

ÉMILE ZOLA

DOCTOR

PASCAL

Эмиль Золя

Doctor Pascal

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Émile Zola

Doctor Pascal

I

In the heat of the glowing July afternoon, the room, with blinds carefully closed, was full of a great calm. From the three windows, through the cracks of the old wooden shutters, came only a few scattered sunbeams which, in the midst of the obscurity, made a soft brightness that bathed surrounding objects in a diffused and tender light. It was cool here in comparison with the overpowering heat that was felt outside, under the fierce rays of the sun that blazed upon the front of the house.

Standing before the press which faced the windows, Dr. Pascal was looking for a paper that he had come in search of. With doors wide open, this immense press of carved oak, adorned with strong and handsome mountings of metal, dating from the last century, displayed within its capacious depths an extraordinary collection of papers and manuscripts of all sorts, piled up in confusion and filling every shelf to overflowing. For more than thirty years the doctor had thrown into it every page he wrote, from brief notes to the complete texts of his great works on heredity. Thus it was that his searches here were not always easy. He rummaged patiently among the papers, and when he at last found the one he was looking for, he smiled.

For an instant longer he remained near the bookcase, reading the note by a golden sunbeam that came to him from the middle window. He himself, in this dawnlike light, appeared, with his snow-white hair and beard, strong and vigorous; although he was near sixty, his color was so fresh, his features were so finely cut, his eyes were still so clear, and he had so youthful an air that one might have taken him, in his close-fitting, maroon velvet jacket, for a young man with powdered hair.

"Here, Clotilde," he said at last, "you will copy this note. Ramond would never be able to decipher my diabolical writing."

And he crossed the room and laid the paper beside the young girl, who stood working at a high desk in the embrasure of the window to the right.

"Very well, master," she answered.

She did not even turn round, so engrossed was her attention with the pastel which she was at the moment rapidly sketching in with broad strokes of the crayon. Near her in a vase bloomed a stalk of hollyhocks of a singular shade of violet, striped with yellow. But the profile of her small round head, with its short, fair hair, was clearly distinguishable; an exquisite and serious profile, the straight forehead contracted in a frown of attention, the eyes of an azure blue, the nose delicately molded, the chin firm. Her bent neck, especially, of a milky whiteness, looked adorably youthful under the gold of the clustering curls. In her long black blouse she seemed very tall, with her slight figure, slender throat, and flexible form, the flexible slenderness of the divine figures of the Renaissance. In spite of her twenty-five years, she still retained a childlike air and looked hardly eighteen.

"And," resumed the doctor, "you will arrange the press a little. Nothing can be found there any longer."

"Very well, master," she repeated, without raising her head; "presently."

Pascal had turned round to seat himself at his desk, at the other end of the room, before the window to the left. It was a plain black wooden table, and was littered also with papers and pamphlets of all sorts. And silence again reigned in the peaceful semi-obscurity, contrasting with the overpowering glare outside. The vast apartment, a dozen meters long and six wide, had, in addition to the press, only two bookcases, filled with books. Antique chairs of various kinds stood around in disorder, while for sole adornment, along the walls, hung with an old *salon* Empire paper of a

rose pattern, were nailed pastels of flowers of strange coloring dimly visible. The woodwork of three folding-doors, the door opening on the hall and two others at opposite ends of the apartment, the one leading to the doctor's room, the other to that of the young girl, as well as the cornice of the smoke-darkened ceiling, dated from the time of Louis XV.

An hour passed without a sound, without a breath. Then Pascal, who, as a diversion from his work, had opened a newspaper —*Le Temps*— which had lain forgotten on the table, uttered a slight exclamation:

“Why! your father has been appointed editor of the *Epoque*, the prosperous republican journal which has the publishing of the papers of the Tuileries.”

This news must have been unexpected by him, for he laughed frankly, at once pleased and saddened, and in an undertone he continued:

“My word! If things had been invented, they could not have been finer. Life is a strange thing. This is a very interesting article.”

Clotilde made no answer, as if her thoughts were a hundred leagues away from what her uncle was saying. And he did not speak again, but taking his scissors after he had read the article, he cut it out and pasted it on a sheet of paper, on which he made some marginal notes in his large, irregular handwriting. Then he went back to the press to classify this new document in it. But he was obliged to take a chair, the shelf being so high that he could not reach it notwithstanding his tall stature.

On this high shelf a whole series of enormous bundles of papers were arranged in order, methodically classified. Here were papers of all sorts: sheets of manuscript, documents on stamped paper, articles cut out of newspapers, arranged in envelopes of strong blue paper, each of which bore on the outside a name written in large characters. One felt that these documents were tenderly kept in view, taken out continually, and carefully replaced; for of the whole press, this corner was the only one kept in order.

When Pascal, mounted on the chair, had found the package he was looking for, one of the bulkiest of the envelopes, on which was written the name “Saccard,” he added to it the new document, and then replaced the whole under its corresponding alphabetical letter. A moment later he had forgotten the subject, and was complacently straightening a pile of papers that were falling down. And when he at last jumped down off the chair, he said:

“When you are arranging the press, Clotilde, don't touch the packages at the top; do you hear?”

“Very well, master,” she responded, for the third time, docilely.

He laughed again, with the gaiety that was natural to him.

“That is forbidden.”

“I know it, master.”

And he closed the press with a vigorous turn of the key, which he then threw into a drawer of his writing table. The young girl was sufficiently acquainted with his researches to keep his manuscripts in some degree of order; and he gladly employed her as his secretary; he made her copy his notes when some *confrere* and friend, like Dr. Ramond asked him to send him some document. But she was not a *savante*; he simply forbade her to read what he deemed it useless that she should know.

At last, perceiving her so completely absorbed in her work, his attention was aroused.

“What is the matter with you, that you don't open your lips?” he said. “Are you so taken up with the copying of those flowers that you can't speak?”

This was another of the labors which he often intrusted to her – to make drawings, aquarelles, and pastels, which he afterward used in his works as plates. Thus, for the past five years he had been making some curious experiments on a collection of hollyhocks; he had obtained a whole series of new colorings by artificial fecundations. She made these sorts of copies with extraordinary minuteness, an exactitude of design and of coloring so extreme that he marveled unceasingly at the conscientiousness of her work, and he often told her that she had a “good, round, strong, clear little headpiece.”

But, this time, when he approached her to look over her shoulder, he uttered a cry of comic fury.

“There you are at your nonsense! Now you are off in the clouds again! Will you do me the favor to tear that up at once?”

She straightened herself, her cheeks flushed, her eyes aglow with the delight she took in her work, her slender fingers stained with the red and blue crayon that she had crushed.

“Oh, master!”

And in this “master,” so tender, so caressingly submissive, this term of complete abandonment by which she called him, in order to avoid using the words godfather or uncle, which she thought silly, there was, for the first time, a passionate accent of revolt, the revindication of a being recovering possession of and asserting itself.

For nearly two hours she had been zealously striving to produce an exact and faithful copy of the hollyhocks, and she had just thrown on another sheet a whole bunch of imaginary flowers, of dream-flowers, extravagant and superb. She had, at times, these abrupt shiftings, a need of breaking away in wild fancies in the midst of the most precise of reproductions. She satisfied it at once, falling always into this extraordinary efflorescence of such spirit and fancy that it never repeated itself; creating roses, with bleeding hearts, weeping tears of sulphur, lilies like crystal urns, flowers without any known form, even, spreading out starry rays, with corollas floating like clouds. To-day, on a groundwork dashed in with a few bold strokes of black crayon, it was a rain of pale stars, a whole shower of infinitely soft petals; while, in a corner, an unknown bloom, a bud, chastely veiled, was opening.

“Another to nail there!” resumed the doctor, pointing to the wall, on which there was already a row of strangely curious pastels. “But what may that represent, I ask you?”

She remained very grave, drawing back a step, the better to contemplate her work.

“I know nothing about it; it is beautiful.”

At this moment appeared Martine, the only servant, become the real mistress of the house, after nearly thirty years of service with the doctor. Although she had passed her sixtieth year, she, too, still retained a youthful air as she went about, silent and active, in her eternal black gown and white cap that gave her the look of a nun, with her small, white, calm face, and lusterless eyes, the light in which seemed to have been extinguished.

Without speaking, she went and sat down on the floor before an easy-chair, through a rent in the old covering of which the hair was escaping, and drawing from her pocket a needle and a skein of worsted, she set to work to mend it. For three days past she had been waiting for an hour’s time to do this piece of mending, which haunted her.

“While you are about it, Martine,” said Pascal jestingly, taking between both his hands the mutinous head of Clotilde, “sew me fast, too, this little noodle, which sometimes wanders off into the clouds.”

Martine raised her pale eyes, and looked at her master with her habitual air of adoration?

“Why does monsieur say that?”

“Because, my good girl, in very truth, I believe it is you who have stuffed this good little round, clear, strong headpiece full of notions of the other world, with all your devoutness.”

The two women exchanged a glance of intelligence.

“Oh, monsieur! religion has never done any harm to any one. And when people have not the same ideas, it is certainly better not to talk about them.”

