thoughts; to find out of themselves alone the meaning of everything, and distinguish the true from the false, the real from the imaginary; to correct, by observation, the errors of their too ardent imagination; to unravel a chaos, and during this gigantic task to render the tongue supple and strengthen the staggering little legs, in short, to become a man. If ever there was a curious and touching sight it is that of this little creature setting out upon the conquest of the world. As yet he knows neither doubt nor fear, and opens his heart fully. There is something of Don Quixote about a baby. He is as comic as the Knight, but he has also a sublime side.

Do not laugh too much at the hesitations, the countless gropings, the preposterous follies of this virgin mind, which a butterfly lifts to the clouds, to which grains of sand are mountains, which understands the twittering of birds, ascribes thoughts to flowers, and souls to dolls, which believes in far-off realms, where the trees are sugar, the fields chocolate, and the rivers syrup, for which Punch and Mother Hubbard are real and powerful individuals, a mind which peoples silence and vivifies night. Do not laugh at his love; his life is a dream, and his mistakes poetry.

This touching poetry which you find in the infancy of man you also find in the infancy of nations. It is the same. In both cases there is the same necessity of idealization, the same tendency to personify the unknown. And it may be said that between Punch and Jupiter, Mother Hubbard and Venus, there is only a hair's breadth.

CHAPTER XXIX. HIS FIRST BREECHES

The great desire in a child is to become a man. But the first symptom of virility, the first serious step taken in life, is marked by the assumption of breeches.

This first breeching is an event that papa desires and mamma dreads. It seems to the mother that it is the beginning of her being forsaken. She looks with tearful eyes at the petticoat laid aside for ever, and murmurs to herself, “Infancy is over then? My part will soon become a small one. He will have fresh tastes, new wishes; he is no longer only myself, his personality is asserting itself; he is some ones boy.”

The father, on the contrary, is delighted. He laughs in his moustache to see the little arching calves peeping out beneath the trousers; he feels the little body, the outline of which can be clearly made out under the new garment, and says to himself; “How well he is put together, the rascal. He will have broad shoulders and strong loins like myself. How firmly his little feet tread the ground.” Papa would like to see him in jackboots; for a trifle he would buy him spurs. He begins to see himself in this little one sprung from him; he looks at him in a fresh light, and, for the first time, he finds a great charm in calling him “my boy.”

As to the baby, he is intoxicated, proud, triumphant, although somewhat embarrassed as to his arms and legs, and, be it said, without any wish to offend him, greatly resembling those little poodles we see freshly shaven on the approach of summer. What greatly disturbed the poor little fellow is past. How many men of position are there who do not experience similar inconvenience. He knows very well that breeches, like nobility, render certain things incumbent on their possessor, that he must now assume new ways, new gestures, a new tone of voice; he begins to scan out of the corner of his eye the movements of his papa, who is by no means ill pleased at this: he clumsily essays a masculine

gesture or two; and this struggle between his past and his present gives him for some time the most comical air in the world. His petticoats haunt him, and really he is angry that it is so.

Dear first pair of breeches! I love you, because you are a faithful friend, and I encounter at every step in life you and your train of sweet sensations. Are you not the living image of the latest illusion caressed by our vanity? You, young officer, who still measure your moustaches in the glass, and who have just assumed for the first time the epaulette and the gold belt, how did you feel when you went downstairs and heard the scabbard of your sabre go clink-clank on the steps, when with your cap on one side and your arm akimbo you found yourself in the street, and, an irresistible impulse urging you on, you gazed at your figure reflected in the chemist's bottles? Will you dare to say that you did not halt before those bottles? First pair of breeches, lieutenant.

You will find them again, these breeches, when you are promoted to be Captain and are decorated. And later on, when, an old veteran with a gray moustache, you take a fair companion to rejuvenate you, you will again put them on; but this time the dear creature will help you to wear them.

And the day when you will no longer have anything more to do with them, alas! that day you will be very low, for one's whole life is wrapped up in this precious garment. Existence is nothing more than putting on our first pair of breeches, taking them off, putting them on again, and dying with eyes fixed on them.

Is it the truth that most of our joys have no more serious origin than those of children? Are we then so simple? Ah! yes, my dear sir, we are simple to this degree, that we do not think we are. We never quite get rid of our swaddling clothes; do you see, there is always a little bit sticking out? There is a baby in every one of us, or, rather, we are only babies grown big.

See the young barrister walking up and down the lobby of the courts. He is freshly shaven: in the folds of his new gown he hides a pile of documents, and on his head, in which a world of thought is stirring, is a

fine advocate's coif, which he bought yesterday, and which this morning he coquettishly crushed in with a blow from his fist before putting it on. This young fellow is happy; amid the general din he can distinguish the echo of his own footsteps, and the ring of his bootheels sounds to him like the great bell of Notre Dame. In a few minutes he will find an excuse for descending the great staircase, and crossing the courtyard in costume. You may be sure that he will not disrobe except to go to dinner. What joy in these five yards of black stuff; what happiness in this ugly bit of cloth stretched over stiff cardboard!

