

GUY DE MAUPASSANT

THE WORKS OF GUY DE
MAUPASSANT, VOLUME 4

Ги д. Мопассан

**The Works of Guy de
Maupassant, Volume 4**

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THE OLD MAID

Count Eustache d'Etchegorry's solitary country house had the appearance of a poor man's home, where people do not have enough to eat every day in the week, where the bottles are more frequently filled at the pump than in the cellar, and where they wait until it is dark before lighting the candles.

It was an old and sordid building; the walls were crumbling to pieces, the grated, iron gates were eaten away by rust, the holes in the broken windows had been mended with old newspapers, and the ancestral portraits which hung against the walls, showed that it was no tiller of the soil, nor miserable laborer whose strength had gradually worn out and bent his back, who lived there. Great, knotty elm trees sheltered it, as if they had been a tall, green screen, and a large garden, full of wild rose-trees and of straggling plants, as well as of sickly-looking vegetables, which sprang up half-withered from the sandy soil, went down as far as the bank of the river.

From the house, one could hear the monotonous sound of the water, which at one time rushed yellow and impetuous towards the sea, and then again flowed back, as if driven by some invisible force towards the town which could be seen in the distance, with its pointed spires, its ramparts, and its ships at anchor by the side of the quay, and its citadel built on the top of a hill.

A strong smell of the sea came from the offing, mingled with the resinous smell of pine logs, and of the large nets with great pieces of sea-weed clinging to them, which were drying in the sun.

Why had Monsieur d'Etchegorry, who did not like the country, who was of a sociable rather than of a solitary nature, for he never walked alone, but kept step with the retired officers who lived there, and frequently played game after game at *piquet* at the *café*, when he was in town, buried himself in such a solitary place, by the side of a dusty road at Boucau, a village close to the town, where on Sundays the soldiers took off their tunics, and sat in their shirt sleeves in the public-houses, drank the thin wine of the country, and teased the girls.

What secret reasons had he for selling the mansion which he had possessed at Bayonne, close to the bishop's palace, and condemning his daughter, a girl of nineteen, to such a dull, listless, solitary life; counting the minutes far from everybody, as if she had been a nun, no one knew, but most people said that he had lost immense sums in gambling, and had wasted his fortune and ruined his credit in doubtful speculations. They wondered whether he still regretted the tender, sweet woman whom he had lost, who died one evening, after years of suffering, like a church lamp whose oil has been consumed to the last drop. Was he seeking for perfect oblivion, for that soothing repose in nature, in which a man becomes enervated, and which envelopes him like a moist, warm cloth? How could he be satisfied with such an existence? With the bad cooking, and the careless, untidy ways of a char-woman, and with the shabby clothes, that were discolored by use!

His numerous relations had been anxious about it at first, and had tried to cure him of his apparent hypochondria, and to persuade him to employ himself with something, but as he was obstinate, avoided them, rejected their friendly offers with arrogance and self-sufficiency, even his brothers had abandoned him, and almost renounced him. All their affection had been transferred to the poor child who shared his solitude, and who endured all that wretchedness with the resignation of a saint. Thanks to them, she had a few gleams of pleasure in their exile, and was not dressed like a beggar girl, but received invitations, and appeared here and there at some ball, concert or tennis party, and the girl was extremely grateful to them for it all, although she would much have preferred that nobody should have held out a helping hand to her, but have left her to her dull life, without

any day dreams or homesickness, so that she might grow used to her lot, and day by day lose all that remained to her of her pride of race and of her youth.

With her sensitive and proud mind, she felt that she was treated exactly like others were in society, that people showed her either too much pity or too much indifference, that they knew all about her side life of undeserved poverty, and that in the folds of her muslin dress they could smell the mustiness of her home. If she was animated, or buoyed up with secret hopes in her heart, if there was a smile on her lips, and her eyes were bright when she went out at the gate, and the horses carried her off to town at a rapid trot, she was all the more low-spirited and tearful when she returned home, and she used to shut herself up in her room and find fault with her destiny, declared to herself that she would imitate her father, show relations and friends politely out, with a passive and resigned gesture, and make herself so unpleasant and embarrassing that they would grow tired of it in the end, leave long intervals between their visits, and finally would not come to see her at all, but would turn away from her, as if from a hospital where incurable patients were dying.

Nevertheless, the older the count grew, the more the supplies in the small country house diminished, and the more painful and harder existence became. If a morsel of bread was left uneaten on the table, if an unexpected dish was served up at table, if she put a piece of ribbon into her hair, he used to heap violent, spiteful reproaches on her, torrents of rage which defile the mouth, and violent threats like those of a madman, who is tormented by some fixed idea. Monsieur d'Etchegorry had dismissed the servant and engaged a char-woman, whom he intended to pay, merely by small sums on account, and he used to go to market with a basket on his arm.

He locked up every morsel of food, used to count the lumps of sugar and charcoal, and bolted himself in all day long in a room that was larger than the rest, and which for a long time had served as a drawing-room. At times he would be rather more gentle, as if he were troubled by vague thoughts, and used to say to his daughter, in an agonized voice, and trembling all over: "You will never ask me for any accounts, I say?.. You will never demand your mother's fortune?"

She always gave him the required promise, did not worry him with any questions, nor give vent to any complaints, and thinking of her cousins, who would have good dowries, who were growing up happily and peacefully, amidst careful and affectionate surroundings and beautiful old furniture, who were certain to be loved, and to get married some day, and she asked herself why fate was so cruel to some, and so kind to others, and what she had done to deserve such disfavor.

Marie-des-Anges d'Etchegorry, without being absolutely pretty, possessed all the charm of her age, and everybody liked her. She was as tall and slim as a lily, with beautiful, fine, soft fair hair, eyes of a dark, undecided color, which reminded one of those springs in the depths of the forests, in which a ray of the sun is but rarely reflected – mirrors which changed now to violet, then to the color of leaves, but most frequently of a velvety blackness – and her whole being exhaled a freshness of childhood, and something that could not be described, but which was pleasant, wholesome and frank.

She lived on through a long course of years, growing old, faithful to the man who might have given her his name, honorable, having resisted temptations and snares, worthy of the motto which used to be engraved on the tombs of Roman matrons before the Cæsars: "*She spun wool, and kept at home.*"

When she was just twenty-one, Marie-des-Anges fell in love, and her beautiful, dark, restless eyes for the first time became illuminated with a look of dreamy happiness. For someone seemed to have noticed her; he waltzed with her more frequently than he did with the other girls, spoke to her in a low voice, dangled at her petticoats, and discomposed her so much, that she flushed deeply as soon as she heard the sound of his voice.

His name was André de Gèdrè; he had just returned from Sénégal, where after several months of daily fighting in the desert, he had won his sub-lieutenant's epaulets.

With his thin, surnburnt, yellow face, looking awkward in his tight coat, in which his broad shoulders could not distend themselves comfortably, and in which his arms, which had formerly been

used to cut right and left, were cramped in their tight sleeves, he looked like one of those pirates of old, who used to scour the seas, pillaging, killing, hanging their prisoners to the yard-arms, who were ready to engage a whole fleet, and who returned to the port laden with booty, and occasionally with waifs and strays picked up at sea.

He belonged to a race of buccaneers or of heroes, according to the breeze which swelled his sails and carried him North or South. Over head and ears in debt, reduced to discounting doubtful legacies, to gambling at Casinos, and to mortgaging the few acres of land that he had remaining at much below their value, he nevertheless managed to make a pretty good figure in his hand to mouth existence; he never gave in, never showed the blows that he had received, and waited for the last struggle in a state of blissful inactivity, while he sought for renewed strength and philosophy from the caressing lips of women.

Marie-des-Anges seemed to him to be a toy which he could do with as he liked. She had the flavor of unripe fruit; left to herself, and sentimental as she was, she would only offer a very brief resistance to his attacks, and would soon yield to his will, and when he was tired of her and threw her off, she would bow to the inevitable, and would not worry him with violent scenes, nor stand in his way, with threats on her lips. And so he was kind, and used to wheedle her, and by degrees enveloped her in the meshes of a net, which continually hemmed her in closer and closer. He gained entire possession of her heart and confidence, and without expressing any wish or making any promises, managed so to establish his influence over her, that she did nothing but what he wished.

Long before Monsieur de Gèdrè had addressed any passionate words to her, or any avowal which immediately introduces warmth and danger into a flirtation, Marie-des-Anges had betrayed herself with the candor of a little girl, who does not think she is doing any wrong, and cannot hide what she thinks, what she is dreaming about, and the tenderness which lies hidden at the bottom of her heart, and she no longer felt that horror of life which had formerly tortured her. She no longer felt herself alone, as she had done formerly – so alone, so lost, even among her own people, that everything had become indifferent to her.

It was very pleasant and soothing to love and to think that she was loved, to have a furtive and secret understanding with another heart, to imagine that he was thinking of her at the same time that she was thinking of him, to shelter herself timidly under his protection, to feel more unhappy each time she left him, and to experience greater happiness every time they met.

She wrote him long letters, which she did not venture to send him when they were written, for she was timid and feared that he would make fun of them, and she sang the whole day through, like a lark that is intoxicated with the sun, so that Monsieur d'Etchegorry scarcely recognized her any longer.

Soon they made appointments together in some secluded spot, meeting for a few minutes in the aisles of the cathedral and behind the ramparts, or on the promenade of the *Alleés-Marinès*, which was always dark, on account of the dense foliage.

And at last, one evening in June, when the sky was so studded with stars that it might have been taken for a triumphal route of some sovereign, strewn with precious stones and rare flowers, Monsieur de Gèdrè went into the large, neglected garden.

Marie-des-Anges was waiting for him in a somber walk with witch elms on either side and listening for the least noise, looking at the closed windows of the house, and nearly fainting, as much from fear as from happiness. They spoke in a low voice. She was close to him and he must have heard the beating of her heart, into which he had cast the first seeds of love, and he put his arms around her and clasped her gently, as if she had been some little bird that he was afraid of hurting, but which he did not wish to allow to escape.

She no longer knew what she was doing, but was in a state of entire intense, supreme happiness. She shivered, and yet something burning seemed to permeate her whole being under her skin, from the nape of her neck to her feet, like a stream of burning spirit, and she would not have had the strength to disengage herself or to take a step forward, so she leant her head instinctively and very

tenderly against André's shoulder. He kissed her hair, touched her forehead with his lips, and at last put them against hers. The girl felt as if she were going to die, and remained inert and motionless, with her eyes full of tears.

He came nearly every evening for two months. She had not the courage to repel him and to speak to him seriously of the future, and could not understand why he had not yet asked her father for her hand and had not fulfilled his former promises, until, one Sunday, as she was coming from High Mass, walking on before her cousins, Marie-des-Anges heard the following words, from a group in which André was standing, and he was the speaker: "Oh! no," he said, "you are altogether mistaken; I should never do anything so foolish... One does not marry a girl without a halfpenny; one takes her for one's mistress."

The unhappy girl mastered her feelings, went down the steps of the porch quite steadily, but feeling utterly crushed, as if by the news of some terrible disaster, and joined the servant, who was waiting for her, to accompany her back to Boucau. The effects of what she had heard were to give her a serious illness and for some time she hovered between life and death, consumed and wasted by a violent fever; and when after a fortnight's suffering, she grew convalescent, and looked at herself in the glass, she recoiled, as if she had been face to face with an apparition, for there was nothing left of her former self.

Her eyes were dull, her cheeks pale and hollow, and there were white streaks in her silky, light hair. Why had she not succumbed to her illness? Why had destiny reserved her for such a trial, and increased her unhappy lot, that of disappointed hopes, thus? But when that rebellious feeling was over, she accepted her cross, fell into a state of ardent devotion and became crystallized in the torpor of an old woman, tried with all her might to rid her memory of any recollections that had become incrustated in it, and to put a thick black veil between herself and the past.

She never walked in the garden now, and never went to Bayonne, and she would have liked to have choked herself, and to have beaten herself, when, in spite of her efforts and of her will, she remembered her lost happiness, and when some sensual feeling and a longing for past pleasures agitated her body afresh.

That lasted for four years, which finished her and altogether destroyed her good looks and she had the figure and the appearance of an old maid, when her father suddenly died, just as he was going to sit down to dinner; and when the lawyer, who was summoned immediately, had ransacked the cupboards and drawers, discovered a mass of securities, of bank-notes, and of gold, which Count d'Etchegorry, who was eaten up with avarice, had amassed eagerly, and hidden away, it was found that Mademoiselle Marie-des-Anges, who was his sole heiress, possessed an income of fifty thousand francs.

She received the news without any emotion, for of what use was such a fortune to her now, and what should she do with it? Her eyes, alas! had been too much opened by all the tears that had fallen from them for her to delude herself with visionary hopes, and her heart had been too cruelly wounded to warm itself by lying illusions, and she was seized by melancholy when she thought that in future she would be coveted, she who had been kept at arm's length, as if she had been a leper; that men would come after her money with odious impatience, that now that she was worn out and ugly, tired of everything and everybody, she would most certainly have plenty of suitors to refuse, and that perhaps he would come back to her, attracted by that amount of money, like a hawk hovering over its prey, that he would try to re-ignite the dead cinders, to revive some spark in them and to obtain pardon for his cowardice.

Oh! With what bitter pleasure she could have thrown those millions into the road to the ragged beggars, or scattered them about like manna to all who were suffering and dying of hunger, and who had neither roof nor hearth! She naturally soon became the target at which everyone aimed, the goal for which all those who had formerly disdained her most, now eagerly tried.

