HONORÉ DE BALZAC

LITTLE FRENCH MASTERPIECES

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Содержание

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INTRODUCTION

HONORÉ DE BALZAC

(1799-1850)

Balzac's short stories, which we call in French *nouvelles* are, generally speaking, not the best-known or the most popular part of his work; nor are they the part best fitted to give a true and complete idea of his genius. But some of them are none the less masterpieces in their kind; they have characteristics and a significance not always possessed by their author's long novels, such as *Eugénie Grandet* or *Cousin Pons;* and finally, for this very reason, they hold in the unfinished structure of *The Human Comedy* a place which it will be interesting to try to determine. That is all that will be attempted in this Introduction.Some of the stories contained in the present volume were written under curious circumstances. In the first place it is to be noted that

they all date from 1830, 1831, and 1832[1] and therefore precede the conception and planning of *The Human Comedy*. Their value is far from being diminished by that fact. *An Episode under the Terror* (1830), for instance, was composed as an introduction to the *Memoirs* of Sanson – that executioner who of all executioners in the world's history probably despatched the fewest criminals and yet shed the most blood; and the *Memoirs* themselves, which are entirely apocryphal, are also in part Balzac's own work. But, though composed in this way, to order and as a piece of hack work, *An Episode under the Terror* is in its artistic brevity one of Balzac's most tragic and most finished narratives. *La Grande Bretèche* (1832) was at first only an episode inserted among the more extended narratives of which it made part, as in the old-fashioned novel of tales within tales of which *Gil Blas* is the type; and brief as it is, Balzac nevertheless rewrote it three or four times. It is therefore anything but an improvisation. Yet no other of these short stories can give more vividly than *La Grande Bretèche* the impression of a work sprung at once in full completeness from its author's brain, and conceived from the very first in its indivisible unity. But, precisely, it is one of the characteristic traits of Balzac's genius that we hardly need to know when or for what purpose he wrote this or that one of his novels or stories. He bore them all within him at once – we

[1] According to Lovenjoul, *A Seashore Drama* was first published in the fourth edition of the *Philosophic Studies*, in 1835. But this fact in no wise lessens the force of M. Brunetière's argument. – Ed.

might say that the germ of them was preëxistent in him before he had any conscious thought of objectivising them. His characters were born in him, as though from all eternity, before he knew them himself; and before he himself suspected it, *The Human Comedy* was alive, was confusedly moving, was slowly shaping itself, in his brain. This point must be clearly seen before he can be understood or appreciated at his true value. However much interest a monograph on some animal or plant may have in itself – and that interest, no doubt, is often great – it has far more through the relations it bears to other monographs and to the whole field of knowledge of which its subject is only a fragmentary part. So it is with Balzac's novels and stories. Their interest is not limited to themselves. They bring out one another's value and significance, they illustrate and give importance to each other; they have, outside themselves, a justification for existence. This will become clear if we compare Mérimée's *Mateo Falcone*; for instance, with *A Seashore Drama* (1835). The subject is the same: in each case it is a father who constitutes himself justiciary of the honour of his race. But while Mérimée's work, though perhaps better written or at least engraved with deeper tooling, is after all nothing but an anecdote, a sensational news-item, a story of local manners, Balzac's is bound up with a whole mass of ideas, not to say a whole social philosophy, of which it is, properly speaking, only a *chapter;* and of which *The Conscript* (1831) is another.

But why did Balzac confine some of his subjects within

the narrow limits of the *nouvelle*, while he expanded others to the dimensions of epic, we might say, or of history? It was because, though analogies are numerous between natural history and what we may call social history or the natural history of society, yet their resemblance is not complete nor their identity absolute. There are peculiarities or variations of passion which, though physiologically or pathologically interesting, are *socially* insignificant and can be left out of account: for instance, *A Passion in the Desert* (1830), or *The Unknown Masterpiece* (1831). It is rare, in art, for the passionate pursuit of progress to result only, as with Frenhofer, in jumbling the colours on a great painter's canvas; and, even were this less rare, artists are not very numerous! So, if the writer gave to his narrative of this painful but infrequent adventure as full a development, if he diversified and complicated it with as many episodes and details as the adventures of Baron Hulot in *Cousin Bette* or those of Madame de Mortsauf in *The Lily in the Valley*, he would thereby attribute to it, *socially* or *historically*, an importance it does not possess. He would err, and would make us err with him, regarding the true proportions of things. He would represent the humanity which he was attempting to depict, in a manner far from consistent with reality. Hence may be deduced the æsthetics of the *nouvelle*, and its distinction from the *conte*, and also from the *roman* or novel.

The *nouvelle* differs from the *conte* in that it always claims to be a picture of ordinary life; and it differs from the novel in that it selects from ordinary life, and depicts by preference and almost

exclusively, those examples of the strange, the rare, and the extraordinary which ordinary life does in spite of its monotony nevertheless contain. It is neither strange nor rare for a miser to make all the people about him, including his wife and children, victims of the passion to which he is himself enslaved; and that is the subject of *Eugénie Grandet*. It is nothing extraordinary for parents of humble origin to be almost disowned by their children whom they have married too far above them, in another class of society; and that is the subject of *Father Goriot*. But for a husband, as in *La Grande Bretèche*, to wall up his wife's lover in a closet, and that before her very eyes; and, through a combination of circumstances in themselves quite out of the ordinary, for neither one of them to dare or be able to make any defence against his vengeance – this is certainly somewhat rare! Then read *The Conscript*, or *An Episode under the Terror;* the plot is no ordinary one, and perhaps, with a little exaggeration, we may say it can have occurred but once. Such, then, is the field of the *nouvelle*. Let us set off from it the fantastic, in the style of Hoffmann or Edgar Allan Poe, even though Balzac sometimes tried that also, as in *The Wild Ass's Skin*, for instance, or in *Melmoth Converted;* for the fantastic belongs to the field of the *conte*. But unusual events, especially such as result from an unforeseen combination of circumstances; and really tragic adventures, which, like Monsieur and Madame de Merret's in *La Grande Bretèche* or Cambremer's in *A Seashore Drama*, make human conscience hesitate to call the crime by its name; and

illogical variations, deviations, or perversions of passion; and the pathology of feeling, as in *The Unknown Masterpiece;* and still more generally, if I may so express myself, all those things in life which are out of the usual run of life, which happen *on its margin*, and so are beside yet not outside it; all that makes its surprises, its differences, its *startlingness*, so to speak – all this is the province of the *nouvelle*, bordering on that of the novel yet distinct from it. Out of common every-day life you cannot really make *nouvelles*, but only novels – miniature novels, when they are brief, but still novels. In no French writer of the last century, I think, is this distinction more evident or more strictly observed than it is in *The Human Comedy;* and unless I am much mistaken, this may serve to solve, or at least to throw light on, the vexed question of Honoré de Balzac's *naturalism* or *romanticism*.