First pair of breeches—I think I recognize you.

And you, Madame, with what happiness do you renew each season the enjoyment caused by new clothes? Do not say, I beg of you, that such enjoyments are secondary ones, for their influence is positive upon your nature and your character. Why, I ask you, did you find so much captivating logic, so much persuasive eloquence, in the sermon of Father Paul? Why did you weep on quitting the church, and embrace your husband as soon as you got home? You know better than I do, Madame, that it was because on that day you had put on for the first time that little yellow bonnet, which is a gem, I acknowledge, and which makes you look twice as pretty. These impressions can scarcely be explained, but they are invincible. There may be a trifle of childishness in it all, you will admit, but it is a childishness that can not be got rid of.

As a proof of it, the other day, going to St. Thomas's to hear Father Nicholas, who is one of our shining lights, you experienced totally different sentiments; a general feeling of discontent and doubt and nervous irritability at every sentence of the preacher. Your soul did not soar heavenward with the same unreserved confidence; you left St. Thomas's with your head hot and your feet cold; and you so far forgot yourself as to say, as you got into your carriage, that Father Nicholas was a Gallican devoid of eloquence. Your coachman heard it. And, finally, on reaching home you thought your drawing-room too small and your husband growing too fat. Why, I again ask you, this string of vexatious

impressions? If you remember rightly, dear Madame, you wore for the first time the day before yesterday that horrible little violet bonnet, which is such a disgusting failure. First pair of breeches, dear Madame.

Would you like a final example? Observe your husband. Yesterday he went out in a bad temper—he had breakfasted badly—and lo! in the evening, at a quarter to seven, he came home from the Chamber joyful and well-pleased, a smile on his lips, and good-humor in his eye. He kissed you on the forehead with a certain unconstraint, threw a number of pamphlets and papers with an easy gesture on the sidetable, sat down to table, found the soup delicious, and ate joyously. "What is the matter with my husband?" you asked yourself.... I will explain. Your husband spoke yesterday for the first time in the building, you know. He said—the sitting was a noisy one, the Left were threshing out some infernal questions—he said, during the height of the uproar, and rapping with his paper-knife on his desk: "But we can not hear!" And as these words were received on all sides with universal approbation and cries of "Hear, hear!" he gave his thoughts a more parliamentary expression by adding: "The voice of the honorable gentleman who is speaking does not reach us." It was not much certainly, and the amendment may have been carried all the same, but after all it was a step; a triumph, to tell the truth, since your husband has from day to day put off the delivery of his maiden speech. Behold a happy deputy, a deputy who has just—put on his first pair of breeches.

What matter whether the reason be a serious or a futile one, if your blood flows faster, if you feel happier, if you are proud of yourself? To win a great victory or put on a new bonnet, what matters it if this new bonnet gives you the same joy as a laurel crown?

Therefore do not laugh too much at baby if his first pair of breeches intoxicates him, if, when he wears them, he thinks his shadow longer and the trees less high. He is beginning his career as a man, dear child, nothing more.

How many things have not people been proud of since the beginning of the world? They were proud of their noses under Francis the First, of their perukes under Louis XIV, and later on of their appetites and stoutness. A man is proud of his wife, his idleness, his wit, his stupidity, the beard on his chin, the cravat round his neck, the hump on his back.

CHAPTER XXX.
COUNTRY CHILDREN

I love the baby that runs about under the trees of the Tuileries; I love the pretty little fair-haired girls with nice white stockings and unmanageable crinolines. I like to watch the tiny damsels decked out like reliquaries, and already affecting coquettish and lackadaisical ways. It seems to me that in each of them I can see thousands of charming faults already peeping forth. But all these miniature men and women, exchanging postage stamps and chattering of dress, have something of the effect of adorable monstrosities on me.

I like them as I like a bunch of grapes in February, or a dish of green peas in December.

In the babies' kingdom, my friend, my favorite is the country baby, running about in the dust on the highway barefoot and ragged, and searching for black birds' and chaffinches' nests on the outskirts of the woods. I love his great black wondering eye, which watches you fixedly from between two locks of un combed hair, his firm flesh bronzed by the sun, his swarthy forehead, hidden by his hair, his smudged face and his picturesque breeches kept from falling off by the paternal braces fastened to a metal button, the gift of a gendarme.

Ah! what fine breeches; not very long in the legs, but, then, what room everywhere else! He could hide away entirely in this immense space which allows a shirt-tail, escaping through a slit, to wave like a flag. These breeches preserve a remembrance of all the garments of the family; here is a piece of maternal petticoat, here a fragment of yellow waistcoat, here a scrap of blue handkerchief; the whole sewn with a thread that presents the twofold advantage of being seen from a distance, and of not breaking.

But under these patched clothes you can make out a sturdy little figure; and, besides, what matters the clothes? Country babies are not coquettish; and when the coach comes down the hill with jingling bells and they rush after it, stumbling over their neighbors, tumbling with them in the dust, and rolling into the ditches, what would all these dear little gamins do in silk stockings?

