

ÉMILE ZOLA

THE THREE CITIES

TRILOGY: PARIS, VOLUME

3

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Trilogy: Paris, Volume 3

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BOOK III

I
THE RIVALS

ON the Wednesday preceding the mid-Lent Thursday, a great charity bazaar was held at the Duvillard mansion, for the benefit of the Asylum of the Invalids of Labour. The ground-floor reception rooms, three spacious Louis Seize *salons*, whose windows overlooked the bare and solemn courtyard, were given up to the swarm of purchasers, five thousand admission cards having been distributed among all sections of Parisian society. And the opening of the bombarded mansion in this wise to thousands of visitors was regarded as quite an event, a real manifestation, although some people whispered that the Rue Godot-de-Mauroy and the adjacent streets were guarded by quite an army of police agents.

The idea of the bazaar had come from Duvillard himself, and at his bidding his wife had resigned herself to all this worry for the benefit of the enterprise over which she presided with such distinguished nonchalance. On the previous day the "Globe" newspaper, inspired by its director Fongseque, who was also the general manager of the asylum, had published a very fine article, announcing the bazaar, and pointing out how noble, and touching, and generous was the initiative of the Baroness, who still gave her time, her money, and even her home to charity, in spite of the abominable crime which had almost reduced that home to ashes. Was not this the magnanimous answer of the spheres above to the hateful passions of the spheres below? And was it not also a peremptory answer to those who accused the capitalists of doing nothing for the wage-earners, the disabled and broken-down sons of toil?

The drawing-room doors were to be opened at two o'clock, and would only close at seven, so that there would be five full hours for the sales. And at noon, when nothing was as yet ready downstairs, when workmen and women were still decorating the stalls, and sorting the goods amidst a final scramble, there was, as usual, a little friendly *dejeuner*, to which a few guests had been invited, in the private rooms on the first floor. However, a scarcely expected incident had given a finishing touch to the general excitement of the house: that very morning Sagnier had resumed his campaign of denunciation in the matter of the African Railway Lines. In a virulent article in the "Voix du

People," he had inquired if it were the intention of the authorities to beguile the public much longer with the story of that bomb and that Anarchist whom the police did not arrest. And this time, while undertaking to publish the names of the thirty-two corrupt senators and deputies in a very early issue, he had boldly named Minister Barroux as one who had pocketed a sum of 200,000 francs. Mege would therefore certainly revive his interpellation, which might become dangerous, now that Paris had been thrown into such a distracted state by terror of the Anarchists. At the same time it was said that Vignon and his party had resolved to turn circumstances to account, with the object of overthrowing the ministry. Thus a redoubtable crisis was inevitably at hand. Fortunately, the Chamber did not meet that Wednesday; in fact, it had adjourned until the Friday, with the view of making mid-Lent a holiday. And so forty-eight hours were left one to prepare for the onslaught.

Eve, that morning, seemed more gentle and languid than ever, rather pale too, with an expression of sorrowful anxiety in the depths of her beautiful eyes. She set it all down to the very great fatigue which the preparations for the bazaar had entailed on her. But the truth was that Gerard de Quinsac, after shunning any further assignation, had for five days past avoided her in an embarrassed way. Still she was convinced that she would see him that morning, and so she had again ventured to wear the white silk gown which made her look so much younger than she really was. At the same time, beautiful as she had remained, with her delicate

skin, superb figure and noble and charming countenance, her six and forty years were asserting themselves in her blotchy complexion and the little creases which were appearing about her lips, eyelids and temples.

Camille, for her part, though her position as daughter of the house made it certain that she would attract much custom as a saleswoman, had obstinately persisted in wearing one of her usual dresses, a dark "carmelite" gown, an old woman's frock, as she herself called it with a cutting laugh. However, her long and wicked-looking face beamed with some secret delight; such an expression of wit and intelligence wreathing her thin lips and shining in her big eyes that one lost sight of her deformity and thought her almost pretty.

Eve experienced a first deception in the little blue and silver sitting-room, where, accompanied by her daughter, she awaited the arrival of her guests. General de Bozonnet, whom Gerard was to have brought with him, came in alone, explaining that Madame de Quinsac had felt rather poorly that morning, and that Gerard, like a good and dutiful son, had wished to remain with her. Still he would come to the bazaar directly after *dejeuner*. While the Baroness listened to the General, striving to hide her disappointment and her fear that she would now be unable to obtain any explanation from Gerard that day, Camille looked at her with eager, devouring eyes. And a certain covert instinct of the misfortune threatening her must at that moment have come to Eve, for in her turn she glanced at her daughter and turned

pale as if with anxiety.

Then Princess Rosemonde de Harn swept in like a whirlwind. She also was to be one of the saleswomen at the stall chosen by the Baroness, who liked her for her very turbulence, the sudden gaiety which she generally brought with her. Gowned in fire-hued satin (red shot with yellow), looking very eccentric with her curly hair and thin boyish figure, she laughed and talked of an accident by which her carriage had almost been cut in halves. Then, as Baron Duvillard and Hyacinthe came in from their rooms, late as usual, she took possession of the young man and scolded him, for on the previous evening she had vainly waited for him till ten o'clock in the expectation that he would keep his promise to escort her to a tavern at Montmartre, where some horrible things were said to occur. Hyacinthe, looking very bored, quietly replied that he had been detained at a seance given by some adepts in the New Magic, in the course of which the soul of St. Theresa had descended from heaven to recite a love sonnet.