An embarrassed silence followed; this was the one difference of opinion which, at times, brought about disagreements among these three united beings who led so restricted a life. Martine was only twenty-nine, a year older than the doctor, when she entered his house, at the time when he made his *debut* as a physician at Plassans, in a bright little house of the new town. And thirteen years later, when Saccard, a brother of Pascal, sent him his daughter Clotilde, aged seven, after his wife’s death and at the moment when he was about to marry again, it was she who brought up the child, taking it to church, and communicating to it a little of the devout flame with which she had always

burned; while the doctor, who had a broad mind, left them to their joy of believing, for he did not feel that he had the right to interdict to any one the happiness of faith; he contented himself later on with watching over the young girl's education and giving her clear and sound ideas about everything. For thirteen years, during which the three had lived this retired life at La Souleide, a small property situated in the outskirts of the town, a quarter of an hour's walk from St. Saturnin, the cathedral, his life had flowed happily along, occupied in secret great works, a little troubled, however, by an ever increasing uneasiness – the collision, more and more violent, every day, between their beliefs.

Pascal took a few turns gloomily up and down the room. Then, like a man who did not mince his words, he said:

“See, my dear, all this phantasmagoria of mystery has turned your pretty head. Your good God had no need of you; I should have kept you for myself alone; and you would have been all the better for it.”

But Clotilde, trembling with excitement, her clear eyes fixed boldly upon his, held her ground.

“It is you, master, who would be all the better, if you did not shut yourself up in your eyes of flesh. That is another thing, why do you not wish to see?”

And Martine came to her assistance, in her own style.

“Indeed, it is true, monsieur, that you, who are a saint, as I say everywhere, should accompany us to church. Assuredly, God will save you. But at the bare idea that you should not go straight to paradise, I tremble all over.”

He paused, for he had before him, in open revolt, those two whom he had been accustomed to see submissive at his feet, with the tenderness of women won over by his gaiety and his goodness. Already he opened his mouth, and was going to answer roughly, when the uselessness of the discussion became apparent to him.

“There! Let us have peace. I would do better to go and work. And above all, let no one interrupt me!”

With hasty steps he gained his chamber, where he had installed a sort of laboratory, and shut himself up in it. The prohibition to enter it was formal. It was here that he gave himself up to special preparations, of which he spoke to no one. Almost immediately the slow and regular sound of a pestle grinding in a mortar was heard.

“Come,” said Clotilde, smiling, “there he is, at his devil's cookery, as grandmother says.”

And she tranquilly resumed her copying of the hollyhocks. She completed the drawing with mathematical precision, she found the exact tone of the violet petals, striped with yellow, even to the most delicate discoloration of the shades.

“Ah!” murmured Martine, after a moment, again seated on the ground, and occupied in mending the chair, “what a misfortune for a good man like that to lose his soul wilfully. For there is no denying it; I have known him now for thirty years, and in all that time he has never so much as spoken an unkind word to any one. A real heart of gold, who would take the bit from his own mouth. And handsome, too, and always well, and always gay, a real blessing! It is a murder that he does not wish to make his peace with the good God. We will force him to do it, mademoiselle, will we not?”

Clotilde, surprised at hearing her speak so long at one time on the subject, gave her word with a grave air.

“Certainly, Martine, it is a promise. We will force him.”

Silence reigned again, broken a moment afterward by the ringing of the bell attached to the street door below. It had been attached to the door so that they might have notice when any one entered the house, too vast for the three persons who inhabited it. The servant appeared surprised, and grumbled a few words under her breath. Who could have come in such heat as this? She rose, opened the door, and went and leaned over the balustrade; then she returned, saying:

“It is Mme. Felicite.”

Old Mme. Rougon entered briskly. In spite of her eighty years, she had mounted the stairs with the activity of a young girl; she was still the brown, lean, shrill grasshopper of old. Dressed elegantly now in black silk, she might still be taken, seen from behind, thanks to the slenderness of her figure, for some coquette, or some ambitious woman following her favorite pursuit. Seen in front, her eyes still lighted up her withered visage with their fires, and she smiled with an engaging smile when she so desired.

“What! is it you, grandmother?” cried Clotilde, going to meet her. “Why, this sun is enough to bake one.”

Felicite, kissing her on the forehead, laughed, saying:

“Oh, the sun is my friend!”

Then, moving with short, quick steps, she crossed the room, and turned the fastening of one of the shutters.

“Open the shutters a little! It is too gloomy to live in the dark in this way. At my house I let the sun come in.”

Through the opening a jet of hot light, a flood of dancing sparks entered. And under the sky, of the violet blue of a conflagration, the parched plain could be seen, stretching away in the distance, as if asleep or dead in the overpowering, furnace-like heat, while to the right, above the pink roofs, rose the belfry of St. Saturnin, a gilded tower with arises that, in the blinding light, looked like whitened bones.

“Yes,” continued Felicite, “I think of going shortly to the Tulettes, and I wished to know if Charles were here, to take him with me. He is not here – I see that – I will take him another day.”

But while she gave this pretext for her visit, her ferret-like eyes were making the tour of the apartment. Besides, she did not insist, speaking immediately afterward of her son Pascal, on hearing the rhythmical noise of the pestle, which had not ceased in the adjoining chamber.

“Ah! he is still at his devil’s cookery! Don’t disturb him, I have nothing to say to him.”

Martine, who had resumed her work on the chair, shook her head, as if to say that she had no mind to disturb her master, and there was silence again, while Clotilde wiped her fingers, stained with crayon, on a cloth, and Felicite began to walk about the room with short steps, looking around inquisitively.

Old Mme. Rougon would soon be two years a widow. Her husband who had grown so corpulent that he could no longer move, had succumbed to an attack of indigestion on the 3d of September, 1870, on the night of the day on which he had learned of the catastrophe of Sedan. The ruin of the government of which he flattered himself with being one of the founders, seemed to have crushed him. Thus, Felicite affected to occupy herself no longer with politics, living, thenceforward, like a dethroned queen, the only surviving power of a vanished world. No one was unaware that the Rougons, in 1851, had saved Plassans from anarchy, by causing the *coup d’etat* of the 2d of December to triumph there, and that, a few years later, they had won it again from the legitimist and republican candidates, to give it to a Bonapartist deputy. Up to the time of the war, the Empire had continued all-powerful in the town, so popular that it had obtained there at the plebiscite an overwhelming majority. But since the disasters the town had become republican, the quarter St. Marc had returned to its secret royalist intrigues, while the old quarter and the new town had sent to the chamber a liberal representative, slightly tinged with Orleanism, and ready to take sides with the republic, if it should triumph. And, therefore, it was that Felicite, like the intelligent woman she was, had withdrawn her attention from politics, and consented to be nothing more than the dethroned queen of a fallen government.

But this was still an exalted position, surrounded by a melancholy poetry. For eighteen years she had reigned. The tradition of her two *salons*, the yellow *salon*, in which the *coup d’etat* had matured, and the green *salon*, later the neutral ground on which the conquest of Plassans was completed, embellished itself with the reflection of the vanished past, and was for her a glorious history. And

besides, she was very rich. Then, too, she had shown herself dignified in her fall, never uttering a regret or a complaint, parading, with her eighty years, so long a succession of fierce appetites, of abominable maneuvers, of inordinate gratifications, that she became august through them. Her only happiness, now, was to enjoy in peace her large fortune and her past royalty, and she had but one passion left – to defend her past, to extend its fame, suppressing everything that might tarnish it later. Her pride, which lived on the double exploit of which the inhabitants still spoke, watched with jealous care, resolved to leave in existence only creditable documents, those traditions which caused her to be saluted like a fallen queen when she walked through the town.

She went to the door of the chamber and listened to the persistent noise of the pestle, which did not cease. Then, with an anxious brow, she returned to Clotilde.

“Good Heavens! What is he making? You know that he is doing himself the greatest harm with his new drug. I was told, the other day, that he came near killing one of his patients.”

“Oh, grandmother!” cried the young girl.

But she was now launched.

“Yes, exactly. The good wives say many other things, besides! Why, go question them, in the faubourg! They will tell you that he grinds dead men’s bones in infants’ blood.”

This time, while even Martine protested, Clotilde, wounded in her affection, grew angry.

“Oh, grandmother, do not repeat such abominations! Master has so great a heart that he thinks only of making every one happy!”

Then, when she saw that they were both angry, Felicite, comprehending that she had gone too far, resumed her coaxing manner.

“But, my kitten, it is not I who say those frightful things. I repeat to you the stupid reports they spread, so that you may comprehend that Pascal is wrong to pay no heed to public opinion. He thinks he has found a new remedy – nothing could be better! and I will even admit that he will be able to cure everybody, as he hopes. Only, why affect these mysterious ways; why not speak of the matter openly; why, above all, try it only on the rabble of the old quarter and of the country, instead of, attempting among the well-to-do people of the town, striking cures which would do him honor? No, my child, you see your uncle has never been able to act like other people.”

She had assumed a grieved tone, lowering her voice, to display the secret wound of her heart.

“God be thanked! it is not men of worth who are wanting in our family; my other sons have given me satisfaction enough. Is it not so? Your Uncle Eugene rose high enough, minister for twelve years, almost emperor! And your father himself handled many a million, and had a part in many a one of the great works which have made Paris a new city. Not to speak at all of your brother, Maxime, so rich, so distinguished, nor of your cousin, Octave Mouret, one of the kings of the new commerce, nor of our dear Abbe Mouret, who is a saint! Well, then, why does Pascal, who might have followed in the footsteps of them all, persist in living in his hole, like an eccentric old fool?”

And as the young girl was again going to protest, she closed her mouth, with a caressing gesture of her hand.

“No, no, let me finish. I know very well that Pascal is not a fool, that he has written remarkable works, that his communications to the Academy of Medicine have even won for him a reputation among *savants*. But what does that count for, compared to what I have dreamed of for him? Yes, all the best practice of the town, a large fortune, the decoration – honors, in short, and a position worthy of the family. My word! I used to say to him when he was a child: ‘But where do you come from? You are not one of us!’ As for me, I have sacrificed everything for the family; I would let myself be hacked to pieces, that the family might always be great and glorious!”