I love them thus because they are wild, taking alarm, and fleeing away at your approach like the young rabbits you surprise in the morning playing among the wild thyme. You must have recourse to a thousand subterfuges in order to triumph over their alarm and gain their confidence. But if at length, thanks to your prudence, you find yourself in their company, at the outset play ceases, shouts and noise die away; the little group remain motionless, scratching their heads, and all their uneasy eyes look fixedly at you. This is the difficult moment.

A sharp word, a stern gesture, may cause an eternal misunderstanding with them, just as a kind remark, a smile, a caress will soon accomplish their conquest. And this conquest is worth the trouble, believe me.

One of my chief methods of winning them was as follows: I used to take my watch out of my pocket and look at it attentively. Then I would see my little people stretch their necks, open their eyes, and come a step nearer; and it would often happen that the chickens, ducklings, and geese, which were loitering close by in the grass, imitated their comrades and drew near too. I then would put my watch to my ear and smile like a man having a secret whispered to him. In presence of this prodigy my youngsters could no longer restrain themselves, and would exchange among themselves those keen, simple, timid, mocking looks, which must have been seen to be understood. They advanced this time in earnest, and if I offered to let the boldest listen, by holding out my watch to him, he would draw back alarmed, although smiling, while the band would break into an outburst of joy; the ducklings flapping their wings, the white geese cackling, and the chickens going chk, chk. The game was won.

How many times have I not played this little farce, seated under a willow on the banks of my little stream, which ripples over the white stones, while the reeds bend tremblingly. The children would crowd round me to hear the watch, and soon questions broke forth in chorus to an accompaniment of laughter. They inspected my gaiters, rummaged in my pockets and leant against my knees. The ducklings glided under my feet, and the big geese tickled my back.

How enjoyable it is not to alarm creatures that tremble at everything. I would not move for fear of interrupting their joy, and was like a child who is building a house of cards and who has got to the third story. But I marked all these happy little faces standing out against the blue sky; I watched the rays of the sun stealing into the tangles of their fair hair, or spreading in a patch of gold on their little brown necks; I followed their gestures full of awkwardness and grace; I sat down on the grass to be the nearer to them; and if an unfortunate chicken came to grief, between two daisies, I quickly stretched out my arm and replaced it on its legs.

I assure you that they were all grateful. If one loves these little people at all, there is one thing that strikes you when you watch them closely. Ducklings dabbling along the edge of the water or turning head over heels in their feeding trough, young shoots thrusting forth their tender little leaves above ground, little chickens running along before their mother hen, or little men staggering among the grass-all these little creatures resemble one another. They are the babies of the great mother Nature; they have common laws, a common physiognomy; they have something inexplicable about them which is at once comic and graceful, awkward and tender, and which makes them loved at once; they are relations, friends, comrades, under the same flag. This pink and white flag, let us salute it as it passes, old graybeards that we are. It is blessed, and is called childhood.

All babies are round, yielding, weak, timid, and soft to the touch as a handful of wadding. Protected by cushions of good rosy flesh or by a coating of soft down, they go rolling, staggering, dragging along their little unaccustomed feet, shaking in the air their plump hands or

featherless wing. See them stretched haphazard in the sun without distinction of species, swelling themselves with milk or meal, and dare to say that they are not alike. Who knows whether all these children of nature have not a common point of departure, if they are not brothers of the same origin?

Since men with green spectacles have existed, they have amused themselves with ticketing the creatures of this world. These latter are arranged, divided into categories and classified, as though by a careful apothecary who wants everything about him in order. It is no slight matter to stow away each one in the drawer that suits him, and I have heard that certain subjects still remain on the counter owing to their belonging to two show-cases at once.

And what proves to me, indeed, that these cases exist? What is there to assure me that the whole world is not one family, the members of which only differ by trifles which we are pleased to regard as everything?

Have you fully established the fact of these drawers and compartments? Have you seen the bars of these imaginary cages in which you imprison kingdoms and species? Are there not infinite varieties which escape your analysis, and are, as it were, the unknown links uniting all the particles of the animated world? Why say, “For these eternity, for those annihilation?”

Why say, “This is the slave, that is the sovereign?” Strange boldness for men who are ignorant of almost everything!

Man, animal or plant, the creature vibrates, suffers or enjoys—exists and encloses in itself the trace of the same mystery. What assures me that this mystery, which is everywhere the same, is not the sign of a similar relationship, is not the sign of a great law of which we are ignorant?

I am dreaming, you will say. And what does science do herself when she reaches that supreme point at which magnifying glasses become obscure and compasses powerless? It dreams, too; it supposes. Let us, too, suppose that the tree is a man, rough skinned dreamy and silent, who loves, too, after his fashion and vibrates to his very roots when some

evening a warm breeze, laden with the scents of the plain, blows through his green locks and overwhelms him with kisses. No, I do not accept the hypothesis of a world made for us. Childish pride, which would be ridiculous did not its very simplicity lend it something poetic, alone inspires it. Man is but one of the links of an immense chain, of the two ends of which we are ignorant. [See Mark Twain's essay: 'What is Man.' D.W.]