However, Fongue was now coming in with his wife, a tall, thin, silent and generally insignificant woman, whom he seldom took about with him. On this occasion he had been obliged to bring her, as she was one of the lady-patronesses of the asylum, and he himself was coming to lunch with the Duvillards in his capacity as general manager. To the superficial observer he looked quite as gay as usual; but he blinked nervously, and his first glance was a questioning one in the direction of Duvillard, as if he wished to know how the latter bore the fresh thrust

directed at him by Sagnier. And when he saw the banker looking perfectly composed, as superb, as rubicund as usual, and chatting in a bantering way with Rosemonde, he also put on an easy air, like a gamester who had never lost but had always known how to compel good luck, even in hours of treachery. And by way of showing his unconstraint of mind he at once addressed the Baroness on managerial matters: "Have you now succeeded in seeing M. l'Abbe Froment for the affair of that old man Laveuve, whom he so warmly recommended to us? All the formalities have been gone through, you know, and he can be brought to us at once, as we have had a bed vacant for three days past."

"Yes, I know," replied Eve; "but I can't imagine what has become of Abbe Froment, for he hasn't given us a sign of life for a month past. However, I made up my mind to write to him yesterday, and beg him to come to the bazaar to-day. In this manner I shall be able to acquaint him with the good news myself."

"It was to leave you the pleasure of doing so," said Fongue, "that I refrained from sending him any official communication. He's a charming priest, is he not?"

"Oh! charming, we are very fond of him."

However, Duvillard now intervened to say that they need not wait for Duthil, as he had received a telegram from him stating that he was detained by sudden business. At this Fongue's anxiety returned, and he once more questioned the Baron with his eyes. Duvillard smiled, however, and reassured him in an

undertone: "It's nothing serious. Merely a commission for me, about which he'll only be able to bring me an answer by-and-by." Then, taking Fongseue on one side, he added: "By the way, don't forget to insert the paragraph I told you of."

"What paragraph? Oh! yes, the one about that *soiree* at which Silviane recited a piece of verse. Well, I wanted to speak to you about it. It worries me a little, on account of the excessive praise it contains."

Duvillard, but a moment before so full of serenity, with his lofty, conquering, disdainful mien, now suddenly became pale and agitated. "But I absolutely want it to be inserted, my dear fellow! You would place me in the greatest embarrassment if it were not to appear, for I promised Silviane that it should."

As he spoke his lips trembled, and a scared look came into his eyes, plainly revealing his dismay.

"All right, all right," said Fongseue, secretly amused, and well pleased at this complicity. "As it's so serious the paragraph shall go in, I promise you."

The whole company was now present, since neither Gerard nor Duthil was to be expected. So they went into the dining-room amidst a final noise of hammering in the sale-rooms below. The meal proved somewhat of a scramble, and was on three occasions disturbed by female attendants, who came to explain difficulties and ask for orders. Doors were constantly slamming, and the very walls seemed to shake with the unusual bustle which filled the house. And feverish as they all were in the dining-

room, they talked in desultory, haphazard fashion on all sorts of subjects, passing from a ball given at the Ministry of the Interior on the previous night, to the popular mid-Lent festival which would take place on the morrow, and ever reverting to the bazaar, the prices that had been given for the goods which would be on sale, the prices at which they might be sold, and the probable figure of the full receipts, all this being interspersed with strange anecdotes, witticisms and bursts of laughter. On the General mentioning magistrate Amadieu, Eve declared that she no longer dared to invite him to *dejeuner*, knowing how busy he was at the Palace of Justice. Still, she certainly hoped that he would come to the bazaar and contribute something. Then Fongue amused himself with teasing Princess Rosemonde about her fire-hued gown, in which, said he, she must already feel roasted by the flames of hell; a suggestion which secretly delighted her, as Satanism had now become her momentary passion. Meantime, Duvillard lavished the most gallant politeness on that silent creature, Madame Fongue, while Hyacinthe, in order to astonish even the Princess, explained in a few words how the New Magic could transform a chaste young man into a real angel. And Camille, who seemed very happy and very excited, from time to time darted a hot glance at her mother, whose anxiety and sadness increased as she found the other more and more aggressive, and apparently resolved upon open and merciless warfare.

At last, just as the dessert was coming to an end, the Baroness

heard her daughter exclaim in a piercing, defiant voice: "Oh! don't talk to me of the old ladies who still seem to be playing with dolls, and paint themselves, and dress as if they were about to be confirmed! All such ogresses ought to retire from the scene! I hold them in horror!"

At this, Eve nervously rose from her seat, and exclaimed apologetically: "You must forgive me for hurrying you like this. But I'm afraid that we shan't have time to drink our coffee in peace."

The coffee was served in the little blue and silver sitting-room, where bloomed some lovely yellow roses, testifying to the Baroness's keen passion for flowers, which made the house an abode of perpetual spring. Duvillard and Fonseca, however, carrying their cups of steaming coffee with them, at once went into the former's private room to smoke a cigar there and chat in freedom. As the door remained wide open, one could hear their gruff voices more or less distinctly. Meantime, General de Bozonnet, delighted to find in Madame Fonseca a serious, submissive person, who listened without interrupting, began to tell her a very long story of an officer's wife who had followed her husband through every battle of the war of 1870. Then Hyacinthe, who took no coffee – contemptuously declaring it to be a beverage only fit for door-keepers – managed to rid himself of Rosemonde, who was sipping some kummel, in order to come and whisper to his sister: "I say, it was very stupid of you to taunt mamma in the way you did just now. I don't care a rap about it

myself. But it ends by being noticed, and, I warn you candidly, it shows ill breeding."

Camille gazed at him fixedly with her black eyes. "Pray don't *you* meddle with my affairs," said she.

At this he felt frightened, scented a storm, and decided to take Rosemonde into the adjoining red drawing-room in order to show her a picture which his father had just purchased. And the General, on being called by him, likewise conducted Madame Fongue thither.

The mother and daughter then suddenly found themselves alone and face to face. Eve was leaning on a pier-table, as if overcome; and indeed, the least sorrow bore her down, so weak at heart she was, ever ready to weep in her naive and perfect egotism. Why was it that her daughter thus hated her, and did her utmost to disturb that last happy spell of love in which her heart lingered? She looked at Camille, grieved rather than irritated; and the unfortunate idea came to her of making a remark about her dress at the very moment when the girl was on the point of following the others into the larger drawing-room.