She straightened her small figure, she seemed to grow tall with the one passion that had formed the joy and pride of her life. But as she resumed her walk, she was startled by suddenly perceiving on the floor the copy of the *Temps*, which the doctor had thrown there, after cutting out the article, to add it to the Saccard papers, and the light from the open window, falling full upon the sheet, enlightened

her, no doubt, for she suddenly stopped walking, and threw herself into a chair, as if she at last knew what she had come to learn.

“Your father has been appointed editor of the *Epoque*,” she said abruptly.

“Yes,” answered Clotilde tranquilly, “master told me so; it was in the paper.”

With an anxious and attentive expression, Felicite looked at her, for this appointment of Saccard, this rallying to the republic, was something of vast significance. After the fall of the empire he had dared return to France, notwithstanding his condemnation as director of the Banque Universelle, the colossal fall of which had preceded that of the government. New influences, some incredible intrigue must have placed him on his feet again, for not only had he received his pardon, but he was once more in a position to undertake affairs of considerable importance, launched into journalism, having his share again of all the good things going. And the recollection came to her of the quarrels of other days between him and his brother Eugene Rougon, whom he had so often compromised, and whom, by an ironical turn of events, he was perhaps going to protect, now that the former minister of the Empire was only a simple deputy, resigned to the single role of standing by his fallen master with the obstinacy with which his mother stood by her family. She still obeyed docilely the orders of her eldest son, the genius, fallen though he was; but Saccard, whatever he might do, had also a part in her heart, from his indomitable determination to succeed, and she was also proud of Maxime, Clotilde’s brother, who had taken up his quarters again, after the war, in his mansion in the Avenue of the Bois de Boulogne, where he was consuming the fortune left him by his wife, Louise de Mareuil, become prudent, with the wisdom of a man struck in a vital part, and trying to cheat the paralysis which threatened him.

“Editor of the *Epoque*,” she repeated; “it is really the position of a minister which your father has won. And I forgot to tell you, I have written again to your brother, to persuade him to come and see us. That would divert him, it would do him good. Then, there is that child, that poor Charles – ”

She did not continue. This was another of the wounds from which her pride bled; a son whom Maxime had had when seventeen by a servant, and who now, at the age of fifteen, weak of intellect, a half-idiot, lived at Plassans, going from the house of one to that of another, a burden to all.

She remained silent a moment longer, waiting for some remark from Clotilde, some transition by which she might come to the subject she wished to touch upon. When she saw that the young girl, occupied in arranging the papers on her desk, was no longer listening, she came to a sudden decision, after casting a glance at Martine, who continued mending the chair, as if she were deaf and dumb.

“Your uncle cut the article out of the *Temps*, then?”

Clotilde smiled calmly.

“Yes, master put it away among his papers. Ah! how many notes he buries in there! Births, deaths, the smallest event in life, everything goes in there. And the genealogical tree is there also, our famous genealogical tree, which he keeps up to date!”

The eyes of old Mme. Rougon flamed. She looked fixedly at the young girl.

“You know them, those papers?”

“Oh, no, grandmother; master has never spoken to me of them; and he has forbidden me to touch them.”

But she did not believe her.

“Come! you have them under your hands, you must have read them.”

Very simple, with her calm rectitude, Clotilde answered, smilingly again.

“No, when master forbids me to do anything, it is because he has his reasons, and I do not do it.”

“Well, my child,” cried Felicite vehemently, dominated by her passion, “you, whom Pascal loves tenderly, and whom he would listen to, perhaps, you ought to entreat him to burn all that, for if he should chance to die, and those frightful things which he has in there were to be found, we should all be dishonored!”

Ah, those abominable papers! she saw them at night, in her nightmares, revealing in letters of fire, the true histories, the physiological blemishes of the family, all that wrong side of her glory which she would have wished to bury forever with the ancestors already dead! She knew how it was that the doctor had conceived the idea of collecting these documents at the beginning of his great studies on heredity; how he had found himself led to take his own family as an example, struck by the typical cases which he saw in it, and which helped to support laws discovered by him. Was it not a perfectly natural field of observation, close at hand and with which he was thoroughly familiar? And with the fine, careless justness of the scientist, he had been accumulating for the last thirty years the most private data, collecting and classifying everything, raising this genealogical tree of the Rougon-Macquarts, of which the voluminous papers, crammed full of proofs, were only the commentary.

"Ah, yes," continued Mme. Rougon hotly, "to the fire, to the fire with all those papers that would tarnish our name!"

And as the servant rose to leave the room, seeing the turn the conversation was taking, she stopped her by a quick gesture.

"No, no, Martine; stay! You are not in the way, since you are now one of the family."

Then, in a hissing voice:

"A collection of falsehoods, of gossip, all the lies that our enemies, enraged by our triumph, hurled against us in former days! Think a little of that, my child. Against all of us, against your father, against your mother, against your brother, all those horrors!"

"But how do you know they are horrors, grandmother?"

She was disconcerted for a moment.

"Oh, well; I suspect it! Where is the family that has not had misfortunes which might be injuriously interpreted? Thus, the mother of us all, that dear and venerable Aunt Dide, your great-grandmother, has she not been for the past twenty-one years in the madhouse at the Tulettes? If God has granted her the grace of allowing her to live to the age of one hundred and four years, he has also cruelly afflicted her in depriving her of her reason. Certainly, there is no shame in that; only, what exasperates me – what must not be – is that they should say afterward that we are all mad. And, then, regarding your grand-uncle Macquart, too, deplorable rumors have been spread. Macquart had his faults in past days, I do not seek to defend him. But to-day, is he not living very reputably on his little property at the Tulettes, two steps away from our unhappy mother, over whom he watches like a good son? And listen! one last example. Your brother, Maxime, committed a great fault when he had by a servant that poor little Charles, and it is certain, besides, that the unhappy child is of unsound mind. No matter. Will it please you if they tell you that your nephew is degenerate; that he reproduces from four generations back, his great-great-grandmother the dear woman to whom we sometimes take him, and with whom he likes so much to be? No! there is no longer any family possible, if people begin to lay bare everything – the nerves of this one, the muscles of that. It is enough to disgust one with living!"

Clotilde, standing in her long black blouse, had listened to her grandmother attentively. She had grown very serious; her arms hung by her sides, her eyes were fixed upon the ground. There was silence for a moment; then she said slowly:

"It is science, grandmother."

"Science!" cried Felicite, trotting about again. "A fine thing, their science, that goes against all that is most sacred in the world! When they shall have demolished everything they will have advanced greatly! They kill respect, they kill the family, they kill the good God!"

"Oh! don't say that, madame!" interrupted Martine, in a grieved voice, her narrow devoutness wounded. "Do not say that M. Pascal kills the good God!"

"Yes, my poor girl, he kills him. And look you, it is a crime, from the religious point of view, to let one's self be damned in that way. You do not love him, on my word of honor! No, you do not love him, you two who have the happiness of believing, since you do nothing to bring him back to

the right path. Ah! if I were in your place, I would split that press open with a hatchet. I would make a famous bonfire with all the insults to the good God which it contains!”

She had planted herself before the immense press and was measuring it with her fiery glance, as if to take it by assault, to sack it, to destroy it, in spite of the withered and fragile thinness of her eighty years. Then, with a gesture of ironical disdain:

“If, even with his science, he could know everything!”

Clotilde remained for a moment absorbed in thought, her gaze lost in vacancy. Then she said in an undertone, as if speaking to herself:

“It is true, he cannot know everything. There is always something else below. That is what irritates me; that is what makes us quarrel: for I cannot, like him, put the mystery aside. I am troubled by it, so much so that I suffer cruelly. Below, what wills and acts in the shuddering darkness, all the unknown forces – ”

Her voice had gradually become lower and now dropped to an indistinct murmur.

Then Martine, whose face for a moment past had worn a somber expression, interrupted in her turn:

“If it was true, however, mademoiselle, that monsieur would be damned on account of those villainous papers, tell me, ought we to let it happen? For my part, look you, if he were to tell me to throw myself down from the terrace, I would shut my eyes and throw myself, because I know that he is always right. But for his salvation! Oh! if I could, I would work for that, in spite of him. In every way, yes! I would force him; it is too cruel to me to think that he will not be in heaven with us.”

“You are quite right, my girl,” said Felicite approvingly. “You, at least, love your master in an intelligent fashion.”

Between the two, Clotilde still seemed irresolute. In her, belief did not bend to the strict rule of dogma; the religious sentiment did not materialize in the hope of a paradise, of a place of delights, where she was to meet her own again. It was in her simply a need of a beyond, a certainty that the vast world does not stop short at sensation, that there is a whole unknown world, besides, which must be taken into account. But her grandmother, who was so old, this servant, who was so devoted, shook her in her uneasy affection for her uncle. Did they not love him better, in a more enlightened and more upright fashion, they who desired him to be without a stain, freed from his manias as a scientist, pure enough to be among the elect? Phrases of devotional books recurred to her; the continual battle waged against the spirit of evil; the glory of conversions effected after a violent struggle. What if she set herself to this holy task; what if, after all, in spite of himself, she should be able to save him! And an exaltation gradually gained her spirit, naturally inclined to adventurous enterprises.

“Certainly,” she said at last, “I should be very happy if he would not persist in his notion of heaping up all those scraps of paper, and if he would come to church with us.”