Is it not consoling to fancy that we are not an isolated power to which the remainder of the world serves as a pedestal, that one is not a licensed destroyer, a poor, fragile tyrant, whom arbitrary decrees protect, but a necessary note of an infinite harmony? To fancy that the law of life is the same in the immensity of space and irradiates worlds as it irradiates cities and as it irradiates ant-hills. To fancy that each vibration in ourselves is the echo of another vibration. To fancy a sole principle, a primordial axiom, to think the universe envelops us as a mother clasps her child in her two arms; and say to one's self, "I belong to it and it to me; it would cease to be without me. I should not exist without it." To see, in short, only the divine unity of laws, which could not be nonexistent, where others have only seen a ruling fancy or an individual caprice.

It is a dream. Perhaps so, but I have often dreamed it when watching the village children rolling on the fresh grass among the ducklings.

CHAPTER XXXI.
AUTUMN

Do you know the autumn, dear reader, autumn away in the country with its squalls, its long gusts, its yellow leaves whirling in the distance, its sodden paths, its fine sunsets, pale as an invalid's smile, its pools of water in the roadway; do you know all these? If you have seen all these they are certainly not indifferent to you. One either detests or else loves them.

I am of the number of those who love them, and I would give two summers for a single autumn. I adore the big blazing fires; I like to take refuge in the chimney corner with my dog between my wet gaiters. I like to watch the tall flames licking the old ironwork and lighting up the black depths. You hear the wind whistling in the stable, the great door creak, the dog pull at his chain and howl, and, despite the noise of the forest trees which are groaning and bending close by, you can make out the lugubrious cawings of a flock of rooks struggling against the storm. The rain beats against the little panes; and, stretching your legs toward the fire, you think of those without. You think of the sailors, of the old doctor driving his little cabriolet, the hood of which sways to and fro as the wheels sink into the ruts, and Cocotte neighs in the teeth of the wind. You think of the two gendarmes, with the rain streaming from their cocked hats; you see them, chilled and soaked, making their way along the path among the vineyards, bent almost double in the saddle, their horses almost covered with their long blue cloaks. You think of the belated sportsman hastening across the heath, pursued by the wind like a criminal by justice, and whistling to his dog, poor beast, who is splashing through the marshland. Unfortunate doctor, unfortunate gendarmes, unfortunate sportsman!

And all at once the door opens and Baby rushes in exclaiming: "Papa, dinner is ready." Poor doctor! poor gendarmes!

"What is there for dinner?"

The cloth was as white as snow in December, the plate glittered in the lamplight, the steam from the soup rose up under the lamp-shade, veiling the flame and spreading an appetizing smell of cabbage. Poor doctor! poor gendarmes!

The doors were well closed, the curtains carefully drawn. Baby hoisted himself on to his tall chair and stretched out his neck for his napkin to be tied round it, exclaiming at the same time with his hands in the air: "Nice cabbage soup." And, smiling to myself, I said: "The youngster has all my tastes."

Mamma soon came, and cheerfully pulling off her tight gloves: "There, sir, I think, is something that you are very fond of," she said to me.

It was a pheasant day, and instinctively I turned round a little to catch a glimpse on the sideboard of a dusty bottle of my old Chambertin. Pheasant and Chambertin! Providence created them for one another and my wife has never separated them.

"Ah! my children, how comfortable you are here," said I, and every one burst out laughing. Poor gendarmes! poor doctor!

Yes, yes, I am very fond of the autumn, and my darling boy liked it as well as I did, not only on account of the pleasure there is in gathering round a fine large fire, but also on account of the squalls themselves, the wind and the dead leaves. There is a charm in braving them. How many times we have both gone out for a walk through the country despite cold and threatening clouds. We were wrapped up and shod with thick boots; I took his hand and we started off at haphazard. He was five years old then and trotted along like a little man. Heavens! it is five-and-twenty years ago. We went up the narrow lane strewn with damp black leaves; the tall gray poplars stripped of their foliage allowed a view of the horizon, and we could see in the distance, under a violet sky streaked with cold and yellowish bands, the low thatched roofs and the red chimneys from which issued little bluish clouds blown away by the wind. Baby jumped for joy, holding with his hand his hat which threatened to fly off, and looking at me with eyes glittering through tears brought into

them by the breeze. His cheeks were red with cold, and quite at the tip of his nose hung ready to drop a small transparent pearl. But he was happy, and we skirted the wet meadows overflowed by the swollen river. No more reeds, no more water lilies, no more flowers on the banks. Some cows, up to mid-leg in damp herbage, were grazing quietly.

At the bottom of a ditch, near a big willow trunk, two little girls were huddled together under a big cloak wrapped about them. They were watching their cows, their half bare feet in split wooden shoes and their two little chilled faces under the large hood. From time to time large puddles of water in which the pale sky was reflected barred the way, and we remained for a moment beside these miniature lakes, rippling beneath the north wind, to see the leaves float on them. They were the last. We watched them detach themselves from the tops of the tall trees, whirl through the air and settle in the puddles. I took my little boy in my arms and we went through them as we could. At the boundaries of the brown and stubble fields was an overturned plough or an abandoned harrow. The stripped vines were level with the ground, and their damp and knotty stakes were gathered in large piles.