Monsieur de Gèdrè was not long before he was in the ranks of her suitors, as she had foreseen, and caused her that last heart-burning of seeing him humble, kneeling at her feet, acting a comedy, trying every means of overcoming her resistance, and to regain possession of that heart, which was closed against him, after having been entirely his, in all its adorable virginity.

And Marie-des-Anges had loved him so deeply that his letters in which he recalled the past, and stirred up all the recollections of their love, their kisses, and their dreams, softened her in spite of herself, and came across her profound, incurable sadness, like a factitious light, the reflection of a bonfire, which, from a distance, illuminates a prison cell for a moment.

He was poor himself and had not wished, so he said, to drag her into his life of privation and shifts, and she thought to herself that perhaps he had been right; and thus sensibly, like a mother or an elder sister, who has become indulgent and wishes to close her eyes and her ears against everything, to forgive again, to forgive always, she excused him, and tried to remember nothing but those months of tenderness and of ecstasy, those months of happiness, and that he had been the first, the only man who, in the course of her unhappy, wasted life, had given her a moment's peace, had caused her to dream, and had made her happy, and youthful and loving.

He had been charitable towards her and she would be so a hundred fold towards him; and so she grew happy again, when she said to herself that she would be his benefactress, that even with his hard heart, he could not accept the sacrifice from a woman, who, like so many others, might have returned him evil for evil, but who preferred to be kind and maternal, after having been in love with him, without some feelings of gratitude and emotion.

And that resolution transfigured her, restored to her temporarily, something of her youth, which had so soon fled away, and a poor, heroic saint amongst all the saints, she took refuge in a Carmelite convent, so as to escape from this returning temptation, and to bequeath everything of which she could lawfully dispose, to Monsieur de Gèdrè.

THE AWAKENING

During the three years that she had been married, she had not left the *Val de Ciré*, where her husband possessed two cotton-mills. She led a quiet life, and although she had no children, she was quite happy in her house among the trees, which the work-people called the *château*.

Although Monsieur Vasseur was considerably older than she was, he was very kind. She loved him, and no guilty thought had ever entered her mind.

Her mother came and spent every summer at Ciré, and then returned to Paris for the winter, as soon as the leaves began to fall.

Jeanne coughed a little every autumn, for the narrow valley through which the river wound, grew foggy for five months. First of all, slight mists hung over the meadows, making all the low-lying ground look like a large pond, out of which the roof of the houses rose.

Then that white vapor, which rose like a tide, enveloped everything, and turned the valley into a land of phantoms, through which men moved about like ghosts, without recognizing each other ten yards off, and the trees, wreathed in mist, and dripping with moisture, rose up through it.

But the people who went along the neighboring hills, and who looked down upon the deep, white depression of the valley, saw the two huge chimneys of Monsieur Vasseur's factories, rising above the mist below. Day and night they vomited forth two long trails of black smoke, and that alone indicated that people were living in that hollow, which looked as if it were filled with a cloud of cotton.

That year, when October came, the medical men advised the young woman to go and spend the winter in Paris with her mother, as the air of the valley was dangerous for her weak chest, and she went. For a month or so, she thought continually of the house which she had left, to which she seemed rooted, and whose well-known furniture and quiet ways she loved so much, but by degrees she grew accustomed to her new life, and got to liking entertainments, dinners and evening parties, and balls.

Till then, she had retained her girlish manners, she had been undecided and rather sluggish; she walked languidly, and had a tired smile, but now she became animated and merry, and was always ready for pleasure. Men paid her marked attentions, and she was amused at their talk, and made fun of their gallantries, as she felt sure that she could resist them, for she was rather disgusted with love, from what she had learned of it in marriage.

The idea of giving up her body to the coarse caresses of such bearded creatures, made her laugh with pity, and shudder a little with ignorance.

She asked herself how women could consent to those degrading contacts with strangers, as they were already obliged to endure them with their legitimate husbands. She would have loved her husband much more if they had lived together like two friends, and had restricted themselves to chaste kisses, which are the caresses of the soul.

But she was much amused by their compliments, by the desire which showed itself in their eyes, and which she did not share, by their declarations of love, which they whispered into her ear as they were returning to the drawing-room after some grand dinner, by their words, which were murmured so low that she almost had to guess them, and which left her blood quite cool, and her heart untouched, while they gratified her unconscious coquetry, while they kindled a flame of pleasure within her, and while they made her lips open, her eyes glow bright, and her woman's heart, to which homage was due, quiver with delight.

She was fond of those *tête-à-têtes* when it was getting dusk, when a man grows pressing, stammers, trembles and falls on his knees. It was a delicious and new pleasure to her to know that they felt that passion which left her quite unmoved, to say *no*, by a shake of the head, and with her lips, to withdraw her hands, to get up and calmly ring for lights, and to see the man who had been trembling at her feet, get up, confused and furious when he heard the footman coming.

She often had a hard laugh, which froze the most burning words, and said harsh things, which fell like a jet of icy water on the most ardent protestations, while the intonations of her voice were enough to make any man who really loved her, kill himself, and there were two especially who made obstinate love to her, although they did not at all resemble one another.

One of them, Paul Péronel, was a tall man of the world, gallant and enterprising, a man who was accustomed to successful love affairs, and who knew how to wait, and when to seize his opportunity.

The other, Monsieur d'Avancelle, quivered when he came near her, scarcely ventured to express his love, but followed her like a shadow, and gave utterance to his hopeless desire by distracted looks, and the assiduity of his attentions to her, and she made him a kind of slave who followed her steps, and whom she treated as if he had been her servant.

She would have been much amused if anybody had told her that she would love him, and yet she did love him, after a singular fashion. As she saw him continually, she had grown accustomed to his voice, to his gestures, and to his manner, as one grows accustomed to those with whom one meets continually. Often his face haunted her in her dreams, and she saw him as he really was; gentle, delicate in all his actions, humble, but passionately in love, and she awoke full of those dreams, fancying that she still heard him, and felt him near her, until one night (most likely she was feverish), she saw herself alone with him in a small wood, where they were both of them sitting on the grass. He was saying charming things to her, while he pressed and kissed her hands.

She could feel the warmth of his skin and of his breath, and she was stroking his hair, in a very natural manner.

We are quite different in our dreams to what we are in real life. She felt full of love for him, full of calm and deep love, and was happy in stroking his forehead and in holding him against her. Gradually he put his arms round her, kissed her eyes and her cheeks without her attempting to get away from him; their lips met, and she yielded.

When she saw him again, unconscious of the agitation that he had caused her, she felt that she grew red, and while he was telling her of his love, she was continually recalling to mind their previous meeting, without being able to get rid of the recollection.

She loved him, loved him with refined tenderness, which arose chiefly from the remembrance of her dream, although she dreaded the accomplishment of the desires which had arisen in her mind.

At last, he perceived it, and then she told him everything, even to the dread of his kisses, and she made him swear that he would respect her, and he did so. They spent long hours of transcendental love together, during which their souls alone embraced, and when they separated, they were enervated, weak and feverish.

Sometimes their lips met, and with closed eyes they reveled in that long, yet chaste caress; she felt, however, that she could not resist much longer, and as she did not wish to yield, she wrote and told her husband that she wanted to come to him, and to return to her tranquil, solitary life. But in reply, he wrote her a very kind letter, and strongly advised her not to return in the middle of the winter, and so expose herself to a sudden change of climate, and to the icy mists of the valley, and she was thunderstruck, and angry with that confiding man, who did not guess, who did not understand, the struggles of her heart.

February was a warm, bright month, and although she now avoided being alone with Monsieur Avancelle, she sometimes accepted his invitation to drive round the lake in the *Bois de Boulogne* with him, when it was dusk.

On one of those evenings, it was so warm that it seemed as if the sap in every tree and plant were rising. Their cab was going at a walk; it was growing dusk, and they were sitting close together, holding each others' hands, and she said to herself:

"It is all over, I am lost!" for she felt her desires rising in her again, the imperious want for that supreme embrace, which she had undergone in her dream. Every moment their lips sought each other, clung together and separated, only to meet again immediately.

He did not venture to go into the house with her, but left her at her door, more in love with him than ever, and half fainting.

Monsieur Paul Péronel was waiting for her in the little drawing-room, without a light, and when he shook hands with her, he felt how feverish she was. He began to talk in a low, tender voice, lulling her worn-out mind with the charm of amorous words.

She listened to him without replying, for she was thinking of the other; she thought she was listening to the other, and thought she felt him leaning against her, in a kind of hallucination. She saw only him, and did not remember that any other man existed on earth, and when her ears trembled at those three syllables: "I love you," it was he, the other man, who uttered them, who kissed her hands, who strained her to his breast, like the other had done shortly before in the cab. It was he who pressed victorious kisses on her lips, it was his lips, it was he whom she held in her arms and embraced, whom she was calling to, with all the longings of her heart, with all the over-wrought ardor of her body.

When she awoke from her dream, she uttered a terrible cry. Captain Fracasse was kneeling by her, and thanking her, passionately, while he covered her disheveled hair with kisses, and she almost screamed out: "Go away! go away! go away!"

And as he did not understand what she meant, and tried to put his arm round her waist again, she writhed, as she stammered out:

"You are a wretch, and I hate you! Go away! go away!" And he got up in great surprise, took up his hat, and went.

The next day she returned to *Val de Ciré*, and her husband, who had not expected her for some time, blamed her for a freak.

"I could not live away from you any longer," she said.

He found her altered in character, and sadder than formerly, but when he said to her:

"What is the matter with you? You seem unhappy. What do you want?" she replied:

"Nothing. Happiness exists only in our dreams, in this world."

Avancelle came to see her the next summer, and she received him without any emotion, and without regret, for she suddenly perceived that she had never loved him, except in a dream, from which Paul Péronel had brutally roused her.

But the young man, who still adored her, thought as he returned to Paris:

"Women are really very strange, complicated and inexplicable beings."

IN THE SPRING

When the first fine spring days come, and the earth awakes and assumes its garment of verdure, when the perfumed warmth of the air blows on our faces and fills our lungs, and even appears to penetrate to our heart, we feel vague longings for undefined happiness, a wish to run, to walk at random, to inhale the spring. As the winter had been very severe the year before, this longing assumed an intoxicating feeling in May; it was like a superabundance of sap.

Well, one morning on waking, I saw from my window the blue sky glowing in the sun above the neighboring houses. The canaries hanging in the windows were singing loudly, and so were the servants on every floor; a cheerful noise rose up from the streets, and I went out, with my spirits as bright as the day was, to go – I did not exactly know where. Everybody I met seemed to be smiling; an air of happiness appeared to pervade everything, in the warm light of returning spring. One might almost have said that a breeze of love was blowing through the city, and the young women whom I saw in the streets in their morning toilettes, in the depths of whose eyes there lurked a hidden tenderness, and who walked with languid grace, filled my heart with agitation.

Without knowing how or why, I found myself on the banks of the Seine. Steamboats were starting for Suresnes, and suddenly I was seized by an unconquerable wish to have a walk through the woods. The deck of the *mouche*¹ was crowded with passengers, for the sun in early spring draws you out of the house, in spite of yourself, and everybody moves about, goes and comes, and talks to his neighbor.

I had a female neighbor; a little work-girl, no doubt, who possessed the true Parisian charm; a little head, with light curly hair, which looked like frizzed light, came down to her ears and descended to the nape of her neck, danced in the wind, and then became such fine, such light-colored down, that one could scarcely see it, but on which one felt an irresistible desire to impress a shower of kisses.

Under the magnetism of my looks, she turned her head towards me, and then immediately looked down, while a slight fold, which looked as if she were ready to break out into a smile, also showed that fine, silky, pale down which the sun was gilding a little.

The calm river grew wider; the atmosphere was warm and perfectly still, but a murmur of life seemed to fill all space.

My neighbor raised her eyes again, and, this time, as I was still looking at her, she smiled, decidedly. She was charming like that, and in her passing glance, I saw a thousand things, which I had hitherto been ignorant of, for I saw unknown depths, all the charm of tenderness, all the poetry which we dream of, all the happiness which we are continually in search of, in it. I felt an insane longing to open my arms and to carry her off somewhere, so as to whisper the sweet music of words of love into her ears.

I was just going to speak to her, when somebody touched me on the shoulder, and when I turned round in some surprise, I saw an ordinary looking man, who was neither young nor old, and who gazed at me sadly:

"I should like to speak to you," he said.

I made a grimace, which he no doubt saw, for he added:

"It is a matter of importance."

I got up, therefore, and followed him to the other end of the boat, and then he said:

"Monsieur, when winter comes, with its cold, wet and snowy weather, your doctor says to you constantly: 'Keep your feet warm, guard against chills, colds, bronchitis, rheumatism and pleurisy.'

"Then you are very careful, you wear flannel, a heavy great coat and thick shoes, but all this does not prevent you from passing two months in bed. But when spring returns, with its leaves and flowers,

¹ Fly.

its warm, soft breezes, and its smell of the fields, which cause you vague disquiet and causeless emotion, nobody says to you:

"Monsieur, beware of love! It is lying in ambush everywhere; it is watching for you at every corner; all its snares are laid, all its weapons are sharpened, all its guiles are prepared! Beware of love... Beware of love. It is more dangerous than brandy, bronchitis, or pleurisy! It never forgives, and makes everybody commit irreparable follies."

"Yes, Monsieur, I say that the French Government ought to put large public notices on the walls, with these words: '*Return of Spring. French citizens, beware of love!*' just as they put: '*Beware of paint.*'"

"However, as the government will not do this, I must supply its place, and I say to you: 'Beware of love,' for it is just going to seize you, and it is my duty to inform you of it, just as in Russia they inform anyone that his nose is frozen."

I was much astonished at this individual, and assuming a dignified manner, I said:

"Really, Monsieur, you appear to me to be interfering in a matter which is no business of yours."