Seeing her about to yield, Mme. Rougon cried out that it was necessary to act, and Martine herself added the weight of all her real authority. They both approached the young girl, and began to instruct her, lowering their voices as if they were engaged in a conspiracy, whence was to result a miraculous benefit, a divine joy with which the whole house would be perfumed. What a triumph if they reconciled the doctor with God! and what sweetness, afterward, to live altogether in the celestial communion of the same faith!

“Well, then, what must I do?” asked Clotilde, vanquished, won over.

But at this moment the doctor’s pestle was heard in the silence, with its continued rhythm. And the victorious Felicite, who was about to speak, turned her head uneasily, and looked for a moment at the door of the adjoining chamber. Then, in an undertone, she said:

“Do you know where the key of the press is?”

Clotilde answered only with an artless gesture, that expressed all her repugnance to betray her master in this way.

“What a child you are! I swear to you that I will take nothing; I will not even disturb anything. Only as we are alone and as Pascal never reappears before dinner, we might assure ourselves of what there is in there, might we not? Oh! nothing but a glance, on my word of honor.”

The young girl stood motionless, unwilling, still, to give her consent.

“And then, it may be that I am mistaken; no doubt there are none of those bad things there that I have told you of.”

This was decisive; she ran to take the key from the drawer, and she herself opened wide the press.

“There, grandmother, the papers are up there.”

Martine had gone, without a word, to station herself at the door of the doctor’s chamber, her ear on the alert, listening to the pestle, while Felicite, as if riveted to the spot by emotion, regarded the papers. At last, there they were, those terrible documents, the nightmare that had poisoned her life! She saw them, she was going to touch them, to carry them away! And she reached up, straining her little legs, in the eagerness of her desire.

“It is too high, my kitten,” she said. “Help me; give them to me!”

“Oh! not that, grandmother! Take a chair!”

Felicite took a chair, and mounted slowly upon it. But she was still too short. By an extraordinary effort she raised herself, lengthening her stature until she was able to touch the envelopes of strong blue paper with the tips of her fingers; and her fingers traveled over them, contracting nervously, scratching like claws. Suddenly there was a crash – it was a geological specimen, a fragment of marble that had been on a lower shelf, and that she had just thrown down.

Instantly the pestle stopped, and Martine said in a stifled voice:

“Take care; here he comes!”

But Felicite, grown desperate, did not hear, did not let go her hold when Pascal entered hastily. He had supposed that some accident had happened, that some one had fallen, and he stood stupefied at what he saw – his mother on the chair, her arm still in the air, while Martine had withdrawn to one side, and Clotilde, very pale, stood waiting, without turning her head. When he comprehended the scene, he himself became as white as a sheet. A terrible anger arose within him.

Old Mme. Rougon, however, troubled herself in no wise. When she saw that the opportunity was lost, she descended from the chair, without making any illusion whatever to the task at which he had surprised her.

“Oh, it is you! I do not wish to disturb you. I came to embrace Clotilde. But here I have been talking for nearly two hours, and I must run away at once. They will be expecting me at home; they won’t know what has become of me at this hour. Good-by until Sunday.”

She went away quite at her ease, after smiling at her son, who stood before her silent and respectful. It was an attitude that he had long since adopted, to avoid an explanation which he felt must be cruel, and which he had always feared. He knew her, he was willing to pardon her everything, in his broad tolerance as a scientist, who made allowance for heredity, environment, and circumstances. And, then, was she not his mother? That ought to have sufficed, for, in spite of the frightful blows which his researches inflicted upon the family, he preserved a great affection for those belonging to him.

When his mother was no longer there, his anger burst forth, and fell upon Clotilde. He had turned his eyes away from Martine, and fixed them on the young girl, who did not turn hers away, however, with a courage which accepted the responsibility of her act.

“You! you!” he said at last.

He seized her arm, and pressed it until she cried. But she continued to look him full in the face, without quailing before him, with the indomitable will of her individuality, of her selfhood. She was beautiful and provoking, with her tall, slender figure, robed in its black blouse; and her exquisite,

youthful fairness, her straight forehead, her finely cut nose, her firm chin, took on something of a warlike charm in her rebellion.

“You, whom I have made, you who are my pupil, my friend, my other mind, to whom I have given a part of my heart and of my brain! Ah, yes! I should have kept you entirely for myself, and not have allowed your stupid good God to take the best part of you!”

“Oh, monsieur, you blaspheme!” cried Martine, who had approached him, in order to draw upon herself a part of his anger.

But he did not even see her. Only Clotilde existed for him. And he was as if transfigured, stirred up by so great a passion that his handsome face, crowned by his white hair, framed by his white beard, flamed with youthful passion, with an immense tenderness that had been wounded and exasperated.

“You, you!” he repeated in a trembling voice.

“Yes, I! Why then, master, should I not love you better than you love me? And why, if I believe you to be in peril, should I not try to save you? You are greatly concerned about what I think; you would like well to make me think as you do!”

She had never before defied him in this way.

“But you are a little girl; you know nothing!”

“No, I am a soul, and you know no more about souls than I do!”

He released her arm, and waved his hand vaguely toward heaven, and then a great silence fell – a silence full of grave meaning, of the uselessness of the discussion which he did not wish to enter upon. Thrusting her aside rudely, he crossed over to the middle window and opened the blinds, for the sun was declining, and the room was growing dark. Then he returned.

But she, feeling a need of air and space, went to the open window. The burning rain of sparks had ceased, and there fell now, from on high, only the last shiver of the overheated and paling sky; and from the still burning earth ascended warm odors, with the freer respiration of evening. At the foot of the terrace was the railroad, with the outlying dependencies of the station, of which the buildings were to be seen in the distance; then, crossing the vast arid plain, a line of trees marked the course of the Viorne, beyond which rose the hills of Sainte-Marthe, red fields planted with olive trees, supported on terraces by walls of uncemented stones and crowned by somber pine woods – broad amphitheaters, bare and desolate, corroded by the heats of summer, of the color of old baked brick, which this fringe of dark verdure, standing out against the background of the sky, bordered above. To the left opened the gorges of the Seille, great yellow stones that had broken away from the soil, and lay in the midst of blood-colored fields, dominated by an immense band of rocks like the wall of a gigantic fortress; while to the right, at the very entrance to the valley through which flowed the Viorne, rose, one above another, the discolored pink-tiled roofs of the town of Plassans, the compact and confused mass of an old town, pierced by the tops of ancient elms, and dominated by the high tower of St. Saturnin, solitary and serene at this hour in the limpid gold of sunset.

“Ah, my God!” said Clotilde slowly, “one must be arrogant, indeed, to imagine that one can take everything in one’s hand and know everything!”

Pascal had just mounted on the chair to assure himself that not one of his packages was missing. Then he took up the fragment of marble, and replaced it on the shelf, and when he had again locked the press with a vigorous turn of the hand, he put the key into his pocket.

“Yes,” he replied; “try not to know everything, and above all, try not to bewilder your brain about what we do not know, what we shall doubtless never know!”

Martine again approached Clotilde, to lend her her support, to show her that they both had a common cause. And now the doctor perceived her, also, and felt that they were both united in the same desire for conquest. After years of secret attempts, it was at last open war; the *savant* saw his household turn against his opinions, and menace them with destruction. There is no worse torture than to have treason in one’s own home, around one; to be trapped, dispossessed, crushed, by those whom you love, and who love you!

Suddenly this frightful idea presented itself to him.

“And yet both of you love me!” he cried.

He saw their eyes grow dim with tears; he was filled with an infinite sadness, on this tranquil close of a beautiful day. All his gaiety, all his kindness of heart, which came from his intense love of life, were shaken by it.

“Ah, my dear! and you, my poor girl,” he said, “you are doing this for my happiness, are you not? But, alas, how unhappy we are going to be!”

II

On the following morning Clotilde was awake at six o'clock. She had gone to bed angry with Pascal; they were at variance with each other. And her first feeling was one of uneasiness, of secret distress, an instant need of making her peace, so that she might no longer have upon her heart the heavy weight that lay there now.

Springing quickly out of bed, she went and half opened the shutters of both windows. The sun, already high, sent his light across the chamber in two golden bars. Into this drowsy room that exhaled a sweet odor of youth, the bright morning brought with it fresh, cheerful air; but the young girl went back and sat down on the edge of the bed in a thoughtful attitude, clad only in her scant nightdress, which made her look still more slender, with her long tapering limbs, her strong, slender body, with its round throat, round neck, round and supple arms; and her adorable neck and throat, of a milky whiteness, had the exquisite softness and smoothness of white satin. For a long time, at the ungraceful age between twelve and eighteen, she had looked awkwardly tall, climbing trees like a boy. Then, from the ungainly hoyden had been evolved this charming, delicate and lovely creature.

With absent gaze she sat looking at the walls of the chamber. Although La Souleïade dated from the last century, it must have been refurnished under the First Empire, for it was hung with an old-fashioned printed calico, with a pattern representing busts of the Sphinx, and garlands of oak leaves. Originally of a bright red, this calico had faded to a pink – an undecided pink, inclining to orange. The curtains of the two windows and of the bed were still in existence, but it had been necessary to clean them, and this had made them still paler. And this faded purple, this dawnlike tint, so delicately soft, was in truth exquisite. As for the bed, covered with the same stuff, it had come down from so remote an antiquity that it had been replaced by another bed found in an adjoining room; another Empire bed, low and very broad, of massive mahogany, ornamented with brasses, its four square pillars adorned also with busts of the Sphinx, like those on the wall. The rest of the furniture matched, however – a press, with whole doors and pillars; a chest of drawers with a marble top, surrounded by a railing; a tall and massive cheval-glass, a large lounge with straight feet, and seats with straight, lyre-shaped backs. But a coverlet made of an old Louis XV. silk skirt brightened the majestic bed, that occupied the middle of the wall fronting the windows; a heap of cushions made the lounge soft; and there were, besides, two *etageres* and a table also covered with old flowered silk, at the further end of the room.