I remember that one day in one of these autumnal walks, as we gained the top of the hill by a broken road which skirts the heath and leads to the old bridge, the wind suddenly began to blow furiously. My darling, overwhelmed by it, caught hold of my leg and sheltered himself in the skirt of my coat. My dog, for his part, stiffening his four legs, with his tail between the hind ones and his ears waving in the wind, looked up at me too. I turned, the horizon was as gloomy as the interior of a church. Huge black clouds were sweeping toward us, and the trees were bending and groaning on every side under the torrents of rain driven before the squall. I only had time to catch up my little man, who was crying with fright, and to run and squeeze myself against a hedge which was somewhat protected by the old willows. I opened my umbrella, crouched down behind it, and, unbuttoning my big coat, stuffed Baby inside. He

clung closely to me. My dog placed himself between my legs, and Baby, thus sheltered by his two friends, began to smile from the depths of his hiding-place. I looked at him and said:

"Well, little man, are you all right?"

"Yes, dear papa."

I felt his two arms clasp round my waist—I was much thinner than I am now—and I saw that he was grateful to me for acting as a roof to him. Through the opening he stretched out his little lips and I bent mine down.

"Is it still raining outside, papa?"

"It will soon be over."

"Already, I am so comfortable inside you."

How all this stays in your heart. It is perhaps silly to relate these little joys, but how sweet it is to recall them.

We reached home as muddy as two water-dogs and we were well scolded. But when evening had come and Baby was in bed and I went to kiss him and tickle him a little, as was our custom, he put his two little arms round my neck and whispered: "When it rains we will go again, eh?"

CHAPTER XXXII. HE WOULD HAVE BEEN FORTY NOW

When you have seen your child born, have watched his first steps in life, have noted him smile and weep, have heard him call you papa as he stretches out his little arms to you, you think that you have become acquainted with all the joys of paternity, and, as though satiated with these daily joys that are under your hand, you already begin to picture those of the morrow. You rush ahead, and explore the future; you are impatient, and gulp down present happiness in long draughts, instead of tasting it drop by drop. But Baby's illness suffices to restore you to reason.

To realize the strength of the ties that bind you to him, it is necessary to have feared to see them broken; to know that a river is deep, you must have been on the point of drowning in it.

Recall the morning when, on drawing aside the curtain of his bed, you saw on the pillow his little face, pale and thin. His sunken eyes, surrounded by a bluish circle, were half closed. You met his glance, which seemed to come through a veil; he saw you, without smiling at you. You said, "Good morning," and he did not answer. His face only expressed dejection and weakness, it was no longer that of your child. He gave a kind of sigh, and his heavy eyelids drooped. You took his hands, elongated, transparent, and with colorless nails; they were warm and moist. You kissed them, those poor little hands, but there was no responsive thrill to the contact of your lips. Then you turned round, and saw your wife weeping behind you. It was at that moment when you felt yourself shudder from head to foot, and that the idea of a possible woe seized on you, never more to leave you. Every moment you kept going back to the bed and raising the curtains again, hoping perhaps that you

had not seen aright, or that a miracle had taken place; but you withdrew quickly, with a lump in your throat. And yet you strove to smile, to make him smile himself; you sought to arouse in him the wish for something, but in vain; he remained motionless, exhausted, not even turning round, indifferent to all you said, to everything, even yourself.

And what is all that is needed to strike down this little creature, to reduce him to this pitch? Only a few hours. What, is that all that is needed to put an end to him? Five minutes. Perhaps.

You know that life hangs on a thread in this frail body, so little fitted to suffer. You feel that life is only a breath, and say to yourself: "Suppose this one is his last." A little while back he was complaining. Already he does so no longer. It seems as though someone is clasping him, bearing him away, tearing him from your arms. Then you draw near him, and clasp him to you almost involuntarily, as though to give him back some of your own life. His bed is damp with fever sweats, his lips are losing their color. The nostrils of his little nose, grown sharp and dry, rise and fall. His mouth remains wide open. It is that little rosy mouth which used to laugh so joyfully, those are the two lips that used to press themselves to yours, and... all the joys, the bursts of laughter, the follies, the endless chatter, all the bygone happiness, flock to your recollection at the sound of that gasping, breathing, while big hot tears fall slowly from your eyes. Poor wee man. Your hand seeks his little legs, and you dare not touch his chest, which you have kissed so often, for fear of encountering that ghastly leanness which you foresee, but the contact of which would make you break out in sobs. And then, at a certain moment, while the sunlight was flooding the room, you heard a deeper moan, resembling a cry. You darted forward; his face was contracted, and he looked toward you with eyes that no longer saw. And then all was calm, silent and motionless, while his hollow cheeks became yellow and transparent as the amber of his necklaces.