He made an abrupt movement, and replied:

"Ah! Monsieur! Monsieur! If I see that a man is in danger of being drowned at a dangerous spot, ought I to let him perish? So just listen to my story, and you will see why I ventured to speak to you like this."

"It was about this time last year that it occurred. But, first of all, I must tell you that I am a clerk in the Admiralty, where our chiefs, the commissioners, take their gold lace and quill-driving officers seriously, and treat us like fore-top men on board a ship. Well, from my office I could see a small bit of blue sky and the swallows, and I felt inclined to dance among my portfolios."

"My yearning for freedom grew so intense, that, in spite of my repugnance, I went to see my chief, who was a short, bad-tempered man, who was always in a rage. When I told him that I was not well, he looked at me, and said: 'I do not believe it, Monsieur, but be off with you! Do you think that any office can go on, with clerks like you?' I started at once, and went down the Seine. It was a day like this, and I took the *mouche*, to go as far as Saint Cloud. Ah! What a good thing it would have been if my chief had refused me permission to leave the office for the day!"

"I seemed to myself to expand in the sun. I loved it all; the steamer, the river, the trees, the houses, my fellow-passengers, everything. I felt inclined to kiss something, no matter what; it was love, laying its snare. Presently, at the Trocadéro, a girl, with a small parcel in her hand, came on board and sat down opposite to me. She was certainly pretty; but it is surprising, Monsieur, how much prettier women seem to us when it is fine, at the beginning of the spring. Then they have an intoxicating charm, something quite peculiar about them. It is just like drinking wine after the cheese."

"I looked at her, and she also looked at me, but only occasionally, like that girl did at you, just now; but at last, by dint of looking at each other constantly, it seemed to me that we knew each other well enough to enter into conversation, and I spoke to her, and she replied. She was decidedly pretty and nice, and she intoxicated me, Monsieur!"

"She got out at Saint-Cloud, and I followed her. She went and delivered her parcel, and when she returned, the boat had just started. I walked by her side, and the warmth of the air made us both sigh. 'It would be very nice in the woods,' I said. 'Indeed, it would!' she replied. 'Shall we go there for a walk, Mademoiselle?'"

"She gave me a quick, upward look, as if to see exactly what I was like, and then, after a little hesitation, she accepted my proposal, and soon we were there, walking side by side. Under the foliage, which was still rather thin, the tall, thick, bright, green grass, was inundated by the sun, and full of small insects that also made love to one another, and birds were singing in all directions. My companion began to jump and to run, intoxicated by the air, and the smell of the country, and I ran and jumped behind her. How stupid we are at times, Monsieur!"

"Then she wildly sang a thousand things; opera airs, and the song of *Musette!* The song of *Musette!* How poetical it seemed to me, then! I almost cried over it. Ah! Those silly songs make us

lose our heads; and, believe me, never marry a woman who sings in the country, especially if she sings the song of *Musette*!

"She soon grew tired, and sat down on a grassy slope, and I sat down at her feet, and took her hands, her little hands, that were so marked with the needle, and that moved me. I said to myself: 'These are the sacred marks of toil.' Oh! Monsieur, do you know what those sacred marks of labor mean? They mean all the gossip of the workroom, the whispered blackguardism, the mind soiled by all the filth that is talked; they mean lost chastity, foolish chatter, all the wretchedness of daily bad habits, all the narrowness of ideas which belongs to women of the lower orders, united in the girl whose sacred fingers bear *the sacred marks of toil*.

"Then we looked into each other's eyes for a long while. Oh! What power a woman's eye has! How it agitates us, how it invades our very being, takes possession of us, and dominates us. How profound it seems, how full of infinite promises! People call that looking into each other's souls! Oh! Monsieur, what humbug! If we could see into each other's souls, we should be more careful of what we did. However, I was caught, and crazy after her, and tried to take her into my arms, but she said: 'Paws off!' Then I knelt down, and opened my heart to her, and poured out all the affection that was suffocating me, on her knees. She seemed surprised at my change of manner, and gave me a sidelong glance, as if to say: 'Ah! So that is the way women make a fool of you, old fellow! Very well, we will see. In love, Monsieur, we are all artists, and women are the dealers.'

"No doubt I could have had her, and I saw my own stupidity later, but what I wanted was not a woman's person; it was love, it was the ideal. I was sentimental, when I ought to have been using my time to a better purpose.

"As soon as she had had enough of my declarations of affection, she got up, and we returned to Saint-Cloud, and I did not leave her until we got to Paris; but she had looked so sad as we were returning, that at last I asked her what was the matter. 'I am thinking,' she replied, 'that this has been one of those days of which we have but few in life.' And my heart beat so that it felt as if it would break my ribs.

"I saw her on the following Sunday, and the next Sunday, and every Sunday. I took her to Bougival, Saint-Germain, Maisons-Lafitte, Poissy; to every suburban resort of lovers.

"The little jade, in turn, pretended to love me, until, at last, I altogether lost my head, and three months later I married her.

"What can you expect, Monsieur, when a man is a clerk, living alone, without any relations, or anyone to advise him? One says to oneself: 'How sweet life would be with a wife!'

"And so one gets married, and she calls you names from morning till night, understands nothing, knows nothing, chatters continually, sings the song of *Musette* at the top of her voice (oh! that song of *Musette*, how tired one gets of it!); quarrels with the charcoal dealer, tells the porter of all her domestic details, confides all the secrets of her bedroom to the neighbor's servant, discusses her husband with the trades-people, and has her head so stuffed with such stupid stories, with such idiotic superstitions, with such extraordinary ideas and such monstrous prejudices, that I – for what I have said, applies more particularly to myself – shed tears of discouragement every time I talked to her."

He stopped, as he was rather out of breath, and very much moved, and I looked at him, for I felt pity for this poor, artless devil, and I was just going to give him some sort of answer, when the boat stopped. We were at Saint-Cloud.

The little woman who had so taken my fancy, got up in order to land. She passed close to me, and gave me a side glance and a furtive smile; one of those smiles that drive you mad; then she jumped on the landing-stage. I sprang forward to follow her, but my neighbor laid hold of my arm, I shook myself loose, however, whereupon he seized the skirt of my coat, and pulled me back, exclaiming:

"You shall not go! You shall not go!" in such a loud voice, that everybody turned round and laughed, and I remained standing motionless and furious, but without venturing to face scandal and ridicule, and the steamboat started.

The little woman on the landing-stage looked at me as I went off with an air of disappointment, while my persecutor rubbed his hands, and whispered to me:
"I have done you a great service, you must acknowledge."

THE JENNET

Every time he held an inspection on the review ground, General Daumont de Croisailles was sure of a small success, and of receiving a whole packet of letters from women the next day.

Some were almost illegible, scribbled on paper with a love emblem at the top, by some sentimental milliner; the others ardent, as if saturated with curry, letters which excited him, and suggested the delights of kisses to him.

Among them, also, there were some which evidently came from a woman of the world, who was tired of her monotonous life, had lost her head, and let her pen run on, without exactly knowing what she was writing, with those mistakes in spelling here and there which seemed to be in unison with the disordered beating of her heart.

He certainly looked magnificent on horseback; there was something of the fighter, something bold and mettlesome about him, *a valiant look*, as our grandmothers used to say, when they threw themselves into the arms of the conquerors, between two campaigns, though the same conquerors had loud, rough voices, even when they were making love, as they had to dominate the noise of the firing, and violent gestures, as if they were using their swords and issuing orders, who did not waste time over useless refinements, and in squandering the precious hours which were counted so avariciously, in minor caresses, but sounded the charge immediately, and made the assault, without meeting with any more resistance than they did from a redoubt.

As soon as he appeared, preceded by dragoons, with his sword in his hand, amidst the clatter of hoofs and jingle of scabbards and bridles, while plumes waved and uniforms glistened in the sun, a little in front of his staff, sitting perfectly upright in the saddle, and with his cocked hat with its black plumes, slightly on one side, the surging crowd, which was kept in check by the police officers, cheered him as if he had been some popular minister, whose journey had been given notice of beforehand by posters and proclamations.

That tumult of strident voices that went from one end of the great square to the other, which was prolonged like the sound of the rising tide, which beats against the shore with ceaseless noise, that rattle of rifles, and the sound of the music that alternated with blasts of the trumpets all along the line, made the General's heart swell with unspeakable pride.

He attudinized in spite of himself, and thought of nothing but ostentation, and of being noticed. He continually touched his horse with his spurs, and worried it, so as to make it appear restive, and to prance and rear, to champ its bit, and to cover it with foam, and then he would continue his inspection, galloping from regiment to regiment with a satisfied smile, while the good old infantry captains, sitting on their thin Arab horses, with their toes well stuck out, said to one another:

"I should not like to have to ride a confounded, restive brute like that, I know!"

But the General's aide-de-camp, little Jacques de Montboron, could easily have reassured them, for he knew those famous thoroughbreds, as he had had to break them in, and had received a thousand trifling instructions about them.

They were generally more or less spavined brutes, which he had bought at Tattersall's auctions for a ridiculous price, and so quiet and well in hand that they might have been held with a silk thread, but with a good shape, bright eyes, and coats that glistened like silk. They seemed to know their part, and stepped out, pranced and reared, and made way for themselves, as if they had just come out of the riding-school at Saumur.

That was his daily task, his obligatory service.

He broke them in, one after another, and transformed them into veritable mechanical horses, accustomed them to bear the noise of trumpets and drums, and of firing, without starting, tired them out by long rides the evening before every review, and bit his lips to prevent himself from laughing

when people declared that General Daumont de Croisailles was a first-rate rider, who was really fond of danger.

A rider! That was almost like writing history! But the aide-de-camp discreetly kept up the illusion, outdid the others in flattery, and related unheard-of feats of the General's horsemanship.

And, after all, breaking in horses was not more irksome than carrying on a monotonous and dull correspondence about the buttons on the gaiters, or than thinking over projects of mobilization, or than going through accounts in which he lost himself like in a labyrinth. He had not, from the very first day that he entered the military academy at Saint-Cyr, learned that sentence which begins the rules of the *Interior Service*, in vain:

"As discipline constitutes the principal strength of an army, it is very important for every superior to obtain absolute respect, and instant obedience from his inferiors."

He did not resist, but accustomed himself thus to become a sort of Monsieur Loyal, spoke to his chief in the most flattering manner, and reckoned on being promoted over the heads of his fellow officers.

General Daumont de Croisailles was not married and did not intend to disturb the tranquillity of his bachelor life as long as he lived, for he loved all women, whether they were dark, fair or red-haired, too passionately to love only one, who would grow old, and worry him with useless complaints.

Gallant, as they used to be called in the good old days, he kissed the hands of those women who refused him their lips, and as he did not wish to compromise his dignity, and be the talk of the town, he had rented a small house just outside it.

It was close to the canal, in a quiet street with courtyards and shady gardens, and as nothing is less amusing than the racket of jealous husbands, or the brawling of excited women who are disputing or raising their voices in lamentation, and as it is always necessary to foresee some unfortunate incident or other in the amorous life, some unlucky mishap, some absurdly imprudent action, some forgotten love appointment, the house had five different doors.

So discreet, that he reassured even the most timid, and certainly not given to melancholy, he understood extremely well how to vary his kisses and his ways of proceeding; how to work on women's feelings, and to overcome their scruples, to obtain a hold over them through their curiosity to learn something new, by the temptation of a comfortable, well-furnished, warm room, that was fragrant with flowers, and where a little supper was already served as a prologue to the entertainment. His female pupils would certainly have deserved the first prize in a love competition.

So men mistrusted that ancient Lovelace as if he had been the plague, when they had plucked some rare and delicious fruit, and had sketched out some charming adventure, for he always managed to discover the weak spot, and to penetrate into the place.

To some, he held out the lure of debauch without any danger attached to it, the desire of finishing their amorous education, of reveling in perverted enjoyment, and to others he held out the irresistible argument that seduced Danae, that of gold.

Others, again, were attracted by his cocked hat and feathers, and by the conceited hope of seeing him at their knees, of throwing their arms round him as if he had been an ordinary lover, although he was a general who rode so imposingly, who was covered with decorations, and to whom all the regiments presented arms simultaneously, the chief whose orders could not be commented on or disputed, and who had such a martial and haughty look.

His pay, allowances and his private income of fifteen thousand francs,² all went in this way, like water that runs out drop by drop, from a cracked bottle.

He was continually on the alert, and looked out for intrigues with the acuteness of a policeman, followed women about, had all the impudence and all the cleverness of the fast man who has made love for forty years, without ever meaning anything serious, who knows all its lies, tricks and illusions,

² £600.

and who can still do a march without halting on the road, or requiring too much music to put him in proper trim. And in spite of his age and gray hairs, he could have given a sub-lieutenant points, and was very often loved for himself, which is the dream of men who have passed forty, and do not intend to give up the game just yet.

And there were not a dozen in the town who could, without lying, have declared to a jealous husband or a suspicious lover, that they had not, at any rate, once staid late in the little house in the Eglisottes quarter, who could have denied that they had not returned more thoughtful. Not a dozen, certainly, and, perhaps, not six!

Among that dozen or six, however, was Jacques de Montboron's mistress. She was a little marvel, that Madame Courtade, whom the Captain had unearthed in an ecclesiastical warehouse in the Faubourg Saint-Exupère, and not yet twenty. They had begun by smiling at each other, and by exchanging those long looks when they met, which seemed to ask for charity.