"It's quite wrong of you, my dear," said she, "to persist in dressing like an old woman. It doesn't improve you a bit."

As Eve spoke, her soft eyes, those of a courted and worshipped handsome woman, clearly expressed the compassion she felt for that ugly, deformed girl, whom she had never been able to regard as a daughter. Was it possible that she, with her sovereign beauty, that beauty which she herself had ever adored

and nursed, making it her one care, her one religion – was it possible that she had given birth to such a graceless creature, with a dark, goatish profile, one shoulder higher than the other, and a pair of endless arms such as hunchbacks often have? All her grief and all her shame at having had such a child became apparent in the quivering of her voice.

Camille, however, had stopped short, as if struck in the face with a whip. Then she came back to her mother and the horrible explanation began with these simple words spoken in an undertone: "You consider that I dress badly? Well, you ought to have paid some attention to me, have seen that my gowns suited your taste, and have taught me your secret of looking beautiful!"

Eve, with her dislike of all painful feeling, all quarrelling and bitter words, was already regretting her attack. So she sought to make a retreat, particularly as time was flying and they would soon be expected downstairs: "Come, be quiet, and don't show your bad temper when all those people can hear us. I have loved you – "

But with a quiet yet terrible laugh Camille interrupted her. "You've loved me! Oh! my poor mamma, what a comical thing to say! Have you ever loved *anybody*? You want others to love *you*, but that's another matter. As for your child, any child, do you even know how it ought to be loved? You have always neglected me, thrust me on one side, deeming me so ugly, so unworthy of you! And besides, you have not had days and nights enough to love yourself! Oh! don't deny it, my poor mamma; but even now

you're looking at me as if I were some loathsome monster that's in your way."

From that moment the abominable scene was bound to continue to the end. With their teeth set, their faces close together, the two women went on speaking in feverish whispers.

"Be quiet, Camille, I tell you! I will not allow such language!"

"But I won't be quiet when you do all you can to wound me. If it's wrong of me to dress like an old woman, perhaps another is rather ridiculous in dressing like a girl, like a bride."

"Like a bride? I don't understand you."

"Oh! yes, you do. However, I would have you know that everybody doesn't find me so ugly as you try to make them believe."

"If you look amiss, it is because you don't dress properly; that is all I said."

"I dress as I please, and no doubt I do so well enough, since I'm loved as I am."

"What, really! Does someone love you? Well, let him inform us of it and marry you."

"Yes – certainly, certainly! It will be a good riddance, won't it? And you'll have the pleasure of seeing me as a bride!"

Their voices were rising in spite of their efforts to restrain them. However, Camille paused and drew breath before hissing out the words: "Gerard is coming here to ask for my hand in a day or two."

Eve, livid, with wildly staring eyes, did not seem to

understand. "Gerard? why do you tell me that?"

"Why, because it's Gerard who loves me and who is going to marry me! You drive me to extremities; you're for ever repeating that I'm ugly; you treat me like a monster whom nobody will ever care for. So I'm forced to defend myself and tell you the truth in order to prove to you that everybody is not of your opinion."

Silence fell; the frightful thing which had risen between them seemed to have arrested the quarrel. But there was neither mother nor daughter left there. They were simply two suffering, defiant rivals. Eve in her turn drew a long breath and glanced anxiously towards the adjoining room to ascertain if anyone were coming in or listening to them. And then in a tone of resolution she made answer:

"You cannot marry Gerard."

"Pray, why not?"

"Because I won't have it; because it's impossible."

"That isn't a reason; give me a reason."

"The reason is that the marriage is impossible that is all."

"No, no, I'll tell you the reason since you force me to it. The reason is that Gerard is your lover! But what does that matter, since I know it and am willing to take him all the same?"

And to this retort Camille's flaming eyes added the words: "And it is particularly on that account that I want him." All the long torture born of her infirmities, all her rage at having always seen her mother beautiful, courted and adored, was now stirring her and seeking vengeance in cruel triumph. At last then she was

snatching from her rival the lover of whom she had so long been jealous!

"You wretched girl!" stammered Eve, wounded in the heart and almost sinking to the floor. "You don't know what you say or what you make me suffer."

However, she again had to pause, draw herself erect and smile; for Rosemonde hastened in from the adjoining room with the news that she was wanted downstairs. The doors were about to be opened, and it was necessary she should be at her stall. Yes, Eve answered, she would be down in another moment. Still, even as she spoke she leant more heavily on the pier-table behind her in order that she might not fall.

Hyacinthe had drawn near to his sister: "You know," said he, "it's simply idiotic to quarrel like that. You would do much better to come downstairs."

But Camille harshly dismissed him: "Just *you* go off, and take the others with you. It's quite as well that they shouldn't be about our ears."

Hyacinthe glanced at his mother, like one who knew the truth and considered the whole affair ridiculous. And then, vexed at seeing her so deficient in energy in dealing with that little pest, his sister, he shrugged his shoulders, and leaving them to their folly, conducted the others away. One could hear Rosemonde laughing as she went off below, while the General began to tell Madame Fongue another story as they descended the stairs together. However, at the moment when the mother and daughter

at last fancied themselves alone once more, other voices reached their ears, those of Duvillard and Fongue, who were still near at hand. The Baron from his room might well overhear the dispute.

Eve felt that she ought to have gone off. But she had lacked the strength to do so; it had been a sheer impossibility for her after those words which had smote her like a buffet amidst her distress at the thought of losing her lover.

"Gerard cannot marry you," she said; "he does not love you."

"He does."

"You fancy it because he has good-naturedly shown some kindness to you, on seeing others pay you such little attention. But he does not love you."

"He does. He loves me first because I'm not such a fool as many others are, and particularly because I'm young."