In the literal and even the etymological sense of the word *naturalism*– that is, without taking account of the way in which Émile Zola and some other Italians have *perverted its nature*– no one can question that Balzac was a naturalist. One might as well deny that Victor Hugo was a romanticist! Everybody to-day knows that neither the freedom of his vocabulary, nor some very detailed descriptions in *Notre Dame de Paris* and especially in *Les Misérables*, nor his coarse popular jokes, often in doubtful taste if not sometimes worse, nor yet the interest in social questions which characterised him from the very first – that nothing of all this, I say, prevents Victor Hugo from having been, up to the day of his death, *the* romanticist; we may rest assured that in whatever

way romanticism shall be defined, he will always be, in the history of French literature, its living incarnation. Balzac, on the other hand, will always be the living incarnation of naturalism. And surely, if to be a naturalist is to confine the field of one's art to the observation of contemporary life, and to try to give a complete and adequate representation thereof, not drawing back or hesitating, not abating one tittle of the truth, in the depiction of ugliness and vice; if to be a naturalist is, like a portrait-painter, to subordinate every æsthetic and moral consideration to the law of likeness – then it is impossible to be more of a naturalist than Balzac. But with all this, since his imagination is unruly, capricious, changeable, with a strong tendency to exaggeration, audacious, and corrupt; since he, as much as any of his contemporaries, feels the need of startling us; since he habitually writes under the dominion of a kind of hallucinatory fever sufficient of itself to mark what we may call the romantic state of mind – romanticism is certainly not absent from the work of this naturalist, but on the contrary would fill and inspire the whole of it, were that result not prevented by the claims, or conditions, of observation. A romantic imagination, struggling to triumph over itself, and succeeding only by confining itself to the study of the model – such may be the definition of Balzac's imagination or genius; and, in a way, to justify this definition by his work we need only to distinguish clearly his *nouvelles* from his novels.

Balzac's *nouvelles* represent the share of romanticism in his

work. *La Grande Bretèche* is the typical romantic narrative, and we may say as much of *The Unknown Masterpiece*. The observer shuts his eyes; he now looks only within himself; he imagines "what might have been"; and he writes *An Episode under the Terror*. It is for him a way of escape from the obsession of the real:

"The real is strait; the possible is vast."

His unbridled imagination takes free course. He works in dream. And, since of course we can never succeed in building within ourselves perfectly water-tight compartments, entirely separating dream from memory and imagination from observation, reality does find its way into his *nouvelles* by way of exactness in detail, but their conception remains essentially or chiefly romantic; just as in his long novels, *Eugénie Grandet, A Bachelor's Establishment (Un Ménage de Garçon), César Birotteau, A Dark Affair, Cousin Pons*, and *Cousin Bette*, his observation remains naturalistic, and his imagination perverts it, by magnifying or exaggerating, yet never intentionally or systematically or to the extent of falsifying the true relations of things. Shall I dare say, to English readers, that by this fact he belongs to the family of Shakespeare? His long novels are his *Othello*, his *Romeo*, his *Macbeth*, his *Richard III.*, and *Coriolanus;* and his *nouvelles*, his short stories, are his *Tempest*, his *Twelfth Night*, and his *Midsummer Night's Dream*.

This comparison, which really is not a comparison but a mere analogy, such as might be drawn between Musset and

Byron, may serve to bring out one more characteristic of Balzac's *nouvelles*– they are philosophic; in his *The Human Comedy* it is under the title of *Philosophic Studies* that he brought together, whatever their origin, such stories as *A Seashore Drama, The Unknown Masterpiece*, and even *The Conscript*. By so doing he no doubt meant to imply that the sensational stories on which they are based did not contain their whole significance; that he was using them merely as a means of stating a problem, of fixing the reader's attention for a moment on the vastness of the mysterious or unknown by which we are, so to speak, enwrapped about. "We might add this tragic story," he writes at the end of his *The Conscript*, "to the mass of other observations on that sympathy which defies the law of space – a body of evidence which some few solitary scholars are collecting with scientific curiosity, and which will one day serve as basis for a new science, a science which till now has lacked only its man of genius." These are large words, it would seem, with which to point the moral of a mere historical anecdote. But if we consider them well, we shall see that, whatever we may think of this "new science," Balzac wrote his *The Conscript* for the sole purpose of ending it with that sentence. Read, too, *A Seashore Drama*. It is often said that "A fact is a fact" – and I scarcely know a more futile sophism, unless it be the one which consists in saying that "Of tastes and colours there is no disputing." Such is not Balzac's opinion, at any rate. He believes that a fact is more than a fact, that it is the expression or manifestation of something other or more than itself; or again,

that it is a piece of evidence, a *document*, which it is not enough to have put on record, but in which we must also seek, through contrasts and resemblances, its deep ulterior meaning. And this is what he has tried to show in his *nouvelles*.

Thus we see what place they hold in his *The Human Comedy*. Balzac's short stories are not, in his work, what one might be tempted to call somewhat disdainfully "the chips of his workshop." Nor are they even, in relation to his long novels, what a painter's sketches, rough drafts, and studies are to his finished pictures. He did not write them by way of practice or experiment; they have their own value, intrinsic and well-defined. It would be a mistake, also, to consider them as little novels, in briefer form, which more time or leisure might have allowed their author to treat with more fullness. He conceived them for their own sake; he would never have consented to give them proportions which did not befit them. The truth of the matter is that by reason of their dealing with the exceptional or extraordinary, they are, in a way, the element of *romantic drama* in Balzac's *Comedy;* and by reason of their philosophic or symbolic significance, they add the element of mystery to a work which but for them would be somewhat harshly illumined by the hard light of reality. Once more, that is why he did not classify his *The Conscript* with the *Scenes of Political Life*, or his *A Seashore Drama* with the *Scenes of Country Life*. That, too, is what gives them their interest and their originality. That is what distinguishes them from the stories of Prosper Mérimée, or, later,

those of Guy de Maupassant. So much being made clear, it is not important now to ask whether they really have as much depth of meaning as their author claimed for them. That is another question; and I have just indicated why I cannot treat it in this brief Introduction. Only in a complete study of Balzac could his *nouvelles* be adequately judged. Then their due place would be assigned to them, in the full scheme of *The Human Comedy*. I shall be happy if the English reader remembers this; and if the reading of these *nouvelles*, after having for a moment charmed him, shall also inspire him with the wish to know more closely and completely the greatest of French novelists.