Montboron used to pass in front of the shop at the same hours, stopped for a moment with the appearance of a loungeur who was loitering about the streets, but immediately her supple figure appeared, pink and fair, shedding the brightness of youth and almost childhood round her, while her looks showed that she was delighted at little gallant incidents which dispelled the monotony and weariness of her life for a time, and gave rise to vague but delightful hopes.

Was love, that love which she had so constantly invoked, really knocking at her door at last, and taking pity on her unhappy isolation? Did that officer, whom she met whenever she went out, as if he had been faithfully watching her, when coming out of church, or when out for a walk in the evening, who said so many delightful things to her with his wheedling eyes, really love her as she wished to be loved, or was he merely amusing himself at that game, because he had nothing better to do in their quiet little town?

But in a short time he wrote to her, and she replied to him, and at last they managed to meet in secret, to make appointments, and talk together.

She knew all the cunning tricks of a simple girl, who has tasted the most delicious of sweets with the tip of her tongue, and acting in concert, and giving each other the word, so that there might be no awkward mistake, they managed to make the husband their unwitting accomplice, without his having the least idea of what was going on.

Courtade was an excellent fellow, who saw no further than the tip of his nose, incapable of rebelling, flabby, fat, steeped in devotion, and thinking too much about heaven to see what a plot was being hatched against him, in our unhappy vale of tears, as the psalters say.

In the good old days of confederacies, he would have made an excellent chief of a corporation; he loved his wife more like a father than a husband, considering that at his age a man ought no longer to think of such trifles, and that, after all, the only real happiness in life was to keep a good table and to have a good digestion, and so he ate like four canons, and drank in proportion.

Only once during his whole life had he shown anything like energy – but he used to relate that occurrence with all the pride of a conqueror, recalling his most heroic battle – and that was on the evening when he refused to allow the bishop to take his cook away, quite regardless of any of the consequences of such a daring deed.

In a few weeks, the Captain became his regular table companion, and his best friend. He had begun by telling him in a boastful manner that, in order to keep a vow that he had made to St. George, during the charge up the slope at Yron, during the battle of Gravelotte, he wished to send two censers and a sanctuary lamp to his village church.

Courtade did his utmost, and all the more readily as this unexpected customer did not appear to pay any regard to money. He sent for several goldsmiths, and showed Montboron models of all kinds; he hesitated, however, and did not seem able to make up his mind, and discussed the subject, designed ornaments himself, gained time, and thus managed to spend several hours every day in the shop.

In fact, he was quite at home in the place, shook hands with Courtade, called him "my dear fellow," and did not wince when he took his arm familiarly before other people, and introduced him to his customers as, "My excellent friend, the Marquis de Montboron." He could go in and out of the house as he pleased, whether the husband was at home or not.

The censers and the lamp were sent in due course to Montboron's château at Pacy-sur-Romanche (in Normandy), and when the package was undone, it caused the greatest surprise to Jacques' mother, who was more accustomed to receiving requests for money from her son, than ecclesiastical objects.

Suddenly, however, without rhyme or reason, little Madame Courtade became insupportable and enigmatical. Her husband could not understand it at all, and grew uneasy, and continually consulted his friend the Captain.

Etiennette's character seemed to have completely changed; she found fifty pretexts for deserting the shop, for coming late, for avoiding *tête-à-têtes*, in which people come to explanations, and mutually become irritated, though such matters usually end in a reconciliation, amidst a torrent of kisses.

She disappeared for days at a time, and soon, Montboron, who was not fitted to play the part of a Sganarelle, either by age or temperament, became convinced that his mistress was making him wear the horns, that she was hobnobbing with the General, and that she was in possession of one of the five keys of the house in the Eglisottes quarter; and as he was as jealous as an Andalusian, and felt a horror for that kind of pleasantry, he swore that he would make his rival pay a hundred fold for the trick which he had played him.

The Fourteenth of July was approaching, when there was to be a grand parade of the whole garrison on the large review ground, and all along the paling, which divided the spectators from the soldiers, itinerant dealers had put up their stalls, and there were mountebanks' and somnambulists' booths, menageries, and a large circus, which had gone through the town in caravans, with a great noise of trumpets and of drums.

He had given his aide-de-camp his instructions beforehand, for he was more anxious than ever to surprise people, and to have a horse like an equestrian statue, an animal which should outdo that famous black horse of General Boulanger's, about which the Parisian loungers had talked so much, and told Montboron not to mind what the price was, as long as he found him a suitable charger.

When the Captain, a few days before the review, brought him a chestnut jennet, with a long tail and flowing mane, which would not keep quiet for five seconds, but kept on shaking its head, had extraordinary action, answered the slightest touch of the leg, and stepped out as if it knew no other motion, General Daumont de Croisailles showered compliments upon him, and assured him that he knew few officers who possessed his intelligence and his value, and that he should not forget him when the proper time came for recommending him for promotion.

Not a muscle of the Marquis de Montboron's face moved, and when the day of the review arrived, he was at his post on the staff that followed the General, who sat as upright as a dart in the saddle, and looked at the crowd to see whether he could not recognize some old or new female friend there, while his horse pranced and plunged.

He rode onto the review ground, amidst the increasing noise of applause, with a smile upon his lips, when, suddenly, at the moment that he galloped up into the large square, formed by the troops drawn up in a line, the band of the fifty-third regiment struck up a quick march, and, as if obeying a preconcerted signal, the jennet began to turn round, and to accelerate its speed, in spite of the furious tugs at the bridle which the rider gave.

The horse performed beautifully, followed the rhythm of the music, and appeared to be acting under some invisible impulse, and the General had such a comical look on his face, he looked so disconcerted, rolled his eyes, and seemed to be the prey to such terrible exasperation, that he might have been taken for some character in a pantomime, while his staff followed him, without being able to comprehend this fresh fancy of his.

The soldiers presented arms, the music did not stop, though the instrumentalists were much astonished at this interminable ride.

The General at last became out of breath, and could scarcely keep in the saddle, and the women, in the crowded ranks of the spectators, gave prolonged, nervous laughs, which made the old *roué's* ears tingle with excitement.

The horse did not stop until the music ceased, and then it knelt down with bent head, and put its nostrils into the dust.

It nearly gave General de Croisailles an attack of the jaundice, especially when he found out that it was his aide-de-camp's *tit for tat*, and that the horse came from a circus which was giving performances in the town. And what irritated him all the more was, that he could not even set it down against Montboron and have him sent to some terrible out-of-the-way hole, for the Captain sent in his resignation, wisely considering that sooner or later he should have to pay the costs of that little trick, and that the chances were that he should not get any further promotion, but remain stationary, like a cab which some bilker has left standing for hours at one end of an arcade, while he has made his escape at the other.

RUST

During nearly his whole life, he had had an insatiable love for sport. He went out every day, from morning till night, with the greatest ardor, in summer and winter, spring and autumn, on the marshes, when it was close time on the plains and in the woods. He shot, he hunted, he coursed, he ferreted; he spoke of nothing but shooting and hunting, he dreamt of it, and continually repeated:

"How miserable any man must be who does not care for sport!"

And now that he was past fifty, he was well, robust, stout and vigorous, though rather bald, and he kept his moustache cut quite short, so that it might not cover his lips, and interfere with his blowing the horn.

He was never called by anything but his first Christian name, Monsieur Hector, but his full name was Baron Hector Gontran de Coutelier, and he lived in a small manor house which he had inherited, in the middle of the woods; and though he knew all the nobility of the department, and met its male representatives out shooting and hunting, he only regularly visited one family, the Courvilles, who were very pleasant neighbors, and had been allied to his race for centuries, and in their house he was liked, and taken the greatest care of, and he used to say: "If I were not a sportsman, I should like to be here always."

Monsieur de Courville had been his friend and comrade from childhood, and lived quietly as a gentleman farmer with his wife, daughter and son-in-law, Monsieur de Darnetot, who did nothing, under the pretext of being devoted to historical studies.

Baron de Coutelier often went and dined with his friends, as much with the object of telling them of the shots he had made, as of anything else. He had long stories about dogs and ferrets, of which he spoke as if they were persons of note, whom he knew very well. He analyzed them, and explained their thoughts and intentions:

"When Medor saw that the corn-crake was leading him such a dance, he said to himself: 'Wait a bit, my friend, we will have a joke.' And then, with a jerk of the head to me, to make me go into the corner of the clover field, he began to quarter the sloping ground, noisily brushing through the clover to drive the bird into a corner from which it could not escape.

"Everything happened as he had foreseen. Suddenly, the corn-crake found itself on the borders of the clover, and it could not go any further without showing itself; Medor stood and pointed, half-looking round at me, but at a sign from me, he drew up to it, flushed the corn-crake; *bang!* down it came, and Medor, as he brought it to me, wagged his tail, as much as to say: 'How about that, Monsieur Hector?'"

Courville, Darnetot, and the two ladies laughed very heartily at those picturesque descriptions into which the Baron threw his whole heart. He grew animated, moved his arms about, and gesticulated with his whole body; and when he described the death of anything he had killed, he gave a formidable laugh, and said:

"Was not that a good shot?"

As soon as they began to speak about anything else, he left off listening, and hummed a hunting song, or a few notes to imitate a hunting horn, to himself.

He had only lived for field sports, and was growing old, without thinking about it, or guessing it, when he had a severe attack of rheumatism, and was confined to his bed for two months, and nearly died of grief and weariness.

As he kept no female servant, for an old footman did all the cooking, he could not get any hot poultices, nor could he have any of those little attentions, nor anything that an invalid requires. His gamekeeper was his sick nurse, and as the servant found the time hang just as heavily on his hands as it did on his master's, he slept nearly all day and all night in any easy chair, while the Baron was swearing and flying into a rage between the sheets.

The ladies of the De Courville family came to see him occasionally, and those were hours of calm and comfort for him. They prepared his herb tea, attended to the fire, served him his breakfast up daintily, by the side of his bed, and when they were going again, he used to say:

"By Jove! You ought to come here altogether," which made them laugh heartily.

When he was getting better, and was beginning to go out shooting again, he went to dine with his friends one evening; but he was not at all in his usual spirits. He was tormented by one continual fear – that he might have another attack before shooting began, and when he was taking his leave at night, when the women were wrapping him up in a shawl, and tying a silk handkerchief round his neck, which he allowed to be done for the first time in his life, he said in a disconsolated voice:

"If it goes on like this, I shall be done for."

As soon as he had gone, Madame Darnetot said to her mother:

"We ought to try and get the Baron married."

They all raised their hands at the proposal. How was it that they had never thought of it before? And during all the rest of the evening they discussed the widows whom they knew, and their choice fell on a woman of forty, who was still pretty, fairly rich, very good-tempered and in excellent health, whose name was Madame Berthe Vilers, and, accordingly, she was invited to spend a month at the château. She was very dull at home, and was very glad to come; she was lively and active, and Monsieur de Coutelier took her fancy immediately. She amused herself with him as if he had been a living toy, and spent hours in asking him slyly about the sentiments of rabbits and the machinations of foxes, and he gravely distinguished between the various ways of looking at things which different animals had, and ascribed plans and subtle arguments to them, just as he did to men of his acquaintance.

The attention she paid him, delighted him, and one evening, to show his esteem for her, he asked her to go out shooting with him, which he had never done to any woman before, and the invitation appeared so funny to her that she accepted it.

It was quite an amusement for them to fit her out; everybody offered her something, and she came out in a sort of short riding habit, with boots and men's breeches, a short petticoat, a velvet jacket, which was too tight for her across the chest, and a huntsman's black velvet cap.

The Baron seemed as excited as if he were going to fire his first shot. He minutely explained to her the direction of the wind, and how different dogs worked. Then he took her into a field, and followed her as anxiously as a nurse does when her charge is trying to walk for the first time.

Medor soon made a point, and stopped with his tail out stiff and one paw up, and the Baron, standing behind his pupil, was trembling like a leaf, and whispered:

"Look out, they are par ... par ... partridges." And almost before he had finished, there was a loud *whirr—whirr*, and a covey of large birds flew up in the air, with a tremendous noise.

Madame Vilers was startled, shut her eyes, fired off both barrels and staggered at the recoil of the gun; but when she had recovered her self-possession, she saw that the Baron was dancing about like a madman, and that Medor was bringing back the first of the two partridges which she had killed.

From that day, Monsieur de Coutelier was in love with her, and used to say, raising his eyes: "What a woman!" And he used to go and see them every evening now, and talked about shooting.

One day, Monsieur de Courville, who was walking part of the way with him, asked him, suddenly:

"Why don't you marry her?"

The Baron was altogether taken by surprise, and said:

"What? I? Marry her? ... Well ... really..."

And he said no more for a while, but then, suddenly shaking hands with his companion, he said:

"Good-bye, my friend," and quickly disappeared in the darkness.

He did not go again for three days, but when he reappeared, he was pale from thinking the matter over, and graver than usual. Taking Monsieur de Courville aside, he said:

"That was a capital idea of yours; try and persuade her to accept me, for one might say that a woman like she is, was made for me, and you and I shall be able to have some sort of sport together, all the year round."

As Monsieur de Courville felt certain that his friend would not meet with a refusal, he replied:

"Propose to her immediately, my dear fellow, or would you rather that I did it for you?"

But the Baron grew suddenly nervous, and said, with some hesitation:

"No, ... no... I must go to Paris for ... for a few days. As soon as I come back, I will give you a definite answer." No other explanation was forthcoming, and he started the next morning.

He made a long stay. One, two, three weeks passed, but Monsieur de Coutelier did not return, and the Courvilles, who were surprised and uneasy, did not know what to say to their friend, whom they had informed of the Baron's wishes. Every other day they sent to his house for news of him, but none of his servants had a line.