This was a fresh wound for the Baroness; one inflicted with mocking cruelty in which rang out all the daughter's triumphant delight at seeing her mother's beauty at last ripening and waning. "Ah! my poor mamma, you no longer know what it is to be young. If I'm not beautiful, at all events I'm young; my eyes are clear and my lips are fresh. And my hair's so long too, and I've so much of it that it would suffice to gown me if I chose. You see, one's never ugly when one's young. Whereas, my poor mamma, everything is ended when one gets old. It's all very well for a woman to have been beautiful, and to strive to keep so, but in reality there's only ruin left, and shame and disgust."

She spoke these words in such a sharp, ferocious voice that

each of them entered her mother's heart like a knife. Tears rose to the eyes of the wretched woman, again stricken in her bleeding wound. Ah! it was true, she remained without weapons against youth. And all her anguish came from the consciousness that she was growing old, from the feeling that love was departing from her now, that like a fruit she had ripened and fallen from the tree.

"But Gerard's mother will never let him marry you," she said.

"He will prevail on her; that's his concern. I've a dowry of two millions, and two millions can settle many things."

"Do you now want to libel him, and say that he's marrying you for your money?"

"No, indeed! Gerard's a very nice and honest fellow. He loves me and he's marrying me for myself. But, after all, he isn't rich; he still has no assured position, although he's thirty-six; and there may well be some advantage in a wife who brings you wealth as well as happiness. For, you hear, mamma, it's happiness I'm bringing him, real happiness, love that's shared and is certain of the future."

Once again their faces drew close together. The hateful scene, interrupted by sounds around them, postponed, and then resumed, was dragging on, becoming a perfect drama full of murderous violence, although they never shouted, but still spoke on in low and gasping voices. Neither gave way to the other, though at every moment they were liable to some surprise; for not only were all the doors open, so that the servants might come in, but the Baron's voice still rang out gaily, close at hand.

"He loves you, he loves you" – continued Eve. "That's what you say. But *he* never told you so."

"He has told me so twenty times; he repeats it every time that we are alone together!"

"Yes, just as one says it to a little girl by way of amusing her. But he has never told you that he meant to marry you."

"He told it me the last time he came. And it's settled. I'm simply waiting for him to get his mother's consent and make his formal offer."

"You lie, you lie, you wretched girl! You simply want to make me suffer, and you lie, you lie!"

Eve's grief at last burst forth in that cry of protest. She no longer knew that she was a mother, and was speaking to her daughter. The woman, the *amorosa*, alone remained in her, outraged and exasperated by a rival. And with a sob she confessed the truth: "It is I he loves! Only the last time I spoke to him, he swore to me – you hear me? – he swore upon his honour that he did not love you, and that he would never marry you!"

A faint, sharp laugh came from Camille. Then, with an air of derisive compassion, she replied: "Ah! my poor mamma, you really make me sorry for you! What a child you are! Yes, really, you are the child, not I. What! you who ought to have so much experience, you still allow yourself to be duped by a man's protests! That one really has no malice; and, indeed, that's why he swears whatever you want him to swear, just to please and quiet you, for at heart he's a bit of a coward."

"You lie, you lie!"

"But just think matters over. If he no longer comes here, if he didn't come to *dejeuner* this morning, it is simply because he's had enough of you. He has left you for good; just have the courage to realise it. Of course he's still polite and amiable, because he's a well-bred man, and doesn't know how to break off. The fact is that he takes pity on you."

"You lie, you lie!"

"Well, question him then. Have a frank explanation with him. Ask him his intentions in a friendly way. And then show some good nature yourself, and realise that if you care for him you ought to give him me at once in his own interest. Give him back his liberty, and you will soon see that I'm the one he loves."

"You lie, you lie! You wretched child, you only want to torture and kill me!"

Then, in her fury and distress, Eve remembered that she was the mother, and that it was for her to chastise that unworthy daughter. There was no stick near her, but from a basket of the yellow roses, whose powerful scent intoxicated both of them, she plucked a handful of blooms, with long and spiny stalks, and smote Camille across the face. A drop of blood appeared on the girl's left temple, near her eyelid.

But she sprang forward, flushed and maddened by this correction, with her hand raised and ready to strike back. "Take care, mother! I swear I'd beat you like a gipsy! And now just put this into your head: I mean to marry Gerard, and I will; and I'll

take him from you, even if I have to raise a scandal, should you refuse to give him to me with good grace."

Eve, after her one act of angry vigour, had sunk into an armchair, overcome, distracted. And all the horror of quarrels, which sprang from her egotistical desire to be happy, caressed, flattered and adored, was returning to her. But Camille, still threatening, still unsatiated, showed her heart as it really was, her stern, black, unforgiving heart, intoxicated with cruelty. There came a moment of supreme silence, while Duvillard's gay voice again rang out in the adjoining room.

The mother was gently weeping, when Hyacinthe, coming upstairs at a run, swept into the little *salon*. He looked at the two women, and made a gesture of indulgent contempt. "Ah! you're no doubt satisfied now! But what did I tell you? It would have been much better for you to have come downstairs at once! Everybody is asking for you. It's all idiotic. I've come to fetch you."

Eve and Camille would not yet have followed him, perhaps, if Duvillard and Fongue had not at that moment come out of the former's room. Having finished their cigars they also spoke of going downstairs. And Eve had to rise and smile and show dry eyes, while Camille, standing before a looking-glass, arranged her hair, and stanchd the little drop of blood that had gathered on her temple.