Clotilde at last put on her stockings and slipped on a morning gown of white *pique*, and thrusting the tips of her feet into her gray canvas slippers, she ran into her dressing-room, a back room looking out on the rear of the house. She had had it hung plainly with an *ecru* drill with blue stripes, and it contained only furniture of varnished pine – the toilette table, two presses, and two chairs. It revealed, however, a natural and delicate coquetry which was very feminine. This had grown with her at the same time with her beauty. Headstrong and boyish though she still was at times, she had become a submissive and affectionate woman, desiring to be loved, above everything. The truth was that she had grown up in freedom, without having learned anything more than to read and write, having acquired by herself, later, while assisting her uncle, a vast fund of information. But there had been no plan settled upon between them. He had not wished to make her a prodigy; she had merely conceived a passion for natural history, which revealed to her the mysteries of life. And she had kept her innocence unsullied like a fruit which no hand has touched, thanks, no doubt, to her unconscious and religious waiting for the coming of love – that profound feminine feeling which made her reserve the gift of her whole being for the man whom she should love.

She pushed back her hair and bathed her face; then, yielding to her impatience, she again softly opened the door of her chamber and ventured to cross the vast workroom, noiselessly and on tiptoe. The shutters were still closed, but she could see clearly enough not to stumble against the furniture. When she was at the other end before the door of the doctor's room, she bent forward, holding her

breath. Was he already up? What could he be doing? She heard him plainly, walking about with short steps, dressing himself, no doubt. She never entered this chamber in which he chose to hide certain labors; and which thus remained closed, like a tabernacle. One fear had taken possession of her; that of being discovered here by him if he should open the door; and the agitation produced by the struggle between her rebellious pride and a desire to show her submission caused her to grow hot and cold by turns, with sensations until now unknown to her. For an instant her desire for reconciliation was so strong that she was on the point of knocking. Then, as footsteps approached, she ran precipitately away.

Until eight o'clock Clotilde was agitated by an ever-increasing impatience. At every instant she looked at the clock on the mantelpiece of her room; an Empire clock of gilded bronze, representing Love leaning against a pillar, contemplating Time asleep.

Eight was the hour at which she generally descended to the dining-room to breakfast with the doctor. And while waiting she made a careful toilette, arranged her hair, and put on another morning gown of white muslin with red spots. Then, having still a quarter of an hour on her hands, she satisfied an old desire and sat down to sew a piece of narrow lace, an imitation of Chantilly, on her working blouse, that black blouse which she had begun to find too boyish, not feminine enough. But on the stroke of eight she laid down her work, and went downstairs quickly.

"You are going to breakfast entirely alone," said Martine tranquilly to her, when she entered the dining-room.

"How is that?"

"Yes, the doctor called me, and I passed him in his egg through the half-open door. There he is again, at his mortar and his filter. We won't see him now before noon."

Clotilde turned pale with disappointment. She drank her milk standing, took her roll in her hand, and followed the servant into the kitchen. There were on the ground floor, besides this kitchen and the dining-room, only an uninhabited room in which the potatoes were stored, and which had formerly been used as an office by the doctor, when he received his patients in his house – the desk and the armchair had years ago been taken up to his chamber – and another small room, which opened into the kitchen; the old servant's room, scrupulously clean, and furnished with a walnut chest of drawers and a bed like a nun's with white hangings.

"Do you think he has begun to make his liquor again?" asked Clotilde.

"Well, it can be only that. You know that he thinks of neither eating nor drinking when that takes possession of him!"

Then all the young girl's vexation was exhaled in a low plaint:

"Ah, my God! my God!"

And while Martine went to make up her room, she took an umbrella from the hall stand and went disconsolately to eat her roll in the garden, not knowing now how she should occupy her time until midday.

It was now almost seventeen years since Dr. Pascal, having resolved to leave his little house in the new town, had bought La Souleiade for twenty thousand francs, in order to live there in seclusion, and also to give more space and more happiness to the little girl sent him by his brother Saccard from Paris. This Souleiade, situated outside the town gates on a plateau dominating the plain, was part of a large estate whose once vast grounds were reduced to less than two hectares in consequence of successive sales, without counting that the construction of the railroad had taken away the last arable fields. The house itself had been half destroyed by a conflagration and only one of the two buildings remained – a quadrangular wing "of four walls," as they say in Provence, with five front windows and roofed with large pink tiles. And the doctor, who had bought it completely furnished, had contented himself with repairing it and finishing the boundary walls, so as to be undisturbed in his house.

Generally Clotilde loved this solitude passionately; this narrow kingdom which she could go over in ten minutes, and which still retained remnants of its past grandeur. But this morning she

brought there something like a nervous disquietude. She walked for a few moments along the terrace, at the two extremities of which stood two secular cypresses like two enormous funeral tapers, which could be seen three leagues off. The slope then descended to the railroad, walls of uncemented stones supporting the red earth, in which the last vines were dead; and on these giant steps grew only rows of olive and almond trees, with sickly foliage. The heat was already overpowering; she saw the little lizards running about on the disjointed flags, among the hairy tufts of caper bushes.

Then, as if irritated by the vast horizon, she crossed the orchard and the kitchen garden, which Martine still persisted in cultivating in spite of her age, calling in a man only twice a week for the heavier labors; and she ascended to a little pine wood on the right, all that remained of the superb pines which had formerly covered the plateau; but, here, too, she was ill at ease; the pine needles crackled under her feet, a resinous, stifling odor descended from the branches. And walking along the boundary wall past the entrance gate, which opened on the road to Les Fenouilleres, three hundred meters from the first houses of Plassans, she emerged at last on the threshing-yard; an immense yard, fifteen meters in radius, which would of itself have sufficed to prove the former importance of the domain. Ah! this antique area, paved with small round stones, as in the days of the Romans; this species of vast esplanade, covered with short dry grass of the color of gold as with a thick woolen carpet; how joyously she had played there in other days, running about, rolling on the grass, lying for hours on her back, watching the stars coming out one by one in the depths of the illimitable sky!

She opened her umbrella again, and crossed the yard with slower steps. Now she was on the left of the terrace. She had made the tour of the estate, so that she had returned by the back of the house, through the clump of enormous plane trees that on this side cast a thick shade. This was the side on which opened the two windows of the doctor's room. And she raised her eyes to them, for she had approached only in the sudden hope of at last seeing him. But the windows remained closed, and she was wounded by this as by an unkindness to herself. Then only did she perceive that she still held in her hand her roll, which she had forgotten to eat; and she plunged among the trees, biting it impatiently with her fine young teeth.

It was a delicious retreat, this old quincunx of plane trees, another remnant of the past splendor of La Soulejade. Under these giant trees, with their monstrous trunks, there was only a dim light, a greenish light, exquisitely cool, even on the hottest days of summer. Formerly a French garden had been laid out here, of which only the box borders remained; bushes which had habituated themselves to the shade, no doubt, for they grew vigorously, as tall as trees. And the charm of this shady nook was a fountain, a simple leaden pipe fixed in the shaft of a column; whence flowed perpetually, even in the greatest drought, a thread of water as thick as the little finger, which supplied a large mossy basin, the greenish stones of which were cleaned only once in three or four years. When all the wells of the neighborhood were dry, La Soulejade still kept its spring, of which the great plane trees were assuredly the secular children. Night and day for centuries past this slender thread of water, unvarying and continuous, had sung the same pure song with crystal sound.

Clotilde, after wandering awhile among the bushes of box, which reached to her shoulder, went back to the house for a piece of embroidery, and returning with it, sat down at a stone table beside the fountain. Some garden chairs had been placed around it, and they often took coffee here. And after this she affected not to look up again from her work, as if she was completely absorbed in it. Now and then, while seeming to look between the trunks of trees toward the sultry distance, toward the yard, on which the sun blazed fiercely and which glowed like a brazier, she stole a glance from under her long lashes up to the doctor's windows. Nothing appeared, not a shadow. And a feeling of sadness, of resentment, arose within her at this neglect, this contempt in which he seemed to hold her after their quarrel of the day before. She who had got up with so great a desire to make peace at once! He was in no hurry, however; he did not love her then, since he could be satisfied to live at variance with her. And gradually a feeling of gloom took possession of her, her rebellious thoughts returned, and she resolved anew to yield in nothing.

At eleven o'clock, before setting her breakfast on the fire, Martine came to her for a moment, the eternal stocking in her hand which she was always knitting even while walking, when she was not occupied in the affairs of the house.

"Do you know that he is still shut up there like a wolf in his hole, at his villainous cookery?"

Clotilde shrugged her shoulders, without lifting her eyes from her embroidery.

"And then, mademoiselle, if you only knew what they say! Mme. Felicite was right yesterday when she said that it was really enough to make one blush. They threw it in my face that he had killed old Boutin, that poor old man, you know, who had the falling sickness and who died on the road. To believe those women of the faubourg, every one into whom he injects his remedy gets the true cholera from it, without counting that they accuse him of having taken the devil into partnership."

A short silence followed. Then, as the young girl became more gloomy than before, the servant resumed, moving her fingers still more rapidly:

"As for me, I know nothing about the matter, but what he is making there enrages me. And you, mademoiselle, do you approve of that cookery?"

At last Clotilde raised her head quickly, yielding to the flood of passion that swept over her.

"Listen; I wish to know no more about it than you do, but I think that he is on a very dangerous path. He no longer loves us."