But one evening, while Madame Vilers was singing, and accompanying herself on the piano, a servant came with a mysterious air, and told Monsieur de Courville that a gentleman wanted to see him. It was the Baron, in a traveling suit, who looked much altered and older, and as soon as he saw his old friend, he seized both his hands, and said, in a somewhat tired voice: "I have just returned, my dear friend, and I have come to you immediately; I am thoroughly knocked up."

Then he hesitated in visible embarrassment, and presently said:

"I wished to tell you ... immediately ... that ... that business ... you know what I mean ... must come to nothing."

Monsieur de Courville looked at him in stupefaction. "Must come to nothing?.. Why?"

"Oh! Do not ask me, please; it would be too painful for me to tell you; but you may rest assured that I am acting like an honorable man. I cannot ... I have no right ... no right, you understand, to marry this lady, and I will wait until she has gone, to come here again; it would be too painful for me to see her. Good-bye." And he absolutely ran away.

The whole family deliberated and discussed the matter, surmising a thousand things. The conclusion they came to was, that the Baron's past life concealed some great mystery, that, perhaps, he had natural children, or some connection of long standing. At any rate, the matter seemed serious, and so as to avoid any difficult complications, they adroitly informed Madame Vilers of the state of affairs, who returned home just as much of a widow as she had come.

Three months more passed, when one evening, when he had dined rather too well, and was rather unsteady on his legs, Monsieur de Coutelier, while he was smoking his pipe with Monsieur de Courville, said to him:

"You would really pity me, if you only knew how continually I am thinking about your friend."

But the other, who had been rather vexed at the Baron's behavior in the circumstances, told him exactly what he thought of him:

"By Jove, my good friend, when a man has any secrets in his existence, like you have, he does not make advances to a woman, immediately, as you did, for you must surely have foreseen the reason why you had to draw back."

The Baron left off smoking in some confusion.

"Yes, and no; at any rate, I could not have believed what actually happened."

Whereupon, Monsieur de Courville lost his patience, and replied:

"One ought to foresee everything."

But Monsieur de Coutelier replied in a low voice, in case anybody should be listening: "I see that I have hurt your feelings, and will tell you everything, so that you may forgive me. You know that for twenty years I have lived only for sport; I care for nothing else, and think about nothing else. Consequently, when I was on the point of undertaking certain obligations with regard to this lady, I felt some scruples of conscience. Since I have given up the habit of ... of love, there! I have not known whether I was still capable of ... you know what I mean ... Just think! It is exactly sixteen

years since ... I for the last time ... you understand what I mean. In this neighborhood, it is not easy to ... you know. And then, I had other things to do. I prefer to use my gun, and so before entering into an engagement before the Mayor³ and the Priest to ... well, I was frightened. I said to myself: 'Confound it; suppose I missed fire!' An honorable man always keeps his engagements, and in this case, I was undertaking sacred duties with regard to this lady, and so, to feel sure, I made up my mind to go and spend a week in Paris.

"At the end of that time, nothing, absolutely nothing occurred. I always lost the game... I waited for a fortnight, three weeks, continually hoping. In the restaurants, I ate a number of highly seasoned dishes, which upset my stomach, and ... and it was still the same thing ... or rather, nothing. You will, therefore, understand, that, in such circumstances, and having assured myself of the fact, the only thing I could do was ... was ... to withdraw; and I did so."

Monsieur de Courville had to struggle very hard not to laugh, and he shook hands with the Baron, saying:

"I am very sorry for you," and accompanied him half-way home.

When he got back, and was alone with his wife, he told her everything, nearly choking with laughter; she, however, did not laugh, but listened very attentively, and when her husband had finished, she said, very seriously:

"The Baron is a fool, my dear; he was frightened, that is all. I will write and ask Berthe to come back here as soon as possible."

And when Monsieur de Courville observed that their friend had made such long and useless attempts, she merely said:

"Nonsense! When a man loves his wife, you know ... that sort of thing adjusts itself to the situation."

And Monsieur de Courville made no reply, as he felt rather confused himself.

³ Civil marriage is obligatory in France, whether a religious ceremony takes place or not. – TRANSLATOR.

THE SUBSTITUTE

"Madame Bonderoi?"

"Yes, Madame Bonderoi."

"Impossible."

"I tell you it is."

Madame Bonderoi, the old lady in a lace cap, the devout, the holy, the honorable Madame Bonderoi, whose little false curls looked as if they were glued round her head.

"That is the very woman."

"Oh! Come, you must be mad."

"I swear to you that it is Madame Bonderoi."

"Then please give me the details."

"Here they are. During the life of Monsieur Bonderoi, the lawyer, people said that she utilized his clerks for her own particular service. She is one of those respectable middle-class women, with secret vices, and inflexible principles, of whom there are so many. She liked good-looking young fellows, and I should like to know what is more natural than that? Do not we all like pretty girls?"

"As soon as old Bonderoi was dead, his widow began to live the peaceful and irreproachable life of a woman with a fair, fixed income. She went to church assiduously, and spoke evil of her neighbors, but gave no handle to anyone for speaking ill of her, and when she grew old she became the little wizened, sour-faced, mischievous woman whom you know. Well, this adventure, which you would scarcely believe, happened last Friday.

"My friend, Jean d'Anglemare, is, as you know, a captain in a dragoon regiment, who is quartered in the barracks in the *Rue de la Rivette*, and when he got to his quarters the other morning, he found that two men of his squadron had had a terrible quarrel. The rules about military honor are very severe, and so a duel took place between them. After the duel they became reconciled, and when their officer questioned them, they told him what their quarrel had been about. They had fought on Madame Bonderoi's account."

"Oh!"

"Yes, my dear fellow, about Madame Bonderoi."

"But I will let Trooper Siballe speak."

"This is how it was, Captain. About a year and a half ago, I was lounging about the barrack-yard, between six and seven o'clock in the evening, when a woman came up and spoke to me, and said, just as if she had been asking her way: 'Soldier, would you like to earn ten francs a week, honestly?' Of course, I told her that I decidedly should, and so she said: 'Come and see me at twelve o'clock tomorrow morning. I am Madame Bonderoi, and my address is No. 6, *Rue de la Tranchée*.' 'You may rely upon my being there, Madame.' And then she went away, looking very pleased, and she added: 'I am very much obliged to you, soldier.' 'I am obliged to you, Madame,' I replied. But I plagued my head about the matter, until the time came, all the same.

"At twelve o'clock, exactly, I rang the bell, and she let me in herself. She had a lot of ribbons on her head.

"'We must make haste,' she said; 'as my servant might come in.'

"'I am quite willing to make haste,' I replied, 'but what am I to do?'

"'But she only laughed, and replied: 'Don't you understand, you great knowing fellow?'

"'I was no nearer her meaning, I give you my word of honor, Captain, but she came and sat down by me, and said:

"'If you mention this to anyone, I will have you put in prison, so swear that you will never open your lips about it.'

"I swore whatever she liked, though I did not at all understand what she meant, and my forehead was covered with perspiration, so I took my pocket-handkerchief out of my helmet, and she took it and wiped my brow with it; then she kissed me, and whispered: 'Then you will?' 'I will do anything you like, Madame,' I replied, 'as that is what I came for.'

"Then she made herself clearly understood by her actions, and when I saw what it was, I put my helmet onto a chair, and showed her that in the dragoons a man never retires, Captain.

"Not that I cared much about it, for she was certainly not in her prime, but it is no good being too particular in such a matter, as ten francs are scarce, and then I have relations whom I like to help, and I said to myself: 'There will be five francs for my father, out of that.'

"When I had done my allotted task, Captain, I got ready to go, though she wanted me to stop longer, but I said to her:

"'To everyone their due, Madame. A small glass of brandy costs two sous, and two glasses cost four.'

"She understood my meaning, and put a gold ten-franc piece into my hand. I do not like that coin, because it is so small that if your pockets are not very well made, and come at all unsewn, one is apt to find it in one's boots, or not to find it at all, and so, while I was looking at it, she was looking at me. She got red in the face, as she had misunderstood my looks, and she said: 'Is not that enough?'

"'I did not mean that, Madame,' I replied; 'but if it is all the same to you, I would rather have two five-franc pieces.' And she gave them to me, and I took my leave. This has been going on for a year and a half, Captain. I go every Tuesday evening, when you give me leave to go out of barracks; she prefers that, as her servant has gone to bed then, but last week I was not well, and I had to go into the infirmary. When Tuesday came, I could not get out, and I was very vexed, because of the ten francs which I had been receiving every week, and I said to myself:

"'If anybody goes there, I shall be done; and she will be sure to take an artilleryman, and that made me very angry. So I sent for Paumelle, who comes from my part of the country, and I told him how matters stood:

"'There will be five francs for you, and five for me,' I said. He agreed, and went, as I had given him full instructions. She opened the door as soon as he knocked, and let him in, and as she did not look at his face, she did not perceive that it was not I, for, you know, Captain, one dragoon is very like another, with their helmets on.

"Suddenly, however, she noticed the change, and she asked, angrily: 'Who are you? What do you want? I do not know you.'

"Then Paumelle explained matters; he told her that I was not well, and that I had sent him as my substitute; so she looked at him, made him also swear to keep the matter secret, and then she accepted him, as you may suppose, for Paumelle is not a bad-looking fellow, either. But when he came back, Captain, he would not give me my five francs. If they had been for myself, I should not have said a word, but they were for my father, and on that score, I would stand no nonsense, and I said to him:

"'You are not particular in what you do, for a dragoon; you are a discredit to your uniform.'

"He raised his fist, Captain, saying that fatigue duty like that was worth double. Of course, everybody has his own ideas, and he ought not to have accepted it. You know the rest."

"Captain d'Anglemare laughed until he cried as he told me the story, but he also made me promise to keep the matter a secret, just as he had promised the two soldiers. So, above all, do not betray me, but promise me to keep it to yourself."

"Oh! You may be quite easy about that. But how was it all arranged, in the end?"

"How? It is a joke in a thousand!.. Mother Bonderoi keeps her two dragoons, and reserves his own particular day for each of them, and in that way everybody is satisfied."

"Oh! That is capital! Really capital!"

"And he can send his old father and mother the money as usual, and thus morality is satisfied."

THE RELIC

To the Abbé Louis d'Ennemaire, at Soissons.

"My Dear Abbé:

"My marriage with your cousin is broken off in the stupidest manner, on account of a stupid trick which I almost involuntarily played my intended, in my embarrassment, and I turn to you, my old schoolfellow, for you may be able to help me out of the difficulty. If you can, I shall be grateful to you until I die.

"You know Gilberte, or rather you think you know her, for do we ever understand women? All their opinions, their ideas, their creeds, are a surprise to us. They are all full of twists and turns, of the unforeseen, of unintelligible arguments, or defective logic and of obstinate ideas, which seem final, but which they alter because a little bird came and perched on the window ledge.

"I need not tell you that your cousin is very religious, as she was brought up by the *White* (or was it the *Black*?) *Ladies* at Nancy. You know that better than I do, but what you perhaps do not know, is, that she is just as excitable about other matters as she is about religion. Her head flies away, just like a leaf being whirled away by the wind; and she is a woman, or rather a girl, more so than many are, for she is moved, or made angry in a moment, starting off at a gallop after affection, just as she does after hatred, and returning in the same manner; and she is as pretty ... as you know, and more charming than I can say ... as you will never know.

"Well, we became engaged, and I adored her, as I adore her still, and she appeared to love me.

"One evening, I received a telegram summoning me to Cologne for a consultation, which might be followed by a serious and difficult operation, and as I had to start the next morning, I went to wish Gilberte goodbye, and tell her why I could not dine with them on Wednesday, but on Friday, the day of my return. Ah! Take care of Fridays, for I assure you they are unlucky!

"When I told her that I had to go to Germany, I saw that her eyes filled with tears, but when I said I should be back very soon, she clapped her hands, and said:

"I am very glad you are going, then! You must bring me back something; a mere trifle, just a souvenir, but a souvenir that you have chosen for me. You must find out what I should like best, do you hear? And then I shall see whether you have any imagination.'

"She thought for a few moments, and then added:

"I forbid you to spend more than twenty francs on it. I want it for the intention, and for the remembrance of your penetration, and not for its intrinsic value.'

"And then, after another moment's silence, she said, in a low voice, and with downcast eyes.

"If it costs you nothing in money, and if it is something very ingenious and pretty, I will ... I will kiss you.'

"The next day, I was in Cologne. It was the case of a terrible accident, which had thrown a whole family into despair, and a difficult amputation was necessary. They put me up; I might say, they almost locked me up, and I saw nobody but people in tears, who almost deafened me with their lamentations; I operated on a man who appeared to be in a moribund state, and who nearly died under my hands, and with whom I remained two nights, and then, when I saw that there was a chance for his

recovery, I drove to the station. I had, however, made a mistake in the trains, and I had an hour to wait, and so I wandered about the streets, still thinking of my poor patient, when a man accosted me. I do not know German, and he was totally ignorant of French, but at last I made out that he was offering me some relics. I thought of Gilberte, for I knew her fanatical devotion, and here was my present ready to hand, so I followed the man into a shop where religious objects were for sale, and I bought *a small piece of a bone of one of the Eleven Thousand Virgins*.

"The pretended relic was enclosed in a charming, old silver box, and that determined my choice, and putting my purchase into my pocket, I went to the railway station, and so to Paris.

"As soon as I got home, I wished to examine my purchase again, and on taking hold of it, I found that the box was open, and the relic lost! It was no good to hunt in my pocket, and to turn it inside out; the small bit of bone, which was no bigger than half a pin, had disappeared.