There was already quite a number of people below, in the three huge saloons adorned with tapestry and plants. The stalls

had been draped with red silk, which set a gay, bright glow around the goods. And no ordinary bazaar could have put forth such a show, for there was something of everything among the articles of a thousand different kinds, from sketches by recognised masters, and the autographs of famous writers, down to socks and slippers and combs. The haphazard way in which things were laid out was in itself an attraction; and, in addition, there was a buffet, where the whitest of beautiful hands poured out champagne, and two lotteries, one for an organ and another for a pony-drawn village cart, the tickets for which were sold by a bevy of charming girls, who had scattered through the throng. As Duvillard had expected, however, the great success of the bazaar lay in the delightful little shiver which the beautiful ladies experienced as they passed through the entrance where the bomb had exploded. The rougher repairing work was finished, the walls and ceilings had been doctored, in part re-constructed. However, the painters had not yet come, and here and there the whiter stone and plaster work showed like fresh scars left by all the terrible gashes. It was with mingled anxiety and rapture that pretty heads emerged from the carriages which, arriving in a continuous stream, made the flagstones of the court re-echo. And in the three saloons, beside the stalls, there was no end to the lively chatter: "Ah! my dear, did you see all those marks? How frightful, how frightful! The whole house was almost blown up. And to think it might begin again while we are here! One really needs some courage to come, but then, that asylum is such

a deserving institution, and money is badly wanted to build a new wing. And besides, those monsters will see that we are not frightened, whatever they do."

When the Baroness at last came down to her stall with Camille she found the saleswomen feverishly at work already under the direction of Princess Rosemonde, who on occasions of this kind evinced the greatest cunning and rapacity, robbing the customers in the most impudent fashion. "Ah! here you are," she exclaimed. "Beware of a number of higglers who have come to secure bargains. I know them! They watch for their opportunities, turn everything topsy-turvy and wait for us to lose our heads and forget prices, so as to pay even less than they would in a real shop. But I'll get good prices from them, you shall see!"

At this, Eve, who for her own part was a most incapable saleswoman, had to laugh with the others. And in a gentle voice she made a pretence of addressing certain recommendations to Camille, who listened with a smiling and most submissive air. In point of fact the wretched mother was sinking with emotion, particularly at the thought that she would have to remain there till seven o'clock, and suffer in secret before all those people, without possibility of relief. And thus it was almost like a respite when she suddenly perceived Abbe Froment sitting and waiting for her on a settee, covered with red velvet, near her stall. Her legs were failing her, so she took a place beside him.

"You received my letter then, Monsieur l'Abbe. I am glad that you have come, for I have some good news to give you, and

wished to leave you the pleasure of imparting it to your *protege*, that man Laveuve, whom you so warmly recommended to me. Every formality has now been fulfilled, and you can bring him to the asylum to-morrow."

Pierre gazed at her in stupefaction. "Laveuve? Why, he is dead!"

In her turn she became astonished. "What, dead! But you never informed me of it! If I told you of all the trouble that has been taken, of all that had to be undone and done again, and the discussions and the papers and the writing! Are you quite sure that he is dead?"

"Oh! yes, he is dead. He has been dead a month."

"Dead a month! Well, we could not know; you yourself gave us no sign of life. Ah! *mon Dieu*! what a worry that he should be dead. We shall now be obliged to undo everything again!"

"He is dead, madame. It is true that I ought to have informed you of it. But that doesn't alter the fact – he is dead."

Dead! that word which kept on returning, the thought too, that for a month past she had been busying herself for a corpse, quite froze her, brought her to the very depths of despair, like an omen of the cold death into which she herself must soon descend, in the shroud of her last passion. And, meantime, Pierre, despite himself, smiled bitterly at the atrocious irony of it all. Ah! that lame and halting Charity, which proffers help when men are dead!

The priest still lingered on the settee when the Baroness rose.

She had seen magistrate Amadieu hurriedly enter like one who just wished to show himself, purchase some trifle, and then return to the Palace of Justice. However, he was also perceived by little Massot, the "Globe" reporter, who was prowling round the stalls, and who at once bore down upon him, eager for information. And he hemmed him in and forthwith interviewed him respecting the affair of that mechanician Salvat, who was accused of having deposited the bomb at the entrance of the house. Was this simply an invention of the police, as some newspapers pretended? Or was it really correct? And if so, would Salvat soon be arrested? In self-defence Amadieu answered correctly enough that the affair did not as yet concern him, and would only come within his attributions, if Salvat should be arrested and the investigation placed in his hands. At the same time, however, the magistrate's pompous and affectedly shrewd manner suggested that he already knew everything to the smallest details, and that, had he chosen, he could have promised some great events for the morrow. A circle of ladies had gathered round him as he spoke, quite a number of pretty women feverish with curiosity, who jostled one another in their eagerness to hear that brigand tale which sent a little shiver coursing under their skins. However, Amadieu managed to slip off after paying Rosemonde twenty francs for a cigarette case, which was perhaps worth thirty sous.

Massot, on recognising Pierre, came up to shake hands with him. "Don't you agree with me, Monsieur l'Abbe, that Salvat

must be a long way off by now if he's got good legs? Ah! the police will always make me laugh!"

However, Rosemonde brought Hyacinthe up to the journalist. "Monsieur Massot," said she, "you who go everywhere, I want you to be judge. That Chamber of Horrors at Montmartre, that tavern where Legras sings the 'Flowers of the Streets' – "

"Oh! a delightful spot, madame," interrupted Massot, "I wouldn't take even a gendarme there."

"No, don't jest, Monsieur Massot, I'm talking seriously. Isn't it quite allowable for a respectable woman to go there when she's accompanied by a gentleman?" And, without allowing the journalist time to answer her, she turned towards Hyacinthe: "There! you see that Monsieur Massot doesn't say no! You've got to take me there this evening, it's sworn, it's sworn."

Then she darted away to sell a packet of pins to an old lady, while the young man contented himself with remarking, in the voice of one who has no illusions left: "She's quite idiotic with her Chamber of Horrors!"

Massot philosophically shrugged his shoulders. It was only natural that a woman should want to amuse herself. And when Hyacinthe had gone off, passing with perverse contempt beside the lovely girls who were selling lottery tickets, the journalist ventured to murmur: "All the same, it would do that youngster good if a woman were to take him in hand."