"Oh, yes, mademoiselle; he loves us."

"No, no; not as we love him. If he loved us, he would be here with us, instead of endangering his soul and his happiness and ours, up there, in his desire to save everybody."

And the two women looked at each other for a moment with eyes burning with affection, in their jealous anger. Then they resumed their work in silence, enveloped in shadow.

Above, in his room, Dr. Pascal was working with the serenity of perfect joy. He had practised his profession for only about a dozen years, from his return to Paris up to the time when he had retired to La Souleïade. Satisfied with the hundred and odd thousand francs which he had earned and which he had invested prudently, he devoted himself almost exclusively to his favorite studies, retaining only a practise among friends, never refusing to go to the bedside of a patient but never sending in his account. When he was paid he threw the money into a drawer in his writing desk, regarding this as pocket-money for his experiments and caprices, apart from his income which sufficed for his wants. And he laughed at the bad reputation for eccentricity which his way of life had gained him; he was happy only when in the midst of his researches on the subjects for which he had a passion. It was matter for surprise to many that this scientist, whose intellectual gifts had been spoiled by a too lively imagination, should have remained at Plassans, this out-of-the-way town where it seemed as if every requirement for his studies must be wanting. But he explained very well the advantages which he had discovered here; in the first place, an utterly peaceful retreat in which he might live the secluded life he desired; then, an unsuspected field for continuous research in the light of the facts of heredity, which was his passion, in this little town where he knew every family and where he could follow the phenomena kept most secret, through two or three generations. And then he was near the seashore; he went there almost every summer, to study the swarming life that is born and propagates itself in the depths of the vast waters. And there was finally, at the hospital in Plassans, a dissecting room to which he was almost the only visitor; a large, bright, quiet room, in which for more than twenty years every unclaimed body had passed under his scalpel. A modest man besides, of a timidity that had long since become shyness, it had been sufficient for him to maintain a correspondence with his old professors and his new friends, concerning the very remarkable papers which he from time to time sent to the Academy of Medicine. He was altogether wanting in militant ambition.

Ah, this heredity! what a subject of endless meditation it was for him! The strangest, the most wonderful part of it all, was it not that the resemblance between parents and children should not be perfect, mathematically exact? He had in the beginning made a genealogical tree of his family, logically traced, in which the influences from generation to generation were distributed equally

– the father's part and the mother's part. But the living reality contradicted the theory almost at every point. Heredity, instead of being resemblance, was an effort toward resemblance thwarted by circumstances and environment. And he had arrived at what he called the hypothesis of the abortion of cells. Life is only motion, and heredity being a communicated motion, it happened that the cells in their multiplication from one another jostled one another, pressed one another, made room for themselves, putting forth, each one, the hereditary effort; so that if during this struggle the weaker cells succumbed, considerable disturbances took place, with the final result of organs totally different. Did not variation, the constant invention of nature, which clashed with his theories, come from this? Did not he himself differ from his parents only in consequence of similar accidents, or even as the effect of larvated heredity, in which he had for a time believed? For every genealogical tree has roots which extend as far back into humanity as the first man; one cannot proceed from a single ancestor; one may always resemble a still older, unknown ancestor. He doubted atavism, however; it seemed to him, in spite of a remarkable example taken from his own family, that resemblance at the end of two or three generations must disappear by reason of accidents, of interferences, of a thousand possible combinations. There was then a perpetual becoming, a constant transformation in this communicated effort, this transmitted power, this shock which breathes into matter the breath of life, and which is life itself. And a multiplicity of questions presented themselves to him. Was there a physical and intellectual progress through the ages? Did the brain grow with the growth of the sciences with which it occupied itself? Might one hope, in time, for a larger sum of reason and of happiness? Then there were special problems; one among others, the mystery of which had for a long time irritated him, that of sex; would science never be able to predict, or at least to explain the sex of the embryo being? He had written a very curious paper crammed full of facts on this subject, but which left it in the end in the complete ignorance in which the most exhaustive researches had left it. Doubtless the question of heredity fascinated him as it did only because it remained obscure, vast, and unfathomable, like all the infant sciences where imagination holds sway. Finally, a long study which he had made on the heredity of phthisis revived in him the wavering faith of the healer, arousing in him the noble and wild hope of regenerating humanity.

In short, Dr. Pascal had only one belief – the belief in life. Life was the only divine manifestation. Life was God, the grand motor, the soul of the universe. And life had no other instrument than heredity; heredity made the world; so that if its laws could be known and directed, the world could be made to one's will. In him, to whom sickness, suffering, and death had been a familiar sight, the militant pity of the physician awoke. Ah! to have no more sickness, no more suffering, as little death as possible! His dream ended in this thought – that universal happiness, the future community of perfection and of felicity, could be hastened by intervention, by giving health to all. When all should be healthy, strong, and intelligent, there would be only a superior race, infinitely wise and happy. In India, was not a Brahmin developed from a Soudra in seven generations, thus raising, experimentally, the lowest of beings to the highest type of humanity? And as in his study of consumption he had arrived at the conclusion that it was not hereditary, but that every child of a consumptive carried within him a degenerate soil in which consumption developed with extraordinary facility at the slightest contagion, he had come to think only of invigorating this soil impoverished by heredity; to give it the strength to resist the parasites, or rather the destructive leaven, which he had suspected to exist in the organism, long before the microbe theory. To give strength – the whole problem was there; and to give strength was also to give will, to enlarge the brain by fortifying the other organs.

About this time the doctor, reading an old medical book of the fifteenth century, was greatly struck by a method of treating disease called signature. To cure a diseased organ, it was only necessary to take from a sheep or an ox the corresponding organ in sound condition, boil it, and give the soup to the patient to drink. The theory was to cure like by like, and in diseases of the liver, especially, the old work stated that the cures were numberless. This set the doctor's vivid imagination working. Why

not make the trial? If he wished to regenerate those enfeebled by hereditary influences, he had only to give them the normal and healthy nerve substance. The method of the soup, however, seemed to him childish, and he invented in its stead that of grinding in a mortar the brain of a sheep, moistening it with distilled water, and then decanting and filtering the liquor thus obtained. He tried this liquor then mixed with Malaga wine, on his patients, without obtaining any appreciable result. Suddenly, as he was beginning to grow discouraged, he had an inspiration one day, when he was giving a lady suffering from hepatic colics an injection of morphine with the little syringe of Pravaz. What if he were to try hypodermic injections with his liquor? And as soon as he returned home he tried the experiment on himself, making an injection in his side, which he repeated night and morning. The first doses, of a gram only, were without effect. But having doubled, and then tripled the dose, he was enchanted, one morning on getting up, to find that his limbs had all the vigor of twenty. He went on increasing the dose up to five grams, and then his respiration became deeper, and above all he worked with a clearness of mind, an ease, which he had not known for years. A great flood of happiness, of joy in living, inundated his being. From this time, after he had had a syringe made at Paris capable of containing five grams, he was surprised at the happy results which he obtained with his patients, whom he had on their feet again in a few days, full of energy and activity, as if endowed with new life. His method was still tentative and rude, and he divined in it all sorts of dangers, and especially, that of inducing embolism, if the liquor was not perfectly pure. Then he suspected that the strength of his patients came in part from the fever his treatment produced in them. But he was only a pioneer; the method would improve later. Was it not already a miracle to make the ataxic walk, to bring consumptives back to life, as it were; even to give hours of lucidity to the insane? And at the thought of this discovery of the alchemy of the twentieth century, an immense hope opened up before him; he believed he had discovered the universal panacea, the elixir of life, which was to combat human debility, the one real cause of every ill; a veritable scientific Fountain of Youth, which, in giving vigor, health, and will would create an altogether new and superior humanity.

This particular morning in his chamber, a room with a northern aspect and somewhat dark owing to the vicinity of the plane trees, furnished simply with an iron bedstead, a mahogany writing desk, and a large writing table, on which were a mortar and a microscope, he was completing with infinite care the preparation of a vial of his liquor. Since the day before, after pounding the nerve substance of a sheep in distilled water, he had been decanting and filtering it. And he had at last obtained a small bottle of a turbid, opaline liquid, irised by bluish gleams, which he regarded for a long time in the light as if he held in his hand the regenerating blood and symbol of the world.

But a few light knocks at the door and an urgent voice drew him from his dream.

"Why, what is the matter, monsieur? It is a quarter-past twelve; don't you intend to come to breakfast?"

For downstairs breakfast had been waiting for some time past in the large, cool dining-room. The blinds were closed, with the exception of one which had just been half opened. It was a cheerful room, with pearl gray panels relieved by blue mouldings. The table, the sideboard, and the chairs must have formed part of the set of Empire furniture in the bedrooms; and the old mahogany, of a deep red, stood out in strong relief against the light background. A hanging lamp of polished brass, always shining, gleamed like a sun; while on the four walls bloomed four large bouquets in pastel, of gillyflowers, carnations, hyacinths, and roses.

Joyous, radiant, Dr. Pascal entered.

"Ah, the deuce! I had forgotten! I wanted to finish. Look at this, quite fresh, and perfectly pure this time; something to work miracles with!"

And he showed the vial, which he had brought down in his enthusiasm. But his eye fell on Clotilde standing erect and silent, with a serious air. The secret vexation caused by waiting had brought back all her hostility, and she, who had burned to throw herself on his neck in the morning, remained motionless as if chilled and repelled by him.

“Good!” he resumed, without losing anything of his gaiety, “we are still at odds, it seems. That is something very ugly. So you don’t admire my sorcerer’s liquor, which resuscitates the dead?”