"You know, my dear little Abbé, that my faith is not very great, but, as my friend, you are magnanimous enough to put up with my coldness, and to leave me alone, and to wait for the future, so you say. But I absolutely disbelieve in the relics of second-hand dealers in piety, and you share my doubts in that respect. Therefore, the loss of that bit of sheep's carcass did not grieve me, and I easily procured a similar fragment, which I carefully fastened inside my jewel, and then I went to see my intended.

"As soon as she saw me, she ran up to me, smiling and anxious, and said to me: "What have you brought me?"

"I pretended to have forgotten, but she did not believe me, and I made her beg me, and beseech me, even. But when I saw that she was devoured by curiosity, I gave her the sacred silver box. She appeared over-joyed.

"A relic! Oh! A relic!"

"And she kissed the box passionately, so that I was ashamed of my deception. She was not quite satisfied, however, and her uneasiness soon turned to terrible fear, and looking straight into my eyes, she said:

"Are you sure that it is authentic?"

"Absolutely certain."

"How can you be so certain?"

"I was caught, for to say that I had bought it through a man in the streets, would be my destruction. What was I to say? A wild idea struck me, and I said, in a low, mysterious voice:

"I stole it for you."

"She looked at me with astonishment and delight in her large eyes.

"Oh! You stole it? Where?"

"In the cathedral; in the very shrine of the Eleven Thousand Virgins."

"Her heart beat with pleasure, and she murmured:

"Oh! Did you really do that ... for me? Tell me ... all about it!"

"There was an end of it, and I could not go back. I made up a fanciful story, with precise details. I had given the custodian of the building a hundred francs to be allowed to go about the building by myself; the shrine was being repaired, but I happened to be there at the breakfast time of the workmen and clergy; by removing a small panel, I had been enabled to seize a small piece of bone (oh! so small), among a quantity of others, (I said a quantity, as I thought of the amount that the remains of the skeletons of eleven thousand virgins must produce). Then I went to a goldsmith's

and bought a casket worthy of the relic; and I was not sorry to let her know that the silver box cost me five hundred francs.

"But she did not think of that; she listened to me, trembling; in an ecstasy, and whispering:

"How I love you!" she threw herself into my arms.

"Just note this: I had committed sacrilege for her sake. I had committed a theft; I had violated a shrine; violated and stolen holy relics, and for that she adored me, thought me loving, tender, divine. Such is woman, my dear Abbé.

"For two months I was the best of lovers. In her room, she had made a kind of magnificent chapel in which to keep this bit of mutton chop, which, as she thought, had made me commit that love-crime, and she worked up her religious enthusiasm in front of it every morning and evening. I had asked her to keep the matter secret, for fear, as I said, that I might be arrested, condemned and given over to Germany, and she kept her promise.

"Well, at the beginning of the summer, she was seized with an irresistible wish to see the scene of my exploit, and she begged her father so persistently (without telling him her secret reason), that he took her to Cologne, but without telling me of their trip, according to his daughter's wish.

"I need not tell you that I had not seen the interior of the cathedral. I do not know where the tomb (if there be a tomb), of the Eleven Thousand Virgins is, and then, it appears that it is unapproachable, alas!

"A week afterwards, I received ten lines, breaking off our engagement, and then an explanatory letter from her father, whom she had, somewhat late, taken into her confidence.

"At the sight of the shrine, she had suddenly seen through my trickery and my lie, and had also found out that I was innocent of any other crime. Having asked the keeper of the relics whether any robbery had been committed, the man began to laugh, and pointed out to them how impossible such a crime was, but from the moment I had plunged my profane hand into venerable relics, I was no longer worthy of my fair-haired and delicate betrothed.

"I was forbidden the house; I begged and prayed in vain, nothing could move the fair devotee, and I grew ill from grief. Well, last week, her cousin, Madame d'Arville, who is yours also, sent word to me that she should like to see me, and when I called, she told me on what conditions I might obtain my pardon, and here they are. I must bring her a relic, a real, authentic relic, certified to be such by Our Holy Father, the Pope, of some virgin and martyr, and I am going mad from embarrassment and anxiety.

"I will go to Rome, if needful, but I cannot call on the Pope unexpectedly, and tell him my stupid adventure; and, besides, I doubt whether they let private individuals have relics. Could not you give me an introduction to some cardinal, or only to some French prelate, who possesses some remains of a female saint? Or perhaps you may have the precious object she wants in your collection?

"Help me out of my difficulty, my dear Abbé, and I promise you that I will be converted ten years sooner than I otherwise should be!

"Madame d'Arville, who takes the matter seriously, said to me the other day:

"Poor Gilberte will never marry."

"My dear old schoolfellow, will you allow your cousin to die the victim of a stupid piece of business on my part? Pray prevent her from being the eleventh thousand and one virgin.

"Pardon me, I am unworthy, but I embrace you, and love you with all my heart.
"Your old friend,
"Henri Fontal."

THE MAN WITH THE BLUE EYES

Monsieur Pierre Agénor de Vargnes, the Examining Magistrate, was the exact opposite of a practical joker. He was dignity, staidness, correctness personified. As a sedate man, he was quite incapable of being guilty, even in his dreams, of anything resembling a practical joke, however remotely. I know nobody to whom he could be compared, unless it be the present president of the French Republic. I think it is useless to carry the analogy any further, and having said thus much, it will be easily understood that a cold shiver passed through me when Monsieur Pierre Agénor de Vargnes did me the honor of sending a lady to wait on me.

At about eight o'clock, one morning last winter, as he was leaving the house to go to the *Palais de Justice*, his footman handed him a card, on which was printed:

DOCTOR JAMES FERDINAND,
Member of the Academy of Medicine,
Port-au-Prince,
Chevalier of the Legion of Honor.

At the bottom of the card, there was written in pencil:

From Lady Frogère

Monsieur de Vargnes knew the lady very well, who was a very agreeable Creole from Haiti, and whom he had met in many drawing-rooms, and, on the other hand, though the doctor's name did not awaken any recollections in him, his quality and titles alone required that he should grant him an interview, however short it might be. Therefore, although he was in a hurry to get out, Monsieur de Vargnes told the footman to show in his early visitor, but to tell him beforehand that his master was much pressed for time, as he had to go to the Law Courts.

When the doctor came in, in spite of his usual imperturbability, he could not restrain a movement of surprise, for the doctor presented that strange anomaly of being a negro of the purest, blackest type, with the eyes of a white man, of a man from the North, pale, cold, clear, blue eyes, and his surprise increased when, after a few words of excuse for his untimely visit, he added, with an enigmatical smile:

"My eyes surprise you, do they not? I was sure that they would, and, to tell you the truth, I came here in order that you might look at them well, and never forget them."

His smile, and his words, even more than his smile, seemed to be those of a madman. He spoke very softly, with that childish, lisping voice, which is peculiar to negroes, and his mysterious, almost menacing words, consequently, sounded all the more as if they were uttered at random by a man bereft of his reason. But his looks, the looks of those pale, cold, clear, blue eyes, were certainly not those of a madman. They clearly expressed menace, yes, menace, as well as irony, and, above all, implacable ferocity, and their glance was like a flash of lightning, which one could never forget.

"I have seen," Monsieur de Vargnes used to say, when speaking about it, "the looks of many murderers, but in none of them have I ever observed such a depth of crime, and of impudent security in crime."

And this impression was so strong, that Monsieur de Vargnes thought that he was the sport of some hallucination, especially as when he spoke about his eyes, the doctor continued with a smile, and in his most childish accents: "Of course, Monsieur, you cannot understand what I am saying to you, and I must beg your pardon for it. To-morrow, you will receive a letter which will explain it at all to you, but, first all, it was necessary that I should let you have a good, a careful look at my eyes, my eyes which are myself, my only and true self, as you will see."

With these words, and with a polite bow, the doctor went out, leaving Monsieur de Vargnes extremely surprised, and a prey to this doubt, as he said to himself:

"Is he merely a madman? The fierce expression, and the criminal depths of his looks are perhaps caused merely by the extraordinary contrast between his fierce looks and his pale eyes."

And absorbed in these thoughts, Monsieur de Vargnes unfortunately allowed several minutes to elapse, and then he thought to himself suddenly:

"No, I am not the sport of any hallucination, and this is no case of an optical phenomenon. This man is evidently some terrible criminal, and I have altogether failed in my duty in not arresting him myself at once, illegally, even at the risk of my life."

The judge ran downstairs in pursuit of the doctor, but it was too late; he had disappeared. In the afternoon, he called on Madame Frogère, to ask her whether she could tell him anything about the matter. She, however, did not know the negro doctor in the least, and was even able to assure him that he was a fictitious personage, for, as she was well acquainted with the upper classes in Haiti, she knew that the Academy of Medicine at Port-au-Prince had no doctor of that name among its members. As Monsieur de Vargnes persisted, and gave descriptions of the doctor, especially mentioning his extraordinary eyes, Madame Frogère began to laugh, and said:

"You have certainly had to do with a hoaxer, my dear Monsieur. The eyes which you have described, are certainly those of a white man, and the individual must have been painted."

On thinking it over, Monsieur de Vargnes remembered that the doctor had nothing of the negro about him, but his black skin, his woolly hair and beard, and his way of speaking, which was easily imitated, but nothing of the negro, not even the characteristic, undulating walk. Perhaps, after all, he was only a practical joker, and during the whole day, Monsieur de Vargnes took refuge in that view, which rather wounded his dignity as a man of consequence, but which appeased his scruples as a magistrate.

The next day, he received the promised letter, which was written, as well as addressed, in letters cut out of the newspapers. It was as follows:

"MONSIEUR, —

"Doctor James Ferdinand does not exist, but the man whose eyes you saw does, and you will certainly recognize his eyes. This man has committed two crimes, for which he does not feel any remorse, but, as he is a psychologist, he is afraid of some day yielding to the irresistible temptation of confessing his crimes. You know better than anyone (and that is your most powerful aid), with what imperious force criminals, especially intellectual ones, feel this temptation. That great Poet, Edgar Poe, has written masterpieces on this subject, which express the truth exactly, but he has omitted to mention the last phenomenon, which *I* will tell you. Yes, I, a criminal, feel a terrible wish for somebody to know of my crimes, and, when this requirement is satisfied, my secret has been revealed to a confidant, I shall be tranquil for the future, and be freed from this demon of perversity, which only tempts us once. Well! Now that is accomplished. You shall have *my* secret; from the day that you recognize me by my eyes, you will try and find out what I am guilty of, and how I was guilty, and you will discover it, being a master of your profession, which, by-the-bye, has procured you the honor of having been chosen by me to bear the weight of this secret, which now is shared by us, and by us two alone. I say, advisedly, *by us two alone*. You could not, as a matter of fact, prove the reality of this secret to anyone, unless I were to confess it, and I defy you to obtain my public confession, as I have confessed it to you, *and without danger to myself*."

Three months later, Monsieur de Vargnes met Monsieur X – at an evening party and at first sight, and without the slightest hesitation, he recognized in him those very pale, very cold, and very clear blue eyes, eyes which it was impossible to forget.

The man himself remained perfect impassive, so that Monsieur de Vargnes was forced to say to himself:

"Probably I am the sport of a hallucination at this moment, or else there are two pairs of eyes that are perfectly similar, in the world. And what eyes! Can it be possible?"

The magistrate instituted inquiries into his life, and he discovered this, which removed all his doubts.

Five years previously, Monsieur X – had been a very poor, but very brilliant medical student, who, although he never took his doctor's degree, had already made himself remarkable by his microbiological researches.

A young and very rich widow had fallen in love with him and married him. She had one child by her first marriage, and in the space of six months, first the child and then the mother died of typhoid fever, and thus Monsieur X – had inherited a large fortune, in due form, and without any possible dispute. Everybody said that he had attended to the two patients with the utmost devotion. Now, were these two deaths the two crimes mentioned in his letter?

But then, Monsieur X – must have poisoned his two victims with the microbes of typhoid fever, which he had skillfully cultivated in them, so as to make the disease incurable, even by the most devoted care and attention. Why not?

"Do you believe it?" I asked Monsieur de Vargnes. "Absolutely," he replied. "And the most terrible thing about it is, that the villain is right when he defies me to force him to confess his crime publicly for I see no means of obtaining a confession, none whatever. For a moment, I thought of magnetism, but who could magnetize that man with those pale, cold, bright eyes? With such eyes, he would force the magnetizer to denounce himself as the culprit."

And then he said, with a deep sigh:

"Ah! Formerly there was something good about justice!"

And when he saw my inquiring looks, he added in a firm and perfectly convinced voice:

"Formerly, justice had torture at its command."

"Upon my word," I replied, with all an author's unconscious and simple egotism, "it is quite certain that without the torture, this strange tale would have no conclusion, and that is very unfortunate, as far as regards the story I intended to make of it."

ALLOUMA

I

One of my friends had said to me: —

"If you happen to be near Bordj-Ebbaba while you are in Algeria, be sure and go to see my old friend Auballe, who has settled there."

I had forgotten the name of Auballe and of Ebbaba, and I was not thinking of this planter, when I arrived at his house by pure accident. For a month, I had been wandering on foot through that magnificent district which extends from Algiers to Cherchell, Orléansville, and Tiaret. It is at the same time wooded and bare, grand and charming. Between two hills, one comes across large pine forests in narrow valleys, through which torrents rush in the winter. Enormous trees, which have fallen across the ravine, serve as a bridge for the Arabs, and also for the tropical creepers, which twine round the dead stems, and adorn them with new life. There are hollows, in little known recesses of the mountains, of a terribly beautiful character, and the sides of the brooks, which are covered with oleanders, are indescribably lovely.

But what has left behind it the most pleasant recollections of that excursion, is the long after-dinner walks along the slightly wooded roads on those undulating hills, from which one can see an immense tract of country from the blue sea as far as the chain of the Quarsenis, on whose summit there is the cedar forest of Teniet-el-Haad.