Then, again addressing Pierre, he resumed: "Why, here comes Duthil! What did Sagnier mean this morning by saying that

Duthil would sleep at Mazas to-night?"

In a great hurry apparently, and all smiles, Duthil was cutting his way through the crowd in order to join Duvillard and Fongue, who still stood talking near the Baroness's stall. And he waved his hand to them in a victorious way, to imply that he had succeeded in the delicate mission entrusted to him. This was nothing less than a bold manoeuvre to hasten Silviane's admission to the Comedie Francaise. The idea had occurred to her of making the Baron give a dinner at the Cafe Anglais in order that she might meet at it an influential critic, who, according to her statements, would compel the authorities to throw the doors wide open for her as soon as he should know her. However, it did not seem easy to secure the critic's presence, as he was noted for his sternness and grumbling disposition. And, indeed, after a first repulse, Duthil had for three days past been obliged to exert all his powers of diplomacy, and bring even the remotest influence into play. But he was radiant now, for he had conquered.

"It's for this evening, my dear Baron, at half-past seven," he exclaimed. "Ah! dash it all, I've had more trouble than I should have had to secure a concession vote!" Then he laughed with the pretty impudence of a man of pleasure, whom political conscientiousness did not trouble. And, indeed, his allusion to the fresh denunciations of the "Voix du Peuple" hugely amused him.

"Don't jest," muttered Fongue, who for his part wished to amuse himself by frightening the young deputy. "Things are

going very badly!"

Duthil turned pale, and a vision of the police and Mazas rose before his eyes. In this wise sheer funk came over him from time to time. However, with his lack of all moral sense, he soon felt reassured and began to laugh. "Bah!" he retorted gaily, winking towards Duvillard, "the governor's there to pilot the barque!"

The Baron, who was extremely pleased, had pressed his hands, thanked him, and called him an obliging fellow. And now turning towards Fongue, he exclaimed: "I say, you must make one of us this evening. Oh! it's necessary. I want something imposing round Silviane. Duthil will represent the Chamber, you journalism, and I finance – " But he suddenly paused on seeing Gerard, who, with a somewhat grave expression, was leisurely picking his way through the sea of skirts. "Gerard, my friend," said the Baron, after beckoning to him, "I want you to do me a service." And forthwith he told him what was in question; how the influential critic had been prevailed upon to attend a dinner which would decide Silviane's future; and how it was the duty of all her friends to rally round her.

"But I can't," the young man answered in embarrassment. "I have to dine at home with my mother, who was rather poorly this morning."

"Oh! a sensible woman like your mother will readily understand that there are matters of exceptional importance. Go home and excuse yourself. Tell her some story, tell her that a friend's happiness is in question." And as Gerard began to

weaken, Duvillard added: "The fact is, that I really want you, my dear fellow; I must have a society man. Society, you know, is a great force in theatrical matters; and if Silviane has society with her, her triumph is certain."

Gerard promised, and then chatted for a moment with his uncle, General de Bozonnet, who was quite enlivened by that throng of women, among whom he had been carried hither and thither like an old rudderless ship. After acknowledging the amiability with which Madame Fongue had listened to his stories, by purchasing an autograph of Monseigneur Martha from her for a hundred francs, he had quite lost himself amid the bevy of girls who had passed him on, one to another. And now, on his return from them, he had his hands full of lottery tickets: "Ah! my fine fellow," said he, "I don't advise you to venture among all those young persons. You would have to part with your last copper. But, just look! there's Mademoiselle Camille beckoning to you!"

Camille, indeed, from the moment she had perceived Gerard, had been smiling at him and awaiting his approach. And when their glances met he was obliged to go to her, although, at the same moment, he felt that Eve's despairing and entreating eyes were fixed upon him. The girl, who fully realised that her mother was watching her, at once made a marked display of amiability, profiting by the license which charitable fervour authorised, to slip a variety of little articles into the young man's pockets, and then place others in his hands, which she pressed within her own,

showing the while all the sparkle of youth, indulging in fresh, merry laughter, which fairly tortured her rival.

So extreme was Eve's suffering, that she wished to intervene and part them. But it so chanced that Pierre barred her way, for he wished to submit an idea to her before leaving the bazaar. "Madame," said he, "since that man Laveuve is dead, and you have taken so much trouble with regard to the bed which you now have vacant, will you be so good as to keep it vacant until I have seen our venerable friend, Abbe Rose? I am to see him this evening, and he knows so many cases of want, and would be so glad to relieve one of them, and bring you some poor *protege* of his."

"Yes, certainly," stammered the Baroness, "I shall be very happy, – I will wait a little, as you desire, – of course, of course, Monsieur l'Abbe."

She was trembling all over; she no longer knew what she was saying; and, unable to conquer her passion, she turned aside from the priest, unaware even that he was still there, when Gerard, yielding to the dolorous entreaty of her eyes, at last managed to escape from Camille and join her.

"What a stranger you are becoming, my friend!" she said aloud, with a forced smile. "One never sees you now."

"Why, I have been poorly," he replied, in his amiable way. "Yes, I assure you I have been ailing a little."

He, ailing! She looked at him with maternal anxiety, quite upset. And, indeed, however proud and lofty his figure, his

handsome regular face did seem to her paler than usual. It was as if the nobility of the facade had, in some degree, ceased to hide the irreparable dilapidation within. And given his real good nature, it must be true that he suffered – suffered by reason of his useless, wasted life, by reason of all the money he cost his impoverished mother, and of the needs that were at last driving him to marry that wealthy deformed girl, whom at first he had simply pitied. And so weak did he seem to Eve, so like a piece of wreckage tossed hither and thither by a tempest, that, at the risk of being overheard by the throng, she let her heart flow forth in a low but ardent, entreating murmur: "If you suffer, ah! what sufferings are mine! – Gerard, we must see one another, I will have it so."