F. Brunetière

The Unknown Masterpiece

TO A LORD:
* * * * * *
* * * * * *
* * * * * *
1845.

I
GILLETTE

Late in the year 1612, one cold morning in December, a young man whose garments seemed very thin was walking before the door of a house on Rue des Grands-Augustins, Paris. After pacing that street for a long time, with the indecision of a lover who dares not pay a visit to his first mistress, however kind she may be, he at last crossed the threshold of the door and asked if Master François Porbus was at home. Upon receiving an affirmative reply from a woman who was sweeping a room on the lower floor, the young man went slowly up-stairs, hesitating from stair to stair, like a courtier of recent creation, apprehensive of the greeting which he was to receive from the king. When he reached the top of the winding staircase, he stood for a moment on the landing, uncertain whether he should lift the grotesque knocker affixed to the door of the studio where the painter of Henri IV., cast aside for Rubens by Marie de Medici, was doubtless at work. The young man felt that profound emotion which must cause the hearts of all great artists to beat quickly, when, in the prime of youth and of their love for art, they approach a man of genius, or some noble masterpiece.

There exists in all human sentiments a primitive flower, engendered by a noble enthusiasm which grows constantly weaker and weaker, until happiness ceases to be more than

a memory and glory more than a lie. Among these transitory sentiments, nothing bears so close a resemblance to love as the youthful passion of an artist just beginning to experience the delicious torture of his destiny of renown and of misfortune, a passion full of audacity and shyness, of vague beliefs and of certain discouragement. The youthful genius, with empty pockets, whose heart has not throbbed upon appearing before a master, will always lack one chord in his heart, some indefinable touch of the brush, some feeling in his work, some shade of poetical expression. If some boasters, puffed out with conceit, believe too early in the future, they are considered people of intellect by fools alone. In this regard, the young stranger seemed to possess real merit, if talent is to be measured by that early timidity, that indescribable modesty which people destined to glory gradually lose in the exercise of their art, as pretty women lose theirs in the manoeuvring of coquetry. The habitude of triumph lessens doubt, and modesty perhaps is a form of doubt.

Overwhelmed by surprise and distress at that moment of his overweening presumption, the poor neophyte would not have entered the studio of the painter to whom we owe the admirable portrait of Henri IV., except for an extraordinary reinforcement sent him by chance. An old man ascended the stairs. From the oddity of his costume, the magnificence of his lace ruff, the ponderous self-assurance of his gait, the young man divined that he was either the painter's patron or his friend; he drew back against the wall to make room for him, and gazed at

him curiously, hoping to find in him the kindly nature of an artist, or the obliging disposition of those who love art; but he detected something diabolical in that face, and above all that indefinable expression which artists dote upon. Imagine a bald, prominent, even protuberant forehead, overshadowing a small, flattened nose, turned up at the end like Rabelais's or Socrates's; a smiling mouth, wrinkled at the corners; a short chin, proudly raised, and adorned with a gray beard trimmed to a point; sea-green eyes, apparently dulled by age, which, however, by virtue of the contrast of the pearly-white in which the pupils swam, sometimes emitted magnetic glances under the spur of wrath or enthusiasm. The face was woefully ravaged by the fatigues of age, and even more by the thoughts which tire mind and body alike. The eyes had no lashes, and one could barely detect a trace of eyebrows over their protruding arches. Place that head upon a slender and fragile body, surround it with a lace ruff of snowy whiteness and of a pattern as elaborate as that of a silver fish-knife, throw a heavy gold chain over the old man's black doublet, and you will have an imperfect image of that individual, to whom the dim light of the hall imparted an even stranger colouring. You would have said that it was one of Rembrandt's canvases, walking silently, without a frame, through the dark atmosphere which that great painter made his own. The old man cast a sagacious glance at the young one, tapped thrice on the door, and said to a sickly-looking personage of about forty years, who opened it:

"Good morning, master."

Porbus bowed respectfully; he admitted the young man, thinking that he had come with the other, and paid the less heed to him because the neophyte was evidently under the spell which a born painter inevitably experiences at the aspect of the first studio that he sees, where some of the material processes of art are revealed to him. A window in the ceiling lighted Master Porbus's studio. The light, concentrated upon a canvas standing on the easel, which as yet bore only a few light strokes, did not reach the dark recesses in the corners of that enormous room; but a few stray gleams lighted up the silver bull's-eye in the centre of a cavalryman's cuirass hanging on the wall in the ruddy shadow; illuminated with a sudden beam the carved and polished cornice of an old-fashioned sideboard, laden with curious vessels; or studded with dazzling points of light the rough woof of certain old curtains of gold brocade, with broad, irregular folds, scattered about as drapery. Plaster casts, busts, and fragments of antique goddesses, fondly polished by the kisses of centuries, lay about upon tables and consoles. Innumerable sketches, studies in coloured chalk, in red lead, or in pen and ink, covered the walls to the ceiling. Boxes of colours, bottles of oil and of essences, and overturned stools, left only a narrow path to the sort of halo projected by the high stained-glass window, through which the light fell full upon Porbus's pale face and upon the ivory skull of his strange visitor. The young man's attention was soon exclusively absorbed by a picture which had already become famous even in that epoch of commotion and revolution,

and which was visited by some of those obstinate enthusiasts to whom we owe the preservation of the sacred fire during evil days. That beautiful canvas represented *St. Mary the Egyptian* preparing to pay for her passage in the boat. That masterpiece, painted for Marie de Medici, was sold by her in the days of her destitution.

"I like your saint," the old man said to Porbus, "and I would give you ten golden crowns above the price that the queen is to pay; but meddle in her preserves! the deuce!"

"You think it is well done, do you?"

"Hum!" said the old man, "well done? Yes and no. Your saint is not badly put together, but she is not alive. You fellows think that you have done everything when you have drawn a figure correctly and put everything in its place according to the laws of anatomy. You colour this feature with a flesh-tint prepared beforehand on your palette, taking care to keep one side darker than the other; and because you glance from time to time at a nude woman standing on a table, you think that you have copied nature, you imagine that you are painters, and that you have discovered God's secret! Bah! To be a great poet, it is not enough to know syntax, and to avoid errors in grammar.