The recollection of that moment lasts for a lifetime in the hearts of those who have loved; and even in old age, when time has softened your grief, when other joys and other sorrows have filled your days, his dying

bed still appears to you when sitting of an evening beside the fire. You see amid the sparkling flames the room of the lost child, the table with the drinks, the bottles, the arsenal of illness, the little garments, carefully folded, that waited for him so long, his toys abandoned in a corner. You even see the marks of his little fingers on the wall paper, and the zigzags he made with his pencil on the door; you see the corner scribbled over with lines and dates, in which he was measured every month, you see him playing, running, rushing up in a perspiration to throw himself into your arms, and, at the same time, you also see him fixing his glazing eyes on you, or motionless and cold under a white sheet, wet with holy water.

Does not this recollection recur to you sometimes, Grandma, and do not you still shed a big tear as you say to yourself: “He would have been forty now?” Do we not know, dear old lady, whose heart still bleeds, that at the bottom of your wardrobe, behind your jewels, beside packets of yellow letters, the handwriting of which we will not guess at, there is a little museum of sacred relics—the last shoes in which he played about on the gravel the day he complained of being cold, the remains of some broken toys, a dried sprig of box, a little cap, his last, in a triple wrapper, and a thousand trifles that are a world to you, poor woman, that are the fragments of your broken heart?

The ties that unite children to parents are unloosed. Those which unite parents to children are broken. In one case, it is the past that is wiped out; in the other, the future that is rent away.

CHAPTER XXXIII.
CONVALESCENCE

But, my patient reader, forget what have just said. Baby does not want to leave you, he does not want to die, poor little thing, and if you want a proof of it, watch him very closely; there, he smiles.

A very faint smile like those rays of sunlight that steal between two clouds at the close of a wet winter. You rather guess at than see this smile, but it is enough to warm your heart. The cloud begins to disperse, he sees you, he hears you, he knows that papa is there, your child is restored to you. His glance is already clearer. Call him softly. He wants to turn, but he can not yet, and for his sole answer his little hand, which is beginning to come to life again, moves and crumples the sheet. Just wait a little, poor impatient father, and tomorrow, on his awakening, he will say “Papa.” You will see what good it will do you, this “Papa,” faint as a mere breath, this first scarcely intelligible sign of a return to life. It will seem to you that your child has been born again a second time.

He will still suffer, he will have further crises, the storm does not become a calm all at once, but he will be able now to rest his head on your shoulder, nestle in your arms among the blankets; he will be able to complain, to ask help and relief of you with eye and voice; you will, in short, be reunited, and you will be conscious that he suffers less by suffering on your knees. You will hold his hand in yours, and if you seek to go away he will look at you and grasp your finger. How many things are expressed in this grasp. Dear sir, have you experienced it?

“Papa, do stay with me, you help to make me better; when I am alone I am afraid of the pain. Hold me tightly to you, and I shall not suffer so much.”

The more your protection is necessary to another the more you enjoy granting it. What is it then when this other is a second self, dearer than the first. With convalescence comes another childhood, so to speak. Fresh astonishments, fresh joys, fresh desires come one by one as health is restored. But what is most touching and delightful, is that delicate coaxing by the child who still suffers and clings to you, that abandonment of himself to you, that extreme weakness that gives him wholly over to you. At no period of his life has he so enjoyed your presence, has he taken refuge so willingly in your dressing-gown, has he listened more attentively to your stories and smiled more intelligently at your merriment. Is it true, as it seems to you, that he has never been more charming? Or is it simply that threatened danger has caused you to set a higher value on his caresses, and that you count over your treasures with all the more delight because you have been all but ruined?

But the little man is up again. Beat drums; sound trumpets; come out of your hiding-places, broken horses; stream in, bright sun; a song from you little birds. The little king comes to life again—long live the king! And you, your majesty, come and kiss your father.

What is singular is that this fearful crisis you have gone through becomes in some way sweet to you; you incessantly recur to it, you speak of it, you speak of it and cherish it in your mind; and, like the companions of AEneas, you seek by the recollection of past dangers to increase the present joy.

“Do you remember,” you say, “the day when he was so ill? Do you remember his dim eyes, his poor; thin, little arm, and his pale lips? And that morning the doctor went away after clasping our hands?”

It is only Baby who does not remember anything. He only feels an overpowering wish to restore his strength, fill out his cheeks and recover his calves.

“Papa, are we going to have dinner soon, eh, papa?”

“Yes, it is getting dusk, wait a little.”

“But, papa, suppose we don’t wait?”

“In twenty minutes, you little glutton.”

“Twenty, is twenty a great many? If you eat twenty cutlets would it make you ill? But with potatoes, and jam, and soup, and—is it still twenty minutes?”

Then again: “Papa, when there is beef with sauce,” he has his mouth full of it, “red tomato sauce.”

“Yes, dear, well?”