On that day I lost my way. I had just climbed to the top of a hill, whence, beyond a long extent of rising ground, I had seen the extensive plain of Metidja, and then, on the summit of another chain, almost invisible in the distances that strange monument which is called *The Tomb of the Christian Woman*, and which was said to be the burial-place of the kings of Mauritana. I went down again, going southward, with a yellow landscape before me, extending as far as the fringe of the desert, as yellow as if all those hills were covered with lions' skins sewn together, sometimes a pointed yellow peak would rise out of the midst of them, like the bristly back of a camel.

I walked quickly and lightly, like as one does when following tortuous paths on a mountain slope. Nothing seems to weigh on one in those short, quick walks through the invigorating air of those heights, neither the body, nor the heart, nor the thoughts, nor even cares. On that day I felt nothing of all that crushes and tortures our life; I only felt the pleasure of that descent. In the distance I saw an Arab encampment, brown pointed tents, which seemed fixed to the earth, like limpets are to a rock, or else *gourbis*, huts made of branches, from which a gray smoke rose. White figures, men and women, were walking slowly about, and the bells of the flocks sounded vaguely through the evening air.

The arbutus trees on my road hung down under the weight of their purple fruit, which was falling on the ground. They looked like martyred trees, from which blood-colored sweat was falling, for at the top of every tier there was a red spot, like a drop of blood.

The earth all round them was covered with it, and as my feet crushed the fruit, they left blood-colored traces behind them, and sometimes, as I went along, I would jump and pick one, and eat it.

All the valleys were by this time filled with a white vapor, which rose slowly, like the steam from the flanks of an ox, and on the chain of mountains that bordered the horizon, on the outskirts of the desert of Sahara, the sky was in flames. Long streaks of gold alternated with streaks of blood — blood again! Blood and gold, the whole of human history — and sometimes between the two there was a small opening in the greenish azure, far away like a dream.

How far away I was from all those persons and things with which one occupies oneself on the boulevards, far from myself also, for I had become a kind of wandering being, without thought or

consciousness, far from any road, of which I was not even thinking, for as night came on, I found that I had lost my way.

The shades of night were falling onto the earth like a shower of darkness, and I saw nothing before me but the mountains, in the far distance. Presently, I saw some tents in the valley, into which I descended, and tried to make the first Arab I met understand in which direction I wanted to go. I do not know whether he understood me, but he gave me a long answer, which I did not in the least understand. In despair, I was about to make up my mind to pass the night wrapped up in a rug near the encampment, when among the strange words he uttered, I fancied that I heard the name, *Bordj-Ebbaba*, and so I repeated:

"*Bordj-Ebbaba*."

"Yes, yes."

I showed him two francs that were a fortune to him, and he started off, while I followed him. Ah! I followed that pale phantom which strode on before me bare-footed along stony paths, on which I stumbled continually, for a long time, and then suddenly I saw a light, and we soon reached the door of a white house, a kind of fortress with straight walls, and without any outside windows. When I knocked, dogs began to bark inside, and a voice asked in French:

"Who is there?"

"Does Monsieur Auballe live here?" I asked.

"Yes."

The door was opened for me, and I found myself face to face with Monsieur Auballe himself, a tall man in slippers, with a pipe in his mouth and the looks of a jolly Hercules.

As soon as I mentioned my name, he put out both his hands and said:

"Consider yourself at home here, Monsieur."

A quarter of an hour later I was dining ravenously, opposite to my host, who went on smoking.

I knew his history. After having wasted a great amount of money on women, he had invested the remnants of his fortune in Algerian landed property and taken to money-making. It turned out prosperously; he was happy, and had the calm look of a happy and contented man. I could not understand how this fast Parisian could have grown accustomed to that monstrous life in such a lonely spot, and I asked him about it.

"How long have you been here?" I asked him.

"For nine years."

"And have you not been intolerably dull and miserable?"

"No, one gets used to this country, and ends by liking it. You cannot imagine how it lays hold on people by those small, animal instincts that we are ignorant of ourselves. We first become attached to it by our organs, to which it affords secret gratifications which we do not inquire into. The air and the climate overcome our flesh, in spite of ourselves, and the bright light with which it is inundated keeps the mind clear and fresh, at but little cost. It penetrates us continually by our eyes, and one might really say that it cleanses the somber nooks of the soul."

"But what about women?"

"Ah...! There is rather a dearth of them!"

"Only *rather*?"

"Well, yes ... rather. For one can always, even among the Arabs, find some complaisant, native women, who think of the nights of Roumi."

He turned to the Arab, who was waiting on me, who was a tall, dark fellow, with bright, black eyes, that flashed beneath his turban, and said to him:

"I will call you when I want you, Mohammed." And then, turning to me, he said:

"He understands French, and I am going to tell you a story in which he plays a leading part."

As soon as the man had left the room, he began:

"I had been here about four years, and scarcely felt quite settled yet in this country, whose language I was beginning to speak, and forced, in order not to break altogether with those passions that had been fatal to me in other places, to go to Algiers for a few days, from time to time.

"I had bought this farm, this *bordj*, which had been a fortified post, and was within a few hundred yards from the native encampment, whose man I employ to cultivate my land. Among the tribe that had settled here, and which formed a portion of the Oulad-Taadja, I chose, as soon as I arrived here, that tall fellow whom you have just seen, Mohammed ben Lam'har, who soon became greatly attached to me. As he would not sleep in a house, not being accustomed to it, he pitched his tent a few yards from my house, so that I might be able to call him from my window.

"You can guess what my life was, I dare say? Every day I was busy with cleanings and plantations; I hunted a little, I used to go and dine with the officers of the neighboring fortified posts, or else they came and dined with me. As for pleasures ... I have told you what they consisted in. Algiers offered me some which were rather more refined, and from time to time a complaisant and compassionate Arab would stop me when I was out for a walk, and offer to bring one of the women of his tribe to my house at night. Sometimes I accepted, but more frequently I refused, from fear of the disagreeable consequences and troubles it might entail upon me.

"One evening, at the beginning of summer, as I was going home, after going over the farm, as I wanted Mohammed, I went into his tent without calling him, as I frequently did, and there I saw a woman, a girl, sleeping almost naked, with her arms crossed under her head, on one of those thick, red carpets, made of the fine wool of Djebel-Amour, and which are as soft and as thick as a feather bed. Her body, which was beautifully white under the ray of light that came in through the raised covering of the tent, appeared to me to be one of the most perfect specimens of the human race that I had ever seen, and most of the women about here are beautiful and tall, and are a rare combination of features and shape. I let the edge of the tent fall in some confusion, and returned home.

"I love women! The sudden flash of this vision had penetrated and scorched me, and had rekindled in my veins that old, formidable ardor to which I owe my being here. It was very hot for it was July, and I spent nearly the whole night at my window, with my eyes fixed on the black Mohammed's tent made on the ground.

"When he came into my room the next morning, I looked him closely in the face, and he hung his head, like a man who was guilty and in confusion. Did he guess that I knew? I, however, asked him, suddenly:

"'So you are married, Mohammed?' and I saw that he got red, and he stammered out: 'No, *mo'ssieuia!*'

"I used to make him speak French to me, and to give me Arabic lessons, which was often productive of a most incoherent mixture of languages; however, I went on:

"'Then why is there a woman in your tent?'

"'She comes from the South,' he said, in a low, apologetic voice.

"'Oh! So she comes from the South? But that does not explain to me how she comes to be in your tent.'

"Without answering my question, he continued:

"'She is very pretty.'

"'Oh! Indeed. Another time, please, when you happen to receive a pretty woman from the South, you will take care that she comes to my *gourbi*, and not to yours. You understand me, Mohammed?'

"'Yes, *mo'ssieuia*,' he repeated, seriously.

"I must acknowledge that during the whole day I was in a state of aggressive excitement at the recollection of that Arab girl lying on the red carpet, and when I went in at dinner time, I felt very strongly inclined to go to Mohammed's tent again. During the evening, he waited on me just as usual, and hovered round me with his impassive face, and several times I was very nearly asking

him whether he intended to keep that girl from the South, who was very pretty, in his camel skin tent for a long time.

"Towards nine o'clock, still troubled with that longing for female society which is as tenacious as the hunting instinct in dogs, I went out to get some fresh air, and to stroll about a little round that cone of brown skin through which I could see a brilliant speck of light. I did not remain long, however, for fear of being surprised by Mohammed in the neighborhood of his dwelling. When I went in an hour later, I clearly saw his outline in the tent, and then, taking the key out of my pocket, I went into the *bordj*, where besides myself, there slept my steward, two French laborers, and an old cook whom I had picked up in the Algiers. As I went up stairs, I was surprised to see a streak of light under my door, and when I opened it, I saw a girl with the face of a statue sitting on a straw chair by the side of the table, on which a wax candle was burning; she was bedizened with all those silver gew-gaws which women in the South wear on their legs, arms, breast, and even on their stomach. Her eyes, which were tinged with kohl, to make them look larger, regarded me earnestly, and four little blue spots, finely tattooed on her skin, marked her forehead, her cheeks, and her chin. Her arms, which were loaded with bracelets, were resting on her thighs, which were covered by the long, red silk skirt that she wore.

"When she saw me come in, she got up and remained standing in front of me, covered with her barbaric jewels, in an attitude of proud submission.

"What are you doing here?' I said to her in Arabic.

"I am here because Mohammed told me to come.'

"Very well, sit down.'

"So she sat down and lowered her eyes, while I examined her attentively.

"She had a strange, regular, delicate, and rather bestial face, but mysterious as that of a Buddha. Her lips, which were rather thick and covered with a reddish efflorescence, which I discovered on the rest of her body as well, indicated a slight admixture of negro blood, although her hands and arms were of an irreproachable whiteness.

"I hesitated what to do with her, and felt excited, tempted and rather confused, so in order to gain time and to give myself an opportunity for reflection, I put other questions to her, about her birth, how she came into this part of the country, and what her connection with Mohammed was. But she only replied to those that interested me the least, and it was impossible for me to find out why she had come, with what intention, by whose orders, nor what had taken place between her and my servant. However, just as I was about to say to her: 'Go back to Mohammed's tent,' she seemed to guess my intention, for getting up suddenly, and raising her two bare arms, on which the jingling bracelets slipped down to her shoulders, she crossed her hands behind my neck and drew me towards her with an irresistible air of suppliant longing.

"Her eyes, which were bright from emotion, from that necessity of conquering man, which makes the looks of an impure woman as seductive as those of the feline tribe, allured me, enchained me, deprived me of all the power of resistance, and filled me with impetuous ardor. It was a short, sharp struggle of the eyes only, that eternal struggle between those two human brutes, the male and the female, in which the male is always beaten.

"Her hands, which had clasped behind my head, drew me irresistibly, with a gentle, increasing pressure, as if by mechanical force towards her red lips, on which I suddenly laid mine while, at the same moment, I clasped her body, that was covered with jingling silver rings, in an ardent embrace.

"She was as strong, as healthy, and as supple as a wild animal, with all the motions, the ways, the grace, and even something of the odor of a gazelle, which made me find a rare, unknown zest in her kisses, which was as strange to my senses as the taste of tropical fruits.

"Soon – I say soon, although it may have been towards morning – I wished to send her away, as I thought that she would go in the same way that she had come; I did not, even, at the moment,

ask myself what I should do with her, or what she would do with me, but as soon as she guessed my intention, she whispered:

"What do you expect me to do if you get rid of me now? I shall have to sleep on the ground in the open air at night. Let me sleep on the carpet, at the foot of your bed."

"What answer could I give her, or what could I do? I thought that no doubt Mohammed also would be watching the window of my room, in which a light was burning, and questions of various natures, that I had not put to myself during the first minutes, formulated themselves clearly in my brain.

"Stop here," I replied, "and we will talk."

"My resolution was taken in a moment. As this girl had been thrown into my arms, in this manner, I would keep her; I would make her a kind of slave-mistress, hidden in my house, like women in a harem are. When the time should come that I no longer cared for her, it would be easy for me to get rid of her in some way or another, for on African soil those sort of creatures almost belong to us, body and soul, and so I said to her:

"I wish to be kind to you, and I will treat you so that you shall not be unhappy, but I want to know who you are and where you come from?"

"She saw clearly that she must say something, and she told me her story, or rather a story, for no doubt she was lying from beginning to end, like all Arabs always do, with or without any motive.

"That is one of the most surprising and incomprehensible signs of the native character – the Arabs always lie. Those people in whom Islam has become so incarnate that it has become part of themselves, to such an extent as to model their instincts and modifies the entire race, and to differentiate it from others in morals just as much as the color of the skin differentiates a negro from a white man, are liars to the backbone, so that one can never trust a word that they say. I do not know whether they owe that to their religion, but one must have lived among them in order to know the extent to which lying forms part of their being, of their heart and soul, until it has become a kind of second nature, a very necessity of life, with them.

"Well, she told me that she was the daughter of a *Caidi* of the *Ouled Sidi Cheik*, and of a woman whom he had carried off in a raid against the Touaregs. The woman must have been a black slave, or, at any rate, have sprung from a first cross of Arab and negro blood. It is well known that negro women are in great request for harems, where they act as aphrodisiacs. Nothing of such an origin was to be noticed, however, except the purple color of her lips, and the dark nipples of her elongated breasts, which were as supple as if they were on springs. Nobody who knew anything about the matter, could be mistaken in that. But all the rest of her belonged to the beautiful race from the South, fair, supple and with a delicate face which was formed on straight and simple lines like those of a Hindoo figure. Her eyes, which were very far apart, still further heightened the somewhat god-like looks of this desert marauder.