"Look at your saint, Porbus. At first glance she seems admirable; but at the second, one sees that she is glued to the canvas, and that it is impossible to walk about her body. She is a silhouette with but a single face, a figure cut out of canvas, an image that can neither turn nor change its position. I am not

conscious of the air between that arm and the background of the picture; space and depth are lacking. However, everything is right so far as perspective is concerned, and the gradation of light and shade is scrupulously observed; but, despite such praiseworthy efforts, I am unable to believe that that beautiful body is animated with the warm breath of life. It seems to me that, if I should put my hand upon that firm, round breast, I should find it as cold as marble. No, my friend, the blood does not flow beneath that ivory skin; life does not swell with its purple dew the veins and fibres which intertwine like network beneath the transparent, amber-hued temples and breast. This place throbs with life, but that other place is motionless; life and death contend in every detail; here it is a woman, there a statue, and there a corpse. Your creation is incomplete. You have been able to breathe only a portion of your soul into your cherished work. The torch of Prometheus has gone out more than once in your hands, and many parts of your picture have not been touched by the celestial flame."

"But why, my dear master?" Porbus respectfully asked the old man, while the young man had difficulty in repressing a savage desire to strike him.

"Ah! it is this way," replied the little old man. "You have wavered irresolutely between the two systems, between drawing and colour, between the phlegmatic minuteness, the stiff precision of the old German masters, and the dazzling ardour and happy plenitude of the Italian painters. You have tried to imitate

at the same time Hans Holbein and Titian, Albert Dürer and Paul Veronese. Assuredly that was a noble ambition! But what has happened? You have achieved neither the severe charm of precision, nor the deceitful magic of the chiaroscuro. In this spot, like melted bronze which bursts its too fragile mould, the rich, light colouring of Titian brings out too prominently the meagre outlines of Albert Dürer in which you moulded it. Elsewhere, the features have resisted and held in check the superb polish of the Venetian palette. Your face is neither perfectly drawn nor perfectly painted, and bears everywhere the traces of that unfortunate indecision. If you did not feel strong enough to melt together in the flame of your genius the two rival systems, you should have chosen frankly one or the other, in order to obtain the unity which represents one of the conditions of life. You are accurate only in the surroundings, your outlines are false, do not envelop each other, and give no promise of anything behind.

"There is a touch of truth here," said the old man, pointing to the saint's breast; "and here," he added, indicating the point where the shoulder came to an end. "But here," he said, reverting to the middle of the throat, "all is false. Let us not attempt to analyse anything; it would drive you to despair."

The old man seated himself on a stool, put his face in his hands, and said no more.

"Master," said Porbus, "I studied that throat very carefully in the nude figure; but, unfortunately for us, there are true effects in nature which seem improbable upon canvas."

"The mission of art is not to copy nature, but to express it! You are not a vile copyist, but a poet!" cried the old man, hastily interrupting Porbus with an imperious gesture. "Otherwise a sculptor would reach the end of his labours by moulding a woman! But try to mould your mistress's hand and to place it before you; you will find a horrible dead thing without any resemblance, and you will be obliged to resort to the chisel of the man who, without copying it exactly, will impart motion and life to it. We have to grasp the spirit, the soul, the physiognomy of things and of creatures. Effects! effects! why, they are the accidents of life and not life itself.

"A hand – as I have taken that example – a hand does not simply belong to the body; it expresses and carries out a thought, which you must grasp and represent. Neither the painter, nor the poet, nor the sculptor should separate the effect from the cause, for they are inseparably connected! The real struggle is there! Many painters triumph by instinct, without realising this axiom of art. You draw a woman, but you do not see her! That is not the way that one succeeds in forcing the secrets of nature. Your hand reproduces, without your knowledge, the model that you have copied at your master's studio. You do not go down sufficiently into the inmost details of form, you do not pursue it with enough enthusiasm and perseverance in its windings and its flights.

"Beauty is a stern and exacting thing which does not allow itself to be caught so easily; we must await its pleasure, watch for it, seize it, and embrace it closely, in order to compel it to

surrender. Form is a Proteus much more difficult to seize and more fertile in evasions than the Proteus of fable; only after long struggles can one compel it to show itself in its real guise. You are content with the first aspect under which it appears to you, or at most with the second or third; that is not true of the victorious fighters! The invincible painters do not allow themselves to be deceived by all these subterfuges; they persevere until nature is reduced to the point where she must stand forth naked and in her real shape.

"That was the process adopted by Raphael," said the old man, removing his black velvet cap to express the respect inspired by the king of art; "his great superiority comes from the secret perception which, in him, seems determined to shatter form. In his figures form is what it really is in us, an interpreter for the communication of ideas and sensations, a vast poetic conception. Every figure is a world, a portrait, whose model has appeared in a sublime vision, tinged with light, indicated by an inward voice, disrobed by a divine figure, which points out the sources of expression in the past of a whole life. You give your women lovely robes of flesh, lovely draperies of hair; but where is the blood which engenders tranquillity or passion, and which causes special effects? Your saint is a dark woman, but this one, my poor Porbus, is a blonde! Your figures are pale, coloured spectres which you parade before our eyes, and you call that painting and art!

"Because you have made something which looks more like a

woman than like a house, you think that you have attained your end; and, overjoyed because you no longer have to write beside your figures, *currus venustus*, or *pulcher homo*, like the first painters, you fancy that you are marvellous artists! Ah, no! you are not that yet, my good fellows; you will have to use up more pencils and cover many canvases before you reach that point! To be sure, a woman carries her head like that, she wears her skirts as this one does, her eyes languish and melt with that air of mild resignation, the quivering shadow of the eyelashes trembles thus upon her cheek! That is accurate and it is not accurate. What does it lack? A mere nothing, but that nothing is everything. You produce the appearance of life, but you do not express its overflow, that indefinable something which perhaps is the soul, and which floats cloud-like upon the outer envelope; in a word, that flower of life which Titian and Raphael discovered.

"Starting from the farthest point that you have reached, an excellent painting might perhaps be executed; but you grow weary too soon. The common herd admires, but the connoisseur smiles. O Mabuse, O my master," added this extraordinary individual, "you are a thief; you carried life away with you! – However," he continued, "this canvas is worth more than the painting of that mountebank of a Rubens, with his mountains of Flemish flesh powdered with vermillion, his waves of red hair, and his wilderness of colours. At all events, you have here colouring, drawing, and sentiment, the three essential parts of art."

"But that saint is sublime, my good man!" cried the young man, in a loud voice, emerging from a profound reverie. "Those two figures, of the saint and the boatman, have a delicacy of expression utterly unknown to the Italian painters; I don't know a single one of them who could have achieved the hesitation of the boatman."