“Well, a bullock is much bigger than what is on the dish; why don’t they bring the rest of the bullock? I could eat it all and then some bread and then some haricots, and then—”

He is insatiable when he has his napkin under his chin, and it is a happiness to see the pleasure he feels in working his jaws. His little eyes glisten, his cheeks grow red; what he puts away into his little stomach it is impossible to say, and so busy is he that he has scarcely time to laugh between two mouthfuls. Toward dessert his ardor slackens, his look becomes more and more languid, his fingers relax and his eyes close from time to time.

“Mamma, I should like to go to bed,” he says, rubbing his eyes. Baby is coming round.

CHAPTER XXXIV.
FAMILY TIES

The exhilaration of success and the fever of life's struggle take a man away from his family, or cause him to live amid it as a stranger, and soon he no longer finds any attractions in the things which charmed him at the outset. But let ill luck come, let the cold wind blow rather strongly, and he falls back upon himself, he seeks near him something to support him in his weakness, a sentiment to replace his vanished dream, and he bends toward his child, he takes his wife's hand and presses it. He seems to invite these two to share his burden. Seeing tears in the eyes of those he loves, his own seem diminished to that extent. It would seem that moral suffering has the same effect as physical pain. The drowning wretch clutches at straws; in the same way, the man whose heart is breaking clasps his wife and children to him. He asks in turn for help, protection, and comfort, and it is a touching thing to see the strong shelter himself in the arms of the weak and recover courage in their kiss. Children have the instinct of all this; and the liveliest emotion they are capable of feeling is that which they experience on seeing their father weep.

Recall, dear reader, your most remote recollections, seek in that past which seems to you all the clearer the farther you are removed from it. Have you ever seen your father come home and sit down by the fire with a tear in his eye? Then you dared not draw near him at first, so deeply did you feel his grief. How unhappy he must be for his eyes to be wet. Then you felt that a tie attached you to this poor man, that his misfortune struck you too, that a part of it was yours, and that you were smitten because your father was. And no one understands better than the child this joint responsibility of the family to which he owes everything. You have felt all this; your heart has swollen as you stood silent in the corner, and sobs have broken forth as, without knowing

why, you have held out your arms toward him. He has turned, he has understood all, he has not been able to restrain his grief any further, and you have remained clasped in one another's arms, father, mother, and child, without saying anything, but gazing at and understanding one another. Did you, however, know the cause of the poor man's grief?

Not at all.

This is why filial love and paternal love have been poetized, why the family is styled holy. It is because one finds therein the very source of that need of loving, helping and sustaining one another, which from time to time spreads over the whole of society, but in the shape of a weakened echo. It is only from time to time in history that we see a whole nation gather together, retire within itself and experience the same thrill.

A frightful convulsion is needed to make a million men hold out their hands to one another and understand one another at a glance; it needs a superhuman effort for the family to become the nation, and for the boundaries of the hearth to extend to the frontiers.

A complaint, a pang, a tear, is enough to make a man, a woman, and a child, blend their hearts together and feel that they are but one.

Laugh at marriage; the task is easy. All human contracts are tainted with error, and an error is always smiled at by those who are not the victims of it. There are husbands, it is certain; and when we see a man tumble down, even if he knocks his brains out, our first impulse it to burst out laughing. Hence the great and eternal mirth that greets Sganarelle.

But search to the bottom and behold that beneath all these trifles, beneath all this dust of little exploded vanities, ridiculous mistakes and comical passions, is hidden the very pivot of society. Verify that in this all is for the best, since this family sentiment, which is the basis of society, is also its consolation and joy.

The honor of our flag, the love of country, and all that urges a man to devote himself to something or some one not himself, are derived from this sentiment, and in it, you may assert, is to be found the source

whence flow the great streams at which the human heart quenches its thirst.

Egotism for three, you say. What matter, if this egotism engenders devotion?

Will you reproach the butterfly with having been a caterpillar?

Do not accuse me in all this of exaggeration, or of poetic exaltation.

Yes, family life is very often calm and commonplace, the stock-pot that figures on its escutcheon has not been put there without reason, I admit. To the husband who should come and say to me: "Sir, for two days running I have fallen asleep by the fireside," I should reply: "You are too lazy, but after all I understand you."

I also understand that Baby's trumpet is noisy, that articles of jewellery are horribly dear, that lace flounces and sable trimmings are equally so, that balls are wearisome, that Madame has her vapors, her follies, exigencies; I understand, in short, that a man whose career is prosperous looks upon his wife and child as two stumbling blocks.

But I am waiting for the happy man, for the moment when his forehead will wrinkle, when disappointment will descend upon his head like a leaden skull-cap, and when picking up the two blocks he has cursed he will make two crutches of them.

I admit that Alexander the Great, Napoleon the First, and all the demi-gods of humanity, have only felt at rare intervals the charm of being fathers and husbands; but we other poor little men, who are less occupied, must be one or the other.