"No, I beg you, let us wait," he stammered in embarrassment.

"It must be, Gerard; Camille has told me your plans. You cannot refuse to see me. I insist on it."

He made yet another attempt to escape the cruel explanation. "But it's impossible at the usual place," he answered, quivering. "The address is known."

"Then to-morrow, at four o'clock, at that little restaurant in the Bois where we have met before."

He had to promise, and they parted. Camille had just turned her head and was looking at them. Moreover, quite a number of women had besieged the stall; and the Baroness began to attend to them with the air of a ripe and nonchalant goddess, while Gerard rejoined Duvillard, Fongue and Duthil, who were quite

excited at the prospect of their dinner that evening.

Pierre had heard a part of the conversation between Gerard and the Baroness. He knew what skeletons the house concealed, what physiological and moral torture and wretchedness lay beneath all the dazzling wealth and power. There was here an envenomed, bleeding sore, ever spreading, a cancer eating into father, mother, daughter and son, who one and all had thrown social bonds aside. However, the priest made his way out of the *salons*, half stifling amidst the throng of lady-purchasers who were making quite a triumph of the bazaar. And yonder, in the depths of the gloom, he could picture Salvat still running and running on; while the corpse of Laveuve seemed to him like a buffet of atrocious irony dealt to noisy and delusive charity.

II

SPIRIT AND FLESH

How delightful was the quietude of the little ground-floor overlooking a strip of garden in the Rue Cortot, where good Abbe Rose resided! Hereabouts there was not even a rumble of wheels, or an echo of the panting breath of Paris, which one heard on the other side of the height of Montmartre. The deep silence and sleepy peacefulness were suggestive of some distant provincial town.

Seven o'clock had struck, the dusk had gathered slowly, and Pierre was in the humble dining-room, waiting for the *femme-de-menage* to place the soup upon the table. Abbe Rose, anxious at having seen so little of him for a month past, had written, asking him to come to dinner, in order that they might have a quiet chat concerning their affairs. From time to time Pierre still gave his friend money for charitable purposes; in fact, ever since the days of the asylum in the Rue de Charonne, they had had accounts together, which they periodically liquidated. So that evening after dinner they were to talk of it all, and see if they could not do even more than they had hitherto done. The good old priest was quite radiant at the thought of the peaceful evening which he was about to spend in attending to the affairs of his beloved poor; for therein lay his only amusement, the sole pleasure to which he persistently and passionately returned, in spite of all the worries

that his inconsiderate charity had already so often brought him.

Glad to be able to procure his friend this pleasure, Pierre, on his side, grew calmer, and found relief and momentary repose in sharing the other's simple repast and yielding to all the kindness around him, far from his usual worries. He remembered the vacant bed at the Asylum, which Baroness Duvillard had promised to keep in reserve until he should have asked Abbe Rose if he knew of any case of destitution particularly worthy of interest; and so before sitting down to table he spoke of the matter.

"Destitution worthy of interest!" replied Abbe Rose, "ah! my dear child, every case is worthy of interest. And when it's a question of old toilers without work the only trouble is that of selection, the anguish of choosing one and leaving so many others in distress." Nevertheless, painful though his scruples were, he strove to think and come to some decision. "I know the case which will suit you," he said at last. "It's certainly one of the greatest suffering and wretchedness; and, so humble a one, too – an old carpenter of seventy-five, who has been living on public charity during the eight or ten years that he has been unable to find work. I don't know his name, everybody calls him 'the big Old'un.' There are times when he does not come to my Saturday distributions for weeks together. We shall have to look for him at once. I think that he sleeps at the Night Refuge in the Rue d'Orsel when lack of room there doesn't force him to spend the night crouching behind some palings. Shall we go down the Rue

d'Orsel this evening?"

Abbe Rose's eyes beamed brightly as he spoke, for this proposal of his signified a great debauch, the tasting of forbidden fruit. He had been reproached so often and so roughly with his visits to those who had fallen to the deepest want and misery, that in spite of his overflowing, apostolic compassion, he now scarcely dared to go near them. However, he continued: "Is it agreed, my child? Only this once? Besides, it is our only means of finding the big Old'un. You won't have to stop with me later than eleven. And I should so like to show you all that! You will see what terrible sufferings there are! And perhaps we may be fortunate enough to relieve some poor creature or other."

Pierre smiled at the juvenile ardour displayed by this old man with snowy hair. "It's agreed, my dear Abbe," he responded, "I shall be very pleased to spend my whole evening with you, for I feel it will do me good to follow you once more on one of those rambles which used to fill our hearts with grief and joy."

At this moment the servant brought in the soup; however, just as the two priests were taking their seats a discreet ring was heard, and when Abbe Rose learnt that the visitor was a neighbour, Madame Mathis, who had come for an answer, he gave orders that she should be shown in.

"This poor woman," he explained to Pierre, "needed an advance of ten francs to get a mattress out of pawn; and I didn't have the money by me at the time. But I've since procured it. She lives in the house, you know, in silent poverty, on so small an

income that it hardly keeps her in bread."

"But hasn't she a big son of twenty?" asked Pierre, suddenly remembering the young man he had seen at Salvat's.

"Yes, yes. Her parents, I believe, were rich people in the provinces. I've been told that she married a music master, who gave her lessons, at Nantes; and who ran away with her and brought her to Paris, where he died. It was quite a doleful love-story. By selling the furniture and realising every little thing she possessed, she scraped together an income of about two thousand francs a year, with which she was able to send her son to college and live decently herself. But a fresh blow fell on her: she lost the greater part of her little fortune, which was invested in doubtful securities. So now her income amounts at the utmost to eight hundred francs; two hundred of which she has to expend in rent. For all her other wants she has to be content with fifty francs a month. About eighteen months ago her son left her so as not to be a burden on her, and he is trying to earn his living somewhere, but without success, I believe."