"Does this little knave belong to you?" Porbus asked the old man.

"Alas! pray excuse my presumption, master," replied the neophyte, blushing. I am a stranger, a dauber by instinct, only lately arrived in this city, the source of all knowledge."

"To work!" said Porbus, handing him a pencil and a sheet of paper.

In a twinkling the stranger copied the *Mary*.

"O-ho!" cried the old man. "Your name?"

The young man wrote at the foot of the drawing: *Nicolas Poussin*.

"That is not bad for a beginner," said the strange creature who harangued so wildly. "I see that we can safely talk painting before you. I don't blame you for admiring Porbus's saint. It is a masterpiece for the world, and only those who are initiated in the most profound secrets of art can discover wherein it offends. But since you are worthy of the lesson and capable of understanding, I will show you how little is necessary to complete the work. Be all eyes and all attention; such an opportunity for instruction will never occur again perhaps. – Your palette, Porbus!"

Porbus went to fetch palette and brushes. The little old man turned up his sleeves with a convulsive movement, passed his thumb over the palette laden with colours, which Porbus handed to him, and snatched rather than took from his hands a handful of brushes of all sizes; his pointed beard twitched with the mighty efforts that denoted the concupiscence of an amorous imagination. As he dipped his brush in the paint, he grumbled between his teeth:

"These colours are good for nothing but to throw out of the window, with the man who made them! They are disgustingly crude and false! How can one paint with such things?"

Then, with feverish vivacity, he dipped the point of the brush in different mounds of colour, sometimes running through the entire scale more rapidly than a cathedral organist runs over his keyboard in playing the *O Filii* at Easter.

Porbus and Poussin stood like statues, each on one side of the canvas, absorbed in the most intense contemplation.

"You see, young man," said the old man, without turning – "you see how, by means of three or four touches and a little blue varnish, one can make the air circulate around the head of the poor saint, who surely must be stifling and feel imprisoned in that dense atmosphere! See how that drapery flutters about now, and how readily one can realise that the wind is raising it! Formerly it looked like starched linen held in place by pins. Do you see how perfectly the satinlike gloss with which I have touched the breast represents the supple plumpness of a maiden's flesh, and how the

mixture of reddish brown and ochre warms the gray coldness of that tall ghost, in which the blood congealed instead of flowing? Young man, young man, what I am showing you now, no master could teach you! Mabuse alone possessed the secret of imparting life to figures. Mabuse had but one pupil, and that was I. I have had none, and I am growing old! You have intelligence enough to guess the rest from this glimpse that I give you."

While he spoke, the strange old man touched all the parts of the picture: here two strokes of the brush and there only one; but always so opportunely that one would have said that it was a new painting, but a painting drenched with light. He worked with such impassioned zeal that the perspiration stood upon his high forehead; he moved so swiftly, with such impatient, jerky little movements, that to young Poussin it seemed as if there must be in that strange man's body a demon acting through his hands and guiding them erratically, against his will. The superhuman gleam of his eyes, the convulsions which seemed to be the effect of resistance, gave to that idea a semblance of truth, which was certain to act upon a youthful imagination. The old man worked on, saying:

"Paff! paff! paff! this is how we do it, young man! Come, my little touches, warm up this frigid tone for me! Come, come! pon! pon! pon!" he said, touching up the points where he had indicated a lack of life, effacing by a few daubs of paint the differences of temperament, and restoring the unity of tone which a warm-blooded Egyptian demanded. "You see, my boy, it is only the last

stroke of the brush that counts. Porbus has given a hundred, but I give only one. Nobody gives us credit for what is underneath. Be sure to remember that!"

At last the demon paused, and, turning to Porbus and Poussin, who were dumb with admiration, he said to them:

"This doesn't come up to my *Belle Noiseuse*; however, a man could afford to put his name at the foot of such a work. Yes, I would sign it," he added, rising and taking a mirror in which he looked at it. "Now let us go to breakfast," he said. "Come to my house, both of you. I have some smoked ham and some good wine! Despite the evil times, we will talk painting. We are experts. This little man," he added, tapping Nicolas Poussin on the shoulder, "has a facile touch."

Noticing the Norman's shabby jacket at that moment, he took from his belt a goat-skin purse, opened it, took out two gold-pieces and said, offering them to him:

"I will buy your sketch."

"Take it," said Porbus to Poussin, seeing him start and blush with shame, for the young neophyte had all the pride of the poor man. "Take it, he has the ransom of two kings in his wallet."

All three went down from the studio, and, discoursing on art as they walked, bent their steps to a handsome wooden house near Pont St. – Michel, the decorations of which, the knocker, the window-frames, and the arabesques, aroused Poussin's wondering admiration. The painter in embryo suddenly found himself in a room on the lower floor, before a bright fire, beside

a table laden with appetising dishes, and, by incredible good fortune, in the company of two great artists overflowing with good nature.

"Young man," said Porbus, seeing that he stood in open-mouthed admiration before a picture, "don't look at that canvas too closely, or you will be driven to despair."

It was the *Adam* which Mabuse painted in order to obtain his release from the prison in which his creditors kept him so long. In truth, that face was of such startling reality that Nicolas Poussin began at that moment to understand the true meaning of the old man's confused remarks. The latter glanced at the picture with a satisfied expression, but without enthusiasm, and seemed to say: "I have done better than that!"

"There is life in it," he said; "my poor master surpassed himself; but it still lacks a little truth in the background. The man is thoroughly alive; he is about to rise and walk towards us. But the air, the sky, the wind, which we breathe and see and feel, are not there. And then there is only a man! Now the only man that ever came forth from the hands of God ought to have something of the divine, which he lacks. Mabuse himself said so with irritation, when he was not drunk."

Poussin glanced at the old man and Porbus in turn, with restless curiosity. He approached the latter as if to ask him the name of their host; but the painter put his finger to his lips with a mysterious air, and the young man, intensely interested, kept silence, hoping that sooner or later some chance remark

would enable him to discover the name of his host, whose wealth and talent were sufficiently attested by the respect which Porbus manifested for him and by the marvellous things collected in that room.

Seeing a superb portrait of a woman upon the oaken wainscoting, Poussin exclaimed:

"What a beautiful Giorgione!"

"No," replied the old man; "you are looking at one of my first daubs."

"*Tu-dieu!* then I must be in the house of the god of painting!" said Poussin, ingenuously.

The old man smiled like one long familiar with such praise.