He seated himself at the table, and the young girl, sitting down opposite him, was obliged at last to answer:

“You know well, master, that I admire everything belonging to you. Only, my most ardent desire is that others also should admire you. And there is the death of poor old Boutin – ”

“Oh!” he cried, without letting her finish, “an epileptic, who succumbed to a congestive attack! See! since you are in a bad humor, let us talk no more about that – you would grieve me, and that would spoil my day.”

There were soft boiled eggs, cutlets, and cream. Silence reigned for a few moments, during which in spite of her ill-humor she ate heartily, with a good appetite which she had not the coquetry to conceal. Then he resumed, laughing:

“What reassures me is to see that your stomach is in good order. Martine, hand mademoiselle the bread.”

The servant waited on them as she was accustomed to do, watching them eat, with her quiet air of familiarity.

Sometimes she even chatted with them.

“Monsieur,” she said, when she had cut the bread, “the butcher has brought his bill. Is he to be paid?”

He looked up at her in surprise.

“Why do you ask me that?” he said. “Do you not always pay him without consulting me?”

It was, in effect, Martine who kept the purse. The amount deposited with M. Grandguillot, notary at Plassans, produced a round sum of six thousand francs income. Every three months the fifteen hundred francs were remitted to the servant, and she disposed of them to the best interests of the house; bought and paid for everything with the strictest economy, for she was of so saving a disposition that they bantered her about it continually. Clotilde, who spent very little, had never thought of asking a separate purse for herself. As for the doctor, he took what he required for his experiments and his pocket money from the three or four thousand francs which he still earned every year, and which he kept lying in the drawer of his writing desk; so that there was quite a little treasure there in gold and bank bills, of which he never knew the exact amount.

“Undoubtedly, monsieur, I pay, when it is I who have bought the things; but this time the bill is so large on account of the brains which the butcher has furnished you – ”

The doctor interrupted her brusquely:

“Ah, come! so you, too, are going to set yourself against me, are you? No, no; both of you – that would be too much! Yesterday you pained me greatly, and I was angry. But this must cease. I will not have the house turned into a hell. Two women against me, and they the only ones who love me at all? Do you know, I would sooner quit the house at once!”

He did not speak angrily, he even smiled; but the disquietude of his heart was perceptible in the trembling of his voice. And he added with his indulgent, cheerful air:

“If you are afraid for the end of the month, my girl, tell the butcher to send my bill apart. And don’t fear; you are not going to be asked for any of your money to settle it with; your sous may lie sleeping.”

This was an allusion to Martine’s little personal fortune. In thirty years, with four hundred francs wages she had earned twelve thousand francs, from which she had taken only what was strictly necessary for her wants; and increased, almost trebled, by the interest, her savings amounted now to thirty thousand francs, which through a caprice, a desire to have her money apart, she had not chosen to place with M. Grandguillot. They were elsewhere, safely invested in the funds.

“Sous that lie sleeping are honest sous,” she said gravely. “But monsieur is right; I will tell the butcher to send a bill apart, as all the brains are for monsieur’s cookery and not for mine.”

This explanation brought a smile to the face of Clotilde, who was always amused by the jests about Martine's avarice; and the breakfast ended more cheerfully. The doctor desired to take the coffee under the plane trees, saying that he felt the need of air after being shut up all the morning. The coffee was served then on the stone table beside the fountain; and how pleasant it was there in the shade, listening to the cool murmur of the water, while around, the pine wood, the court, the whole place, were glowing in the early afternoon sun.

The doctor had complacently brought with him the vial of nerve substance, which he looked at as it stood on the table.

"So, then, mademoiselle," he resumed, with an air of brusque pleasantry, "you do not believe in my elixir of resurrection, and you believe in miracles!"

"Master," responded Clotilde, "I believe that we do not know everything."

He made a gesture of impatience.

"But we must know everything. Understand then, obstinate little girl, that not a single deviation from the invariable laws which govern the universe has ever been scientifically proved. Up to this day there has been no proof of the existence of any intelligence other than the human. I defy you to find any real will, any reasoning force, outside of life. And everything is there; there is in the world no other will than this force which impels everything to life, to a life ever broader and higher."

He rose with a wave of the hand, animated by so firm a faith that she regarded him in surprise, noticing how youthful he looked in spite of his white hair.

"Do you wish me to repeat my 'Credo' for you, since you accuse me of not wanting yours? I believe that the future of humanity is in the progress of reason through science. I believe that the pursuit of truth, through science, is the divine ideal which man should propose to himself. I believe that all is illusion and vanity outside the treasure of truths slowly accumulated, and which will never again be lost. I believe that the sum of these truths, always increasing, will at last confer on man incalculable power and peace, if not happiness. Yes, I believe in the final triumph of life."

And with a broader sweep of the hand that took in the vast horizon, as if calling on these burning plains in which fermented the saps of all existences to bear him witness, he added:

"But the continual miracle, my child, is life. Only open your eyes, and look."

She shook her head.

"It is in vain that I open my eyes; I cannot see everything. It is you, master, who are blind, since you do not wish to admit that there is beyond an unknown realm which you will never enter. Oh, I know you are too intelligent to be ignorant of that! Only you do not wish to take it into account; you put the unknown aside, because it would embarrass you in your researches. It is in vain that you tell me to put aside the mysterious; to start from the known for the conquest of the unknown. I cannot; the mysterious at once calls me back and disturbs me."

He listened to her, smiling, glad to see her become animated, while he smoothed her fair curls with his hand.

"Yes, yes, I know you are like the rest; you do not wish to live without illusions and without lies. Well, there, there; we understand each other still, even so. Keep well; that is the half of wisdom and of happiness."

Then, changing the conversation:

"Come, you will accompany me, notwithstanding, and help me in my round of miracles. This is Thursday, my visiting day. When the heat shall have abated a little, we will go out together."

She refused at first, in order not to seem to yield; but she at last consented, seeing the pain she gave him. She was accustomed to accompany him on his round of visits. They remained for some time longer under the plane trees, until the doctor went upstairs to dress. When he came down again, correctly attired in a close-fitting coat and wearing a broad-brimmed silk hat, he spoke of harnessing Bonhomme, the horse that for a quarter of a century had taken him on his visits through the streets and the environs of Plassans. But the poor old beast was growing blind, and through gratitude for his

past services and affection for himself they now rarely disturbed him. On this afternoon he was very drowsy, his gaze wandered, his legs were stiff with rheumatism. So that the doctor and the young girl, when they went to the stable to see him, gave him a hearty kiss on either side of his nose, telling him to rest on a bundle of fresh hay which the servant had brought. And they decided to walk.

Clotilde, keeping on her spotted white muslin, merely tied on over her curls a large straw hat adorned with a bunch of lilacs; and she looked charming, with her large eyes and her complexion of milk-and-roses under the shadow of its broad brim. When she went out thus on Pascal's arm, she tall, slender, and youthful, he radiant, his face illuminated, so to say, by the whiteness of his beard, with a vigor that made him still lift her across the rivulets, people smiled as they passed, and turned around to look at them again, they seemed so innocent and so happy. On this day, as they left the road to Les Fenouilleres to enter Plassans, a group of gossips stopped short in their talk. It reminded one of one of those ancient kings one sees in pictures; one of those powerful and gentle kings who never grew old, resting his hand on the shoulder of a girl beautiful as the day, whose docile and dazzling youth lends him its support.

They were turning into the Cours Sauvair to gain the Rue de la Banne, when a tall, dark young man of about thirty stopped them.

"Ah, master, you have forgotten me. I am still waiting for your notes on consumption."

It was Dr. Ramond, a young physician, who had settled two years before at Plassans, where he was building up a fine practise. With a superb head, in the brilliant prime of a gracious manhood, he was adored by the women, but he had fortunately a great deal of good sense and a great deal of prudence.

"Why, Ramond, good day! Not at all, my dear friend; I have not forgotten you. It is this little girl, to whom I gave the notes yesterday to copy, and who has not touched them yet."

The two young people shook hands with an air of cordial intimacy.

"Good day, Mlle. Clotilde."

"Good day, M. Ramond."

During a gastric fever, happily mild, which the young girl had had the preceding year, Dr. Pascal had lost his head to the extent of distrusting his own skill, and he had asked his young colleague to assist him – to reassure him. Thus it was that an intimacy, a sort of comradeship, had sprung up among the three.

"You shall have your notes to-morrow, I promise you," she said, smiling.

Ramond walked on with them, however, until they reached the end of the Rue de la Banne, at the entrance of the old quarter whither they were going. And there was in the manner in which he leaned, smiling, toward Clotilde, the revelation of a secret love that had grown slowly, awaiting patiently the hour fixed for the most reasonable of *denouements*. Besides, he listened with deference to Dr. Pascal, whose works he admired greatly.

"And it just happens, my dear friend, that I am going to Guiraudé's, that woman, you know, whose husband, a tanner, died of consumption five years ago. She has two children living – Sophie, a girl now going on sixteen, whom I fortunately succeeded in having sent four years before her father's death to a neighboring village, to one of her aunts; and a son, Valentin, who has just completed his twenty-first year, and whom his mother insisted on keeping with her through a blind affection, notwithstanding that I warned her of the dreadful results that might ensue. Well, see if I am right in asserting that consumption is not hereditary, but only that consumptive parents transmit to their children a degenerate soil, in which the disease develops at the slightest contagion. Now, Valentin, who lived in daily contact with his father, is consumptive, while Sophie, who grew up in the open air, has superb health."

He added with a triumphant smile:

“But that will not prevent me, perhaps, from saving Valentin, for he is visibly improved, and is growing fat since I have used my injections with him. Ah, Ramond, you will come to them yet; you will come to my injections!”