"I knew nothing exactly about her real life. She related it to me in incoherent fragments, that seemed to rise up at random from a disordered memory, and she mixed up deliciously childish observations with them; a whole vision of a Nomad world, born of a squirrel's brain that had leapt from tent to tent, from encampment to encampment, from tribe to tribe. And all this was done with the severe looks that this reserved people always preserve, with the appearance of a brass idol, and rather comic gravity.

"When she had finished, I perceived that I had not remembered anything of that long story, full of insignificant events, that she had stored up in her flighty brain, and I asked myself whether she had not simply been making fun of me by her empty and would-be serious chatter, which told me nothing about her, nor about any real facts connected with her life.

"And I thought of that conquered race, among whom we have encamped, or, rather, who are encamping among us, whose language we are beginning to speak, whom we see every day, living under the transparent linen of their tents, on whom we have imposed our laws, our regulations, and

our customs, and about whom we know nothing, nothing more whatever, I assure you, than if we were not here, and solely occupied in looking at them, for nearly sixty years. We know no more about what is going on in those huts made of branches, and under those small canvas cones that are fastened to the ground by stakes, which are within twenty yards of our doors, than we know what the so-called civilized Arabs of the Moorish houses in Algiers do, think, and are. Behind the white-washed walls of their town houses, behind the partition of their *gourbi*, which is made of branches, or behind that thin, brown, camel-haired curtain which the wind moves, they live close to us, unknown, mysterious, cunning, submissive, smiling, impenetrable. What if I were to tell you, that when I look at the neighboring encampment through my field glasses, I guess that there are superstitions, customs, ceremonies, a thousand practices of which we know nothing, and which we do not even suspect! Never previously, in all probability, did a conquered race know so well how to escape so completely from the real domination, the moral influence and the inveterate, but useless, investigations of the conquerors.

"Now I suddenly felt the insurmountable, secret barrier which incomprehensible nature had set up between the two races, more than I had ever felt it before, between this girl and myself, between this woman who had just given herself to me, who had yielded herself to my caresses and to me, who had possessed her, and, thinking of it for the first time, I said to her: 'What is your name?'

"She did not speak for some moments, and I saw her start, as if she had forgotten that I was there, and then, in her eyes that were raised to mine, I saw that that moment had sufficed for her to be overcome by sleep, by irresistible, sudden, almost overwhelming sleep, like everything that lays hold of the mobile senses of women, and she answered, carelessly, suppressing a yawn:

"'Allouma.'

"'Do you want to go sleep?'

"'Yes,' she replied.

"'Very well then, go to sleep!'

"She stretched herself out tranquilly by my side, lying on her stomach, with her forehead resting on her folded arms, and I felt almost immediately that fleeting, untutored thoughts were lulled in repose, while I began to ponder, as I lay by her side, and tried to understand it all. Why had Mohammed given her to me? Had he acted the part of a magnanimous servant, who sacrifices himself for his master, even to the extent of giving up the woman whom he had brought into his own tent, to him? Or had he, on the other hand, obeyed a more complex and more practical, though less generous impulse, in handing over this girl who had taken my fancy, to my embrace? An Arab, when it is a question of women, is rigorously modest and unspeakably complaisant, and one can no more understand his rigorous and easy morality, than one can all the rest of his sentiments. Perhaps, when I accidentally went to his tent, I had merely forestalled the benevolent intentions of this thoughtful servant, who had intended this woman, who was his friend and accomplice, or perhaps even his mistress, for me.

"All these suppositions assailed me, and fatigued me so much, that, at last, in my turn, I fell into a profound sleep, from which I was roused by the creaking of my door, and Mohammed came in, to call me as usual. He opened the window, through which a flood of light streamed in, and fell onto Allouma who was still asleep; then he picked up my trousers, coat and waistcoat from the floor in order to brush them. He did not look at the woman who was lying by my side, did not seem to know or remark that she was there, and preserved his ordinary gravity, demeanor and looks. But the light, the movement, the slight noise which his bare feet made, the feeling of the fresh air on her skin and in her lungs, roused Allouma from her lethargy. She stretched out her arms, turned over, opened her eyes, and looked at me and then Mohammed with the same indifference; then she sat up in bed and said: 'I am hungry.'

"'What would you like?'

"'Kahoua.'

"Coffee and bread and butter.'

"Yes.'

"Mohammed remained standing close to our bed, with my clothes under his arm, waiting for my orders.

"Bring breakfast for Allouma and me,' I said to him.

"He went out, without his face betraying the slightest astonishment or anger, and as soon as he had left the room, I said to the girl:

"Will you live in my house?'

"I should like to, very much.'

"I will give you a room to yourself, and a woman to wait on you.'

"You are very generous, and I am grateful to you.'

"But if you behave badly, I shall send you away immediately.'

"I will do everything that you wish me to.'

"She took my hand, and kissed it as a token of submission, and just then Mohammed came in, carrying a tray with our breakfast on it, and I said to him: —

"Allouma is going to live here. You must spread a carpet on the floor of the room at the end of the passage, and get Abd-El-Kader-El-Hadara's wife to come and wait on her.'

"Yes, *mo'ssieuia*.'

"That was all.

"An hour later, my beautiful Arab was installed in a large, airy, light room, and when I went in to see that everything was in order, she asked me in a supplicating voice, to give her a wardrobe with a looking-glass in the doors. I promised her one, and then I left her squatting on the carpet from Djebel-Amour, with a cigarette in her mouth, and gossiping with the old Arab woman I had sent for, as if they had known each other for years."

II

"For a month I was very happy with her, and I got strangely attached to this creature belonging to another race, who seemed to me almost to belong to some other species, and to have been born on a neighboring planet.

"I did not love her; no, one does not love the women of that primitive continent. This small, pale blue flower of Northern countries never unfolds between them and us, or even between them and their natural males, the Arabs. They are too near to human animalism, their hearts are too rudimentary, their feelings are not refined enough to rouse that sentimental exaltation in us, which is the poetry of love. Nothing intellectual, no intoxication of thought or feeling is mingled with that sensual intoxication which those charming nonentities excite in us. Nevertheless, they captivate us like the others do, but in a different fashion, which is less tenacious, and, at the same time, less cruel and painful.

"I cannot even now explain precisely what I felt for her. I said to you just now that this country, this bare Africa, without any arts, void of all intellectual pleasures, gradually captivates us by its climate, by the continual mildness of the dawn and sunset, by its delightful light, and by the feeling of well-being with which it fills all our organs. Well, then! Allouma captivated me in the same manner, by a thousand hidden, physical, alluring charms, and by the procreative seductiveness, not of her embraces, for she was of thoroughly oriental supineness in that respect, but of her sweet self-surrender.

"I left her absolutely free to come and go as she liked, and she certainly spent one afternoon out of two with the wives of my native agricultural laborers. Often also, she would remain for nearly a whole day admiring herself in front of a mahogany wardrobe with a large looking-glass in the doors that I had got from Miliana.

"She admired herself conscientiously, standing before the glass doors, in which she followed her own movements with profound and serious attention. She walked with her head somewhat thrown back, in order to be able to see whether her hips and loins swayed properly; went away, came back again, and then, tired with her own movements, she sat down on a cushion and remained opposite to her own reflection, with her eyes fixed on her face in the glass, and her whole soul absorbed in that picture.

"Soon, I began to notice that she went out nearly every morning after breakfast, and that she disappeared altogether until evening, and as I felt rather anxious about this, I asked Mohammed whether he knew what she could be doing during all these long hours of absence, but he replied very calmly:

"Do not be uneasy. It will be the Feast of Ramadan soon, and so she goes to say her prayers."

"He also seemed delighted at having Allouma in the house, but I never once saw anything suspicious between them, and so I accepted the situation as it was, and let time, accident, and life act for themselves.

"Often, after I had inspected my farm, my vineyards, and my clearings, I used to take long walks. You know the magnificent forests in this part of Algeria, those almost impenetrable ravines, where fallen pine trees hem the mountain torrents, and those little valleys filled with oleanders, which look like oriental carpets stretching along the banks of the streams. You know that at every moment, in these woods and on these hills, where one would think that nobody had ever penetrated, one suddenly sees the white dome of a shrine that contains the bones of a humble, solitary marabout, which was scarcely visited from time to time, even by the most confirmed believers, who had come from the neighboring villages with a wax candle in their pocket, to set up before the tomb of the saint.

"Now one evening as I was going home, I was passing one of these Mohammedan chapels, and, looking in through the door, which was always open, I saw a woman praying before the altar.

That Arab woman, sitting on the ground in that dilapidated building, into which the wind entered as it pleased, and heaped up the fine, dry pine needles in yellow heaps in the corners. I went near to see better, and recognized Allouma. She neither saw nor heard me, so absorbed was she with the saint, to whom she was speaking in a low voice, as she thought that she was alone with him, and telling this servant of God all her troubles. Sometimes she stopped for a short time to think, to try and recollect what more she had to say, so that she might not forget anything that she wished to confide to him; then, again, she would grow animated, as if he had replied to her, as if he had advised her to do something that she did not want to do, and the reasons for which she was impugning, and I went away as I had come, without making any noise, and returned home to dinner.

"That evening, when I sent for her, I saw that she had a thoughtful look, which was not usual with her.

"Sit down there,' I said, pointing to her place on the couch by my side. As soon as she had sat down, I stooped to kiss her, but she drew her head away quickly, and, in great astonishment, I said to her:

"Well, what is the matter?"

"It is the Ramadan,' she said.

"I began to laugh, and said: 'And the Marabout has forbidden you to allow yourself to be kissed during the Ramadan?'

"Oh, yes; I am an Arab woman, and you are a Roumi!"

"And it would be a great sin?"

"Oh, yes!"

"So you ate nothing all day, until sunset?"

"No, nothing."

"But you had something to eat after sundown?"

"Yes."

"Well, then, as it is quite dark now, you ought not to be more strict about the rest than you are about your mouth."

"She seemed irritated, wounded, and offended, and replied with an amount of pride that I had never noticed in her before: —

"If an Arab girl were to allow herself to be touched by a Roumi during the Ramadan, she would be cursed for ever."

"And that is to continue for a whole month?"

"Yes, for the whole of the month of Ramadan,' she replied, with great determination.

"I assumed an irritated manner and said: — 'Very well, then, you can go and spend the Ramadan with your family.'

"She seized my hands, and, laying them on my heart, she said: —

"Oh! Please do not be unkind, and you shall see how nice I will be. We will keep Ramadan together, if you like. I will look after you, and spoil you, but don't be unkind."

"I could not help smiling at her funny manner and her unhappiness, and I sent her to go to sleep at home, but, an hour later, just as I was thinking about going to bed, there came two little taps at my door, which were so slight, however, that I scarcely heard them; but when I said: — 'Come in,' Allouma appeared carrying a large tray covered with Arab dainties; fried balls of rice, covered with sugar, and a variety of other strange, Nomad pastry.

"She laughed, showing her white teeth, and repeated: — 'Come, we will keep Ramadan together.'

"You know that the fast, which begins at dawn and ends at twilight, at the moment when the eye can no longer distinguish a black from a white thread, is followed every evening by small, friendly entertainments, at which eating is kept up until the morning, and the result is that for such of the natives as are not very scrupulous, Ramadan consists of turning day into night, and night into day. But Allouma carried her delicacy of conscience further than this. She placed her tray between us

on the divan, and taking a small, sugared ball between her long, slender fingers, she put it into my mouth, and whispered: – 'Eat it, it is very good.'

"I munched the light cake, which was really excellent, and asked her: – 'Did you make that?'

"'Yes.'

"'For me?'

"'Yes, for you.'

"'To enable me to support Ramadan?'

"'Oh! Don't be so unkind! I will bring you some every day.'

"Oh! the terrible month that I spent! A sugared, insipidly sweet month; a month that nearly drove me mad; a month of spoiling and of temptation, of anger and of vain efforts against an invincible resistance, but at last the three days of Beiram came, which I celebrated in my own fashion, and Ramadan was forgotten.

"The summer went on, and it was very hot, and in the first days of autumn, Allouma appeared to me to be pre-occupied and absent-minded, and, seemingly, taking no interest in anything, and, at last, when I sent for her one evening, she was not to be found in her room. I thought that she was roaming about the house, and I gave orders to look for her. She had not come in, however, and so I opened my window, and called out: —

"'Mohammed,' and the voice of the man, who was lying in his tent, replied: —

"'Yes, *mo'ssieuia*.'

"'Do you know where Allouma is?'

"'No, *mo'ssieuia* ... it is not possible ... is Allouma lost?'

"A few moments later, my Arab came into my room, so agitated that he could not master his feelings, and I said:

"'Is Allouma lost?'

"'Yes, she is lost.'

"'It is impossible.'

"'Go and look for her,' I said.

"He remained standing where he was, thinking, seeking for her motives, and unable to understand anything about it. Then he went into the empty room, where Allouma's clothes were lying about, in oriental disorder. He examined everything, as if he had been a police officer, or, rather, he smelt like a dog, and then, incapable of a lengthened effort, he murmured, resignedly: —

"'She has gone, she has gone!'

"I was afraid that some accident had happened to her; that she had fallen into some ravine and sprained herself, and I immediately sent all the men about the place off with orders to look for her until they should find her, and they hunted for her all that night, all the next day, and all the week long, but nothing was discovered that could put us upon her track. I suffered, for I missed her very much; my house seemed empty, and my existence a void. And then, disgusting thoughts entered my mind. I feared that she might have been carried off, or even murdered, but when I spoke about it to Mohammed, and tried to make him share my fears, he invariably replied:

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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