"Master Frenhofer!" said Porbus, "couldn't you send for a little of your fine Rhine wine for me?"

"Two casks!" replied the old man; "one to pay for the pleasure which I enjoyed this morning in seeing your pretty sinner, and the other as a friendly gift."

"Ah! if I were not always ill," rejoined Porbus, "and if you would let me see your *Belle Noiseuse*, I might be able to paint a picture, high and wide and deep, in which the figures would be life-size."

"Show my work!" cried the old man, intensely excited. "No, no! I still have to perfect it. Yesterday, towards night," he said, "I thought that it was finished. The eyes seemed to me moist, the flesh quivered; the tresses of the hair moved. It breathed! Although I have discovered the means of producing upon flat

canvas the relief and roundness of nature, I realised my error this morning, by daylight. Ah! to attain that glorious result, I have thoroughly studied the great masters of colouring, I have analysed and raised, layer by layer, the pictures of Titian, that king of light; like that sovereign painter, I have sketched my figure in a light shade, with soft, thick colour – for shading is simply an accident, remember that, my boy! – Then I returned to my work, and by means of half-tints, and of varnish, the transparency of which I lessened more and more, I made the shadows more and, more pronounced, even to the deepest blacks; for the shadows of ordinary painters are of a different nature from their light tones; they are wood, brass, whatever you choose, except flesh in shadow. One feels that, if a figure should change its posture, the shaded places would not brighten, and would never become light. I have avoided that fault, into which many of the most illustrious artists have fallen, and in my work the whiteness of the flesh stands out under the darkness of the deepest shadow.

"I have not, like a multitude of ignorant fools, who fancy that they draw correctly because they make a carefully shaded stroke, marked distinctly the outer lines of my figure and given prominence to the most trivial anatomical details, for the human body does not end in lines. In that regard, sculptors can approach the truth more nearly than we can. Nature demands a succession of rounded outlines which shade into one another. Strictly speaking, drawing does not exist! – Do not laugh, young

man! However strange that remark may seem to you, you will understand its meaning some day. – The line is the means by which man interprets the effect of light upon objects; but there are no lines in nature, where everything is full; it is in modelling that one draws, that is to say, that one removes things from the surroundings in which they are; the distribution of light alone gives reality to the body! So that I have not sharply outlined the features; I have spread over the outlines a cloud of light, warm half-tints, the result being that one cannot place one's finger upon the exact spot where the outline ends and the background begins. Seen at close quarters, the work seems cottony and to lack precision; but two yards away, everything becomes distinct and stands out; the body moves, the forms become prominent, and one can feel the air circulating all about. However, I am not satisfied yet; I still have doubts.

"Perhaps I should not have drawn a single line; perhaps it would be better to attack a figure in the middle, devoting one's self first to the prominences which are most in the light, and passing then to the darker portions. Is not that the way in which the sun, that divine painter of the universe, proceeds? O Nature, Nature! who has ever surprised thee in thy flights? I tell you that too much knowledge, like ignorance, ends in a negation. I doubt my work!"

The old man paused, then continued:

"For ten years, young man, I have been working, but what are ten short years when it is a question of contending with nature?

We have no idea how long a time Pygmalion employed in making the only statue that ever walked!"

The old man fell into a profound reverie, and sat with staring eyes, mechanically toying with his knife.

"He is conversing with his *spirit* now!" said Porbus in an undertone.

At that word Nicolas Poussin became conscious of the presence of an indefinable artistic curiosity. That old man with the white eyes, staring and torpid, became in his eyes more than a man; he assumed the aspect of an unreal genius living in an unknown sphere. He stirred a thousand confused ideas in his mind. The mental phenomenon of that species of fascination can no more be defined than one can define the emotion aroused by a ballad which recalls the fatherland to the exile's heart. The contempt which that old man affected to express for the most beautiful works of art, his wealth, his manners, the deference with which Porbus treated him, that work kept secret so long – a work of patience and of genius doubtless, judging by the head of a *Virgin* which young Poussin had so enthusiastically admired, and which, still beautiful, even beside Mabuse's *Adam*, bore witness to the imperial workmanship of one of the princes of art – everything, in short, about the old man went beyond the bounds of human nature.

The one point which was perfectly clear and manifest to Nicolas Poussin's fertile imagination was a complete image of the artistic nature, of that irresponsible nature to which so

many powers are entrusted, and which too often misuses them, leading cold reason, the honest bourgeois, and even some experts, through innumerable rock-strewn paths, where there is nothing so far as they are concerned; whereas that white-winged damsel, unreasoning in her fancies, discovers these epic poems, châteaux, and works of art. A sardonic but kindly nature; fertile but sterile. Thus, to the enthusiastic Poussin, that old man had become, by an abrupt transfiguration, art itself, art with its secrets, its unruly impulses, and its reveries.

"Yes, my dear Porbus," Frenhofer resumed, "I have failed thus far to meet an absolutely flawless woman, a body the outlines of which are perfectly beautiful, and whose colouring – But where is she to be found in real life?" he asked, interrupting himself, "that undiscoverable Venus of the ancients, so often sought, of whom we find only a few scattered charms? Oh! to see for an instant, but a single time, that divine, complete, in a word, ideal nature, I would give my whole fortune. Aye, I would seek thee in the abode of the dead, O divine beauty! Like Orpheus, I would go down into the hell of art to bring life back thence."

"We may go away," said Porbus to Poussin; "he neither hears nor sees us now."

"Let us go to his studio," suggested the wonder-struck youth.

"Oh! the old fellow knows how to keep people out. His treasures are too well guarded for us to obtain a glimpse of them. I have not awaited your suggestion and your longing before attacking the mystery."

"So there is a mystery?"

"Yes," Porbus replied. "Old Frenhofer is the only pupil whom Mabuse would ever consent to take. Having become his friend, his saviour, his father, Frenhofer sacrificed the greater part of his property to humour Mabuse's passions; in exchange Mabuse bequeathed to him the secret of *relief*, the power of imparting to figures that extraordinary appearance of life, that touch of nature, which is our never-ending despair, but of which he was such a thorough master that one day, having sold and drunk the flowered damask which he was to wear on the occasion of Charles V.'s entry into Paris, he attended his master in a garment of paper painted to represent damask. The peculiar brilliancy of the fabric worn by Mabuse surprised the Emperor, who, when he attempted to compliment the old drunkard's patron, discovered the fraud.