I do not believe in the happy old bachelor; I do not believe in the happiness of all those who, from stupidity or calculation, have withdrawn themselves from the best of social laws. A great deal has been said on this subject, and I do not wish to add to the voluminous documents in this lawsuit. Acknowledge frankly all you who have heard the cry of your new-born child and felt your heart tingle like a glass on the point of breaking, unless you are idiots, acknowledge that you said to yourselves: "I am in the right. Here, and here alone, lies man's part. I am

entering on a path, beaten and worn, but straight; I shall cross the weary downs, but each step will bring me nearer the village spire. I am not wandering through life, I am marching on, I stir with my feet the dust in which my father has planted his. My child, on the same road, will find the traces of my footsteps, and, perhaps, on seeing that I have not faltered, will say: 'Let me act like my old father and not lose myself in the ploughed land.'"

If the word holy has still a meaning, despite the uses it has been put to, I do not see that a better use can be made of it than by placing it beside the word family.

They speak of progress, justice, general well-being, infallible policies, patriotism, devotion. I am for all these good things, but this bright horizon is summed up in these three words: "Love your neighbor," and this is precisely, in my opinion, the thing they forget to teach.

To love your neighbor is as simple as possible, but the mischief is that you do not meet with this very natural feeling. There are people who will show you the seed in the hollow of their hand, but even those who deal in this precious grain are the last to show you it in leaf.

Well, my dear reader, this little plant which should spring up like the poppies in the wheat, this plant which has never been seen growing higher than watercress, but which should overtop the oaks, this undiscoverable plant, I know where it grows.

It grows beside the domestic hearth, between the shovel and tongs; it is there that it perpetuates itself, and if it still exists, it is to the family that we owe it. I love pretty nearly all the philanthropists and saviours of mankind; but I only believe in those who have learned to love others by embracing their own children.

Mankind can not be remodelled to satisfy the wants of humanitarian theories; man is egotistical, and he loves, above all, those who are about him. This is the natural human sentiment, and it is this which must be enlarged, extended and cultivated. In a word, it is in family love that is comprised love of country and consequently of humanity. It is from fathers that citizens are made.

Man has not twenty prime movers, but only one in his heart; do not argue but profit by it.

Affection is catching. Love between three—father, mother, and child—when it is strong, soon requires space; it pushes back the walls of the house, and by degrees invites the neighbors. The important thing, then, is to give birth to this love between three; for it is madness, I am afraid, to thrust the whole human species all at once on a man's heart. Such large mouthfuls are not to be swallowed at a gulp, nor without preparation.

This is why I have always thought that with the numerous sous given for the redemption of the little Chinese, we might in France cause the fire to sparkle on hearths where it sparkles no longer, make many eyes grow brighter round a tureen of smoking soup, warm chilled mothers, bring smiles to the pinched faces of children, and give pleasure and happiness to poor discouraged ones on their return home.

What a number of hearty kisses you might have brought about with all these sous, and, in consequence, what a sprinkling with the watering-pot for the little plant you wot of.

"But then what is to become of the redemption of the little Chinese?"

We will think of this later; we must first know how to love our own before we are able to love those of others.

No doubt, this is brutal and egotistical, but you can not alter it; it is out of small faults that you build up great virtues. And, after all, do not grumble, this very vanity is the foundation stone of that great monument —at present still propped up by scaffolding—which is called Society.

ETEXT EDITOR'S BOOKMARKS:

A ripe husband, ready to fall from the tree
Affection is catching
All babies are round, yielding, weak, timid, and soft
And I shall say 'damn it,' for I shall then be grown up
Answer "No," but with a little kiss which means "Yes"
As regards love, intention and deed are the same

But she thinks she is affording you pleasure

Clumsily, blew his nose, to the great relief of his two arms

Do not seek too much

Emotion when one does not share it

First impression is based upon a number of trifles

He Would Have Been Forty Now

Hearty laughter which men affect to assist digestion

How many things have not people been proud of

How rich we find ourselves when we rummage in old drawers

Husband who loves you and eats off the same plate is better

I would give two summers for a single autumn

I do not accept the hypothesis of a world made for us

I came here for that express purpose

I am not wandering through life, I am marching on

Ignorant of everything, undesirous of learning anything

In his future arrange laurels for a little crown for your own

It (science) dreams, too; it supposes

It is silly to blush under certain circumstances

Learned to love others by embracing their own children

Life is not so sweet for us to risk ourselves in it singlehanded

Love in marriage is, as a rule, too much at his ease

Man is but one of the links of an immense chain

Rather do not give—make yourself sought after

Reckon yourself happy if in your husband you find a lover

Recollection of past dangers to increase the present joy

Respect him so that he may respect you

Shelter himself in the arms of the weak and recover courage

Sometimes like to deck the future in the garments of the past

The heart requires gradual changes

The future that is rent away

The recollection of that moment lasts for a lifetime

The future promises, it is the present that pays

Their love requires a return

There are pious falsehoods which the Church excuses

Ties that unite children to parents are unloosed
Ties which unite parents to children are broken
To be able to smoke a cigar without being sick
To love is a great deal—To know how to love is everything
We are simple to this degree, that we do not think we are
When time has softened your grief
Why mankind has chosen to call marriage a man-trap

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