The young physician shook hands with both of them, saying:

“I don’t say no. You know that I am always with you.”

When they were alone they quickened their steps and were soon in the Rue Canquoin, one of the narrowest and darkest streets of the old quarter. Hot as was the sun, there reigned here the semi-obscurity and the coolness of a cave. Here it was, on a ground floor, that Guiraudé lived with her son Valentin. She opened the door herself. She was a thin, wasted-looking woman, who was herself affected with a slow decomposition of the blood. From morning till night she crushed almonds with the end of an ox-bone on a large paving stone, which she held between her knees. This work was their only means of living, the son having been obliged to give up all labor. She smiled, however, to-day on seeing the doctor, for Valentin had just eaten a cutlet with a good appetite, a thing which he had not done for months. Valentin, a sickly-looking young man, with scanty hair and beard and prominent cheek bones, on each of which was a bright red spot, while the rest of his face was of a waxen hue, rose quickly to show how much more sprightly he felt! And Clotilde was touched by the reception given to Pascal as a saviour, the awaited Messiah. These poor people pressed his hands – they would like to have kissed his feet; looking at him with eyes shining with gratitude. True, the disease was not yet cured: perhaps this was only the effect of the stimulus, perhaps what he felt was only the excitement of fever. But was it not something to gain time? He gave him another injection while Clotilde, standing before the window, turned her back to them; and when they were leaving she saw him lay twenty francs upon the table. This often happened to him, to pay his patients instead of being paid by them.

He made three other visits in the old quarter, and then went to see a lady in the new town. When they found themselves in the street again, he said:

“Do you know that, if you were a courageous girl, we should walk to Seguiranne, to see Sophie at her aunt’s. That would give me pleasure.”

The distance was scarcely three kilometers; that would be only a pleasant walk in this delightful weather. And she agreed gaily, not sulky now, but pressing close to him, happy to hang on his arm. It was five o’clock. The setting sun spread over the fields a great sheet of gold. But as soon as they left Plassans they were obliged to cross the corner of the vast, arid plain, which extended to the right of the Viorne. The new canal, whose irrigating waters were soon to transform the face of the country parched with thirst, did not yet water this quarter, and red fields and yellow fields stretched away into the distance under the melancholy and blighting glare of the sun, planted only with puny almond trees and dwarf olives, constantly cut down and pruned, whose branches twisted and writhed in attitudes of suffering and revolt. In the distance, on the bare hillsides, were to be seen only like pale patches the country houses, flanked by the regulation cypress. The vast, barren expanse, however, with broad belts of desolate fields of hard and distinct coloring, had classic lines of a severe grandeur. And on the road the dust lay twenty centimeters thick, a dust like snow, that the slightest breath of wind raised in broad, flying clouds, and that covered with white powder the fig trees and the brambles on either side.

Clotilde, who amused herself like a child, listening to this dust crackling under her little feet, wished to hold her parasol over Pascal.

“You have the sun in your eyes. Lean a little this way.”

But at last he took possession of the parasol, to hold it himself.

“It is you who do not hold it right; and then it tires you. Besides, we are almost there now.”

In the parched plain they could already perceive an island of verdure, an enormous clump of trees. This was La Seguiranne, the farm on which Sophie had grown up in the house of her Aunt Dieudonne, the wife of the cross old man. Wherever there was a spring, wherever there was a rivulet, this ardent soil broke out in rich vegetation; and then there were walks bordered by trees, whose

luxuriant foliage afforded a delightful coolness and shade. Plane trees, chestnut trees, and young elms grew vigorously. They entered an avenue of magnificent green oaks.

As they approached the farm, a girl who was making hay in the meadow dropped her fork and ran toward them. It was Sophie, who had recognized the doctor and the young lady, as she called Clotilde. She adored them, but she stood looking at them in confusion, unable to express the glad greeting with which her heart overflowed. She resembled her brother Valentin; she had his small stature, his prominent cheek bones, his pale hair; but in the country, far from the contagion of the paternal environment, she had, it seemed, gained flesh; acquired with her robust limbs a firm step; her cheeks had filled out, her hair had grown luxuriant. And she had fine eyes, which shone with health and gratitude. Her Aunt Dieudonne, who was making hay with her, had come toward them also, crying from afar jestingly, with something of Provencal rudeness:

“Ah, M. Pascal, we have no need of you here! There is no one sick!”

The doctor, who had simply come in search of this fine spectacle of health, answered in the same tone:

“I hope so, indeed. But that does not prevent this little girl here from owing you and me a fine taper!”

“Well, that is the pure truth! And she knows it, M. Pascal. There is not a day that she does not say that but for you she would be at this time like her brother Valentin.”

“Bah! We will save him, too. He is getting better, Valentin is. I have just been to see him.”

Sophie seized the doctor’s hands; large tears stood in her eyes, and she could only stammer:

“Oh, M. Pascal!”

How they loved him! And Clotilde felt her affection for him increase, seeing the affection of all these people for him. They remained chatting there for a few moments longer, in the salubrious shade of the green oaks. Then they took the road back to Plassans, having still another visit to make.

This was to a tavern, that stood at the crossing of two roads and was white with the flying dust. A steam mill had recently been established opposite, utilizing the old buildings of Le Paradou, an estate dating from the last century, and Lafouasse, the tavern keeper, still carried on his little business, thanks to the workmen at the mill and to the peasants who brought their corn to it. He had still for customers on Sundays the few inhabitants of Les Artauds, a neighboring hamlet. But misfortune had struck him; for the last three years he had been dragging himself about groaning with rheumatism, in which the doctor had finally recognized the beginning of ataxia. But he had obstinately refused to take a servant, persisting in waiting on his customers himself, holding on by the furniture. So that once more firm on his feet, after a dozen punctures, he already proclaimed his cure everywhere.

He chanced to be just then at his door, and looked strong and vigorous, with his tall figure, fiery face, and fiery red hair.

“I was waiting for you, M. Pascal. Do you know that I have been able to bottle two casks of wine without being tired!”

Clotilde remained outside, sitting on a stone bench; while Pascal entered the room to give Lafouasse the injection. She could hear them speaking, and the latter, who in spite of his stoutness was very cowardly in regard to pain, complained that the puncture hurt, adding, however, that after all a little suffering was a small price to pay for good health. Then he declared he would be offended if the doctor did not take a glass of something. The young lady would not affront him by refusing to take some syrup. He carried a table outside, and there was nothing for it but they must touch glasses with him.

“To your health, M. Pascal, and to the health of all the poor devils to whom you give back a relish for their victuals!”

Clotilde thought with a smile of the gossip of which Martine had spoken to her, of Father Boutin, whom they accused the doctor of having killed. He did not kill all his patients, then; his remedy worked real miracles, since he brought back to life the consumptive and the ataxic. And her

faith in her master returned with the warm affection for him which welled up in her heart. When they left Lafouasse, she was once more completely his; he could do what he willed with her.

But a few moments before, sitting on the stone bench looking at the steam mill, a confused story had recurred to her mind; was it not here in these smoke-blackened buildings, to-day white with flour, that a drama of love had once been enacted? And the story came back to her; details given by Martine; allusions made by the doctor himself; the whole tragic love adventure of her cousin the Abbe Serge Mouret, then rector of Les Artauds, with an adorable young girl of a wild and passionate nature who lived at Le Paradou.

Returning by the same road Clotilde stopped, and pointing to the vast, melancholy expanse of stubble fields, cultivated plains, and fallow land, said:

“Master, was there not once there a large garden? Did you not tell me some story about it?”

“Yes, yes; Le Paradou, an immense garden – woods, meadows, orchards, parterres, fountains, and brooks that flowed into the Viorne. A garden abandoned for an age; the garden of the Sleeping Beauty, returned to Nature’s rule. And as you see they have cut down the woods, and cleared and leveled the ground, to divide it into lots, and sell it by auction. The springs themselves have dried up. There is nothing there now but that fever-breeding marsh. Ah, when I pass by here, it makes my heart ache!”

She ventured to question him further:

“But was it not in Le Paradou that my cousin Serge and your great friend Albine fell in love with each other?”

He had forgotten her presence. He went on talking, his gaze fixed on space, lost in recollections of the past.

“Albine, my God! I can see her now, in the sunny garden, like a great, fragrant bouquet, her head thrown back, her bosom swelling with joy, happy in her flowers, with wild flowers braided among her blond tresses, fastened at her throat, on her corsage, around her slender, bare brown arms. And I can see her again, after she had asphyxiated herself; dead in the midst of her flowers; very white, sleeping with folded hands, and a smile on her lips, on her couch of hyacinths and tuberoses. Dead for love; and how passionately Albine and Serge loved each other, in the great garden their tempter, in the bosom of Nature their accomplice! And what a flood of life swept away all false bonds, and what a triumph of life!”

Clotilde, she too troubled by this passionate flow of murmured words, gazed at him intently. She had never ventured to speak to him of another story that she had heard – the story of the one love of his life – a love which he had cherished in secret for a lady now dead. It was said that he had attended her for a long time without ever so much as venturing to kiss the tips of her fingers. Up to the present, up to near sixty, study and his natural timidity had made him shun women. But, notwithstanding, one felt that he was reserved for some great passion, with his feelings still fresh and ardent, in spite of his white hair.

“And the girl that died, the girl they mourned,” she resumed, her voice trembling, her cheeks scarlet, without knowing why. “Serge did not love her, then, since he let her die?”

Pascal started as though awakening from a dream, seeing her beside him in her youthful beauty, with her large, clear eyes shining