"Frenhofer is passionately devoted to our art, and he looks higher and farther ahead than other painters. He has given much profound thought to the subject of colouring and to the absolute accuracy of lines; but he has studied so much that he has reached the point where he is uncertain of the very object of his studies. In his moments of despair he declares that drawing does not exist and that only geometrical figures can be made with lines; which is going beyond the truth, for with lines and with black, which is not a colour, a human figure maybe drawn; which proves that our art, like nature, is made up of an infinite number of elements: drawing furnishes a skeleton, colour gives life; but life without

the skeleton is much less complete than the skeleton without life. In short, there is one thing which is more true than any of these, and that is that practice and observation are everything with a painter, and that, if reason and poetic sense quarrel with the brush, we arrive at doubt, like our excellent friend here, who is as much madman as painter. A sublime artist, he was unfortunate enough to be born rich, which permitted him to go astray; do not imitate him! Work! Painters ought not to meditate, except with brush in hand."

"We will find our way there!" cried Poussin, no longer listening to Porbus, and undeterred by doubts.

Porbus smiled at the young stranger's enthusiasm, and, when they parted, invited him to come to see him.

Nicolas Poussin walked slowly back to Rue de la Harpe, and passed, unperceiving, the modest house in which he lodged. Ascending his wretched staircase with anxious haste, he reached a room high up beneath a roof supported by pillars, a simple and airy style of architecture found in the houses of old Paris. Beside the single, dark window of that room sat a girl, who, when she heard the door, sprang at once to her feet with a loving impulse; she recognised the painter by the way he raised the latch.

"What's the matter?" she asked.

"The matter – the matter – " he cried, choking with joy; "the matter is that I have come to feel that I am a painter. I have always doubted myself before, but this morning I believe in myself! I tell you, Gillette, we shall be rich, happy! There is gold in these

brushes."

But suddenly he ceased to speak. His strong and serious face lost its joyous expression when he compared the vastness of his hopes with the paucity of his resources. The walls were covered with pieces of common paper on which were sketches in pencil. He owned no clean canvases. Paints commanded a high price in those days, and the poor young man's palette was almost bare. In the depths of his poverty he possessed and was conscious of an incredible store of courage and a superabundance of all-consuming genius. Brought to Paris by a gentleman who was a friend of his, or perhaps by his own talent, he had almost immediately fallen in with a mistress, one of those noble and devoted souls who suffer beside a great man, espouse his troubles, and try to understand his caprices; strong in poverty and love, as other women are fearless in bearing the burden of luxury and in parading their lack of feeling. The smile that played about Gillette's lips diffused a golden light through that garret, and overspread the sky with brightness. The sun did not always shine, whereas she was always there, sedate in her passion, clinging to her happiness and her suffering, encouraging the genius which overflowed in love before seizing upon art.

"Listen, Gillette – come here."

The light-hearted, obedient girl jumped upon the painter's knees. She was all grace, all beauty, lovely as a spring day, adorned by all womanly charms, and illumining them with the glow of a lovely soul.

"O God!" he cried, "I shall never dare to tell her."

"A secret?" said she; "I insist upon knowing it."

Poussin seemed lost in thought.

"Speak, I say."

"Gillette – poor, beloved darling!"

"Ah! you want something of me, do you?"

"Yes."

"If you want me to pose for you as I did the other day," she said, with a little pout, "I shall never consent; for at those times your eyes have nothing at all to say to me. You forget all about me, and yet you look at me."

"Would you prefer to see me painting another woman?"

"Perhaps so," she said, "if she was very ugly."

"Well," rejoined Poussin, in a serious tone, "suppose that, for any future glory, to make me a great painter, it were necessary for you to pose for another artist?"

"You can test me all you choose," she replied. "You know that I would not go."

Poussin let his head fall on his breast, like one who surrenders to a joy or a sorrow that is too great for his heart.

"Listen," said she, plucking at the sleeve of Poussin's threadbare doublet, "I have told you, Nick, that I would give my life for you; but I never promised to give up my love while I am alive."

"Give it up?" cried the young artist.

"If I should show myself like that to another man, you would

cease to love me, and I should deem myself unworthy of you. Is it not a most simple and natural thing to obey your whims? In spite of myself, I am happy, aye, proud, to do your dear will. But for another man – ah, no!"

"Forgive me, my Gillette," cried the painter, throwing himself at her feet. "I prefer to be beloved rather than famous. In my eyes you are fairer than wealth and honours. Go, throw away my brushes, burn these sketches. I have made a mistake. My vocation is to love you. I am no painter, I am a lover. Away with art and all its secrets!"

She gazed admiringly at him, happy, overjoyed. She was queen; she felt instinctively that art was forgotten for her, and cast at her feet like a grain of incense.

"And yet it is only an old man," continued Poussin. "He could see only the woman in you – you are so perfect!"

"One must needs love," she cried, ready to sacrifice the scruples of her love to repay her lover for all the sacrifices that he made for her. "But," she added, "it would be my ruin. Ah! ruin for you – yes, that would be very lovely! But you will forget me! Oh! what a wicked idea this is of yours!"

"I conceived the idea, and I love you," he said with a sort of contrition; "but am I for that reason a villain?"

"Let us consult Father Hardouin," she said.

"Oh, no! let it be a secret between us."

"Very good, I will go. But do not be there," she cried. "Stay at the door, with your dagger drawn; if I cry out, come in and

kill the painter."

With no eyes for aught but his art, Poussin threw his arms about Gillette.

"He no longer loves me!" thought Gillette, when she was alone.

Already she repented her decision. But she was soon seized by a terror more painful than her regret; she strove to drive away a shocking thought that stole into her mind. She fancied that she already loved the painter less, because she suspected that he was less estimable than she had hitherto believed.

II
CATHERINE LESCAULT

Three months after the meeting of Poussin and Porbus, the latter went to see Master Frenhofer. The old man was then in the depths of one of those periods of profound and sudden discouragement, the cause of which, if we are to believe the mathematicians of medicine, consists in bad digestion, the wind, the heat, or some disturbance in the hypochondriac region; and, according to the spiritualists, in the imperfection of our moral nature. The good man had simply tired himself out in finishing his mysterious picture. He was languidly reclining in an enormous chair of carved oak, upholstered in black leather; and without changing his depressed attitude, he darted at Porbus the glance of a man who had determined to make the best of his ennui.

"Well, master," said Porbus, "was the ultramarine, that you went to Bruges for, very bad? Haven't you been able to grind our new white? Is your oil poor, or are your brushes unmanageable?"