Madame Mathis, a short, dark woman, with a sad, gentle, retiring face, came in. Invariably clad in the same black gown, she showed all the anxious timidity of a poor creature whom the storms of life perpetually assailed. When Abbe Rose had handed her the ten francs discreetly wrapped in paper, she blushed and thanked him, promising to pay him back as soon as she received her month's money, for she was not a beggar and did not wish to encroach on the share of those who starved.

"And your son, Victor, has he found any employment?" asked the old priest.

She hesitated, ignorant as she was of what her son might be doing, for now she did not see him for weeks together. And finally, she contented herself with answering: "He has a good heart, he is very fond of me. It is a great misfortune that we should have been ruined before he could enter the Ecole Normale. It was impossible for him to prepare for the examination. But at the Lycee he was such a diligent and intelligent pupil!"

"You lost your husband when your son was ten years old, did you not?" said Abbe Rose.

At this she blushed again, thinking that her husband's story was known to the two priests. "Yes, my poor husband never had any luck," she said. "His difficulties embittered and excited his mind, and he died in prison. He was sent there through a disturbance at a public meeting, when he had the misfortune to wound a police officer. He had also fought at the time of the Commune. And yet he was a very gentle man and extremely fond of me."

Tears had risen to her eyes; and Abbe Rose, much touched, dismissed her: "Well, let us hope that your son will give you satisfaction, and be able to repay you for all you have done for him."

With a gesture of infinite sorrow, Madame Mathis discreetly withdrew. She was quite ignorant of her son's doings, but fate had pursued her so relentlessly that she ever trembled.

"I don't think that the poor woman has much to expect from her son," said Pierre, when she had gone. "I only saw him once, but the gleam in his eyes was as harsh and trenchant as that of a knife."

"Do you think so?" the old priest exclaimed, with his kindly *naivete*. "Well, he seemed to me very polite, perhaps a trifle eager to enjoy life; but then, all the young folks are impatient nowadays. Come, let us sit down to table, for the soup will be cold."

Almost at the same hour, on the other side of Paris, night had in like fashion slowly fallen in the drawing-room of the Countess de Quinsac, on the dismal, silent ground-floor of an old mansion in the Rue St. Dominique. The Countess was there, alone with her faithful friend, the Marquis de Morigny, she on one side, and he on the other side of the chimney-piece, where the last embers of the wood fire were dying out. The servant had not yet brought the lamp, and the Countess refrained from ringing, finding some relief from her anxiety in the falling darkness, which hid from view all the unconfessed thoughts that she was afraid of showing on her weary face. And it was only now, before that dim hearth, and in that black room, where never a sound of wheels disturbed the silence of the slumberous past, that she dared to speak.

"Yes, my friend," she said, "I am not satisfied with Gerard's health. You will see him yourself, for he promised to come home early and dine with me. Oh! I'm well aware that he looks big and strong; but to know him properly one must have nursed and watched him as I have done! What trouble I had to rear him!

In reality he is at the mercy of any petty ailment. His slightest complaint becomes serious illness. And the life he leads does not conduce to good health."

She paused and sighed, hesitating to carry her confession further.

"He leads the life he can," slowly responded the Marquis de Morigny, of whose delicate profile, and lofty yet loving bearing, little could be seen in the gloom. "As he was unable to endure military life, and as even the fatigues of diplomacy frighten you, what would you have him do? He can only live apart pending the final collapse, while this abominable Republic is dragging France to the grave."

"No doubt, my friend. And yet it is just that idle life which frightens me. He is losing in it all that was good and healthy in him. I don't refer merely to the *liaisons* which we have had to tolerate. The last one, which I found so much difficulty in countenancing at the outset, so contrary did it seem to all my ideas and beliefs, has since seemed to me to exercise almost a good influence. Only he is now entering his thirty-sixth year, and can he continue living in this fashion without object or duties? If he is ailing it is perhaps precisely because he does nothing, holds no position, and serves no purpose." Her voice again quavered. "And then, my friend, since you force me to tell you everything, I must own that I am not in good health myself. I have had several fainting fits of late, and have consulted a doctor. The truth is, that I may go off at any moment."

With a quiver, Morigny leant forward in the still deepening gloom, and wished to take hold of her hands. "You! what, am I to lose you, my last affection!" he faltered, "I who have seen the old world I belong to crumble away, I who only live in the hope that you at all events will still be here to close my eyes!"

But she begged him not to increase her grief: "No, no, don't take my hands, don't kiss them! Remain there in the shade, where I can scarcely see you... We have loved one another so long without aught to cause shame or regret; and that will prove our strength – our divine strength – till we reach the grave... And if you were to touch me, if I were to feel you too near me I could not finish, for I have not done so yet."

As soon as he had relapsed into silence and immobility, she continued: "If I were to die to-morrow, Gerard would not even find here the little fortune which he still fancies is in my hands. The dear child has often cost me large sums of money without apparently being conscious of it. I ought to have been more severe, more prudent. But what would you have? Ruin is at hand. I have always been too weak a mother. And do you now understand in what anguish I live? I ever have the thought that if I die Gerard will not even possess enough to live on, for he is incapable of effecting the miracle which I renew each day, in order to keep the house up on a decent footing... Ah! I know him, so supine, so sickly, in spite of his proud bearing, unable to do anything, even conduct himself. And so what will become of him; will he not fall into the most dire distress?"

Then her tears flowed freely, her heart opened and bled, for she foresaw what must happen after her death: the collapse of her race and of a whole world in the person of that big child. And the Marquis, still motionless but distracted, feeling that he had no title to offer his own fortune, suddenly understood her, foresaw in what disgrace this fresh disaster would culminate.

"Ah! my poor friend!" he said at last in a voice trembling with revolt and grief. "So you have agreed to that marriage – yes, that abominable marriage with that woman's daughter! Yet you swore it should never be! You would rather witness the collapse of everything, you said. And now you are consenting, I can feel it!"

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