"Alas!" cried the old man, "I thought for a moment that my work was finished; but I certainly have gone astray in some details, and my mind will not be at rest until I have solved my doubts. I have almost decided to travel, to go to Turkey, to Greece, and to Asia, in search of a model, and to compare my picture with nature in different climes. It may be that I have up-

stairs," he continued with a smile of satisfaction, "Nature herself. Sometimes I am almost afraid that a breath will awaken that woman and that she will disappear."

Then he rose abruptly, as if to go.

"Ah!" replied Porbus; "I have come just in time to save you the expense and the fatigue of the journey."

"How so?" asked Frenhofer in amazement.

"Young Poussin is loved by a woman whose incomparable beauty is absolutely without a flaw. But, my dear master, if he consents to lend her to you, you must at least let us see your picture."

The old man stood, perfectly motionless, in a state of utter stupefaction.

"What!" he cried at last, in a heartrending voice, "show my creation, my spouse? Tear away the veil with which I have modestly covered my happiness? Why, that would be the most shocking prostitution! For ten years I have lived with that woman; she is mine, mine alone, she loves me. Does she not smile at every stroke of the brush which I give her? She has a soul, the soul with which I have endowed her. She would blush if other eyes than mine should rest upon her. Show her! Where is the husband, the lover, base enough to lend his wife to dishonour? When you paint a picture for the court, you do not put your whole soul into it, you sell to the courtiers nothing more than coloured mannikins. My painting is not a painting; it is a sentiment, a passion! Born in my studio, it must remain there unsullied, and can not come forth

until it is clothed. Poesy and women never abandon themselves naked to any but their lovers! Do we possess Raphael's model, Ariosto's Angelica, or Dante's Beatrice? No! We see only their shapes. Very well; the work which I have up-stairs under lock and key is an exception in our art. It is not a canvas, it is a woman; a woman with whom I weep, and laugh, and talk, and think. Do you expect me suddenly to lay aside a joy that has lasted ten years, as one lays aside a cloak? Do you expect me suddenly to cease to be father, lover, and God? That woman is not a creature, she is a creation. Let your young man come – I will give him my wealth; I will give him pictures by Correggio, Michelangelo, or Titian; I will kiss his footprints in the dust; but make him my rival? Shame! Ah! I am even more lover than painter. Yes, I shall have the strength to burn my *Belle Noiseuse* when I breathe my last; but to force her to endure the glance of a man, of a young man, of a painter? No, no! I would kill to-morrow the man who should sully her with a look! I would kill you on the instant, my friend, if you did not salute her on your knees! Do you expect me now to subject my idol to the insensible glances and absurd criticisms of fools? Ah! love is a mystery, it lives only in the deepest recesses of the heart, and all is lost when a man says, even to his friend: 'This is she whom I love!'"

The old man seemed to have become young again; his eyes gleamed with life; his pale cheeks flushed a bright red, and his hands shook. Porbus, surprised by the passionate force with which the words were spoken, did not know what reply to make

to an emotion no less novel than profound. Was Frenhofer sane or mad? Was he under the spell of an artistic caprice, or did the ideas which he had expressed proceed from that strange fanaticism produced in us by the long gestation of a great work? Could one hope ever to come to an understanding with that extraordinary passion?

Engrossed by all these thoughts, Porbus said to the old man:

"But is it not woman for woman? Will not Poussin abandon his mistress to your eyes?"

"What mistress?" rejoined Frenhofer. "She will betray him sooner or later. Mine will always be faithful to me!"

"Very well!" said Porbus, "let us say no more about it. But, perhaps, before you find, even in Asia, a woman so lovely, so perfect as is she of whom I speak, you will die without finishing your picture."

"Ah! it is finished," said Frenhofer. "Whoever should see it would think that he was looking at a woman lying upon a velvet couch, behind a curtain. Beside her is a golden tripod containing perfumes. You would be tempted to seize the tassel of the cords which hold the curtain, and you would fancy that you saw the bosom of Catherine Lescault, a beautiful courtesan called *La Belle Noiseuse*, rise and fall with the movement of her breath. However, I should like to be certain – "

"Oh! go to Asia," Porbus replied, as he detected a sort of hesitation in Frenhofer's expression.

And Porbus walked towards the door of the room.

At that moment Gillette and Nicolas Poussin arrived at Frenhofer's house. When the girl was about to enter, she stepped back, as if she were oppressed by some sudden presentiment.

"Why have I come here, pray?" she asked her lover in a deep voice, gazing at him steadfastly.

"Gillette, I left you entirely at liberty, and I mean to obey you in everything. You are my conscience and my renown. Go back to the house; I shall be happier perhaps than if you – "

"Do I belong to myself when you speak to me thus? Oh no! I am nothing more than a child. Come," she added, apparently making a mighty effort; "if our love dies, and if I plant in my heart a never-ending regret, will not your fame be the reward of my compliance with your wishes? Let us go in; it will be like living again to be always present as a memory on your palette."

As they opened the door of the house, the two lovers met Porbus, who, startled by the beauty of Gillette, whose eyes were then filled with tears, seized her, trembling from head to foot as she was, and said, leading her into the old man's presence:

"Look! is she not above all the masterpieces on earth?"

Frenhofer started. Gillette stood there in the ingenuous and unaffected attitude of a young Georgian girl, innocent and timid, abducted by brigands and offered for sale to a slave-merchant. A modest flush tinged her cheeks, she lowered her eyes, her hands were hanging at her side, her strength seemed to abandon her, and tears protested against the violence done to her modesty. At that moment Poussin, distressed beyond words because he

had taken that lovely pearl from his garret, cursed himself. He became more lover than artist, and innumerable scruples tortured his heart when he saw the old man's kindling eye, as, in accordance with the habit of painters, he mentally disrobed the girl, so to speak, divining her most secret forms. Thereupon the young man reverted to the savage jealousy of true love.

"Let us go, Gillette," he cried.

At that tone, at that outcry, his mistress looked up at him in rapture, saw his face and ran into his arms.

"Ah! you do love me then?" she replied, melting into tears.

Although she had mustered energy to impose silence upon her suffering, she lacked strength to conceal her joy.

"Oh! leave her with me for a moment," said the old painter, "and you may compare her to my *Catherine*. Yes, I consent."

There was love in Frenhofer's cry, too. He seemed to be acting the part of a coquette for his counterfeit woman, and to enjoy in advance the triumph which the beauty of his creation would certainly win over that of a girl of flesh and blood.

"Do not let him retract!" cried Porbus, bringing his hand down on Poussin's shoulder. "The fruits of love soon pass away, those of art are immortal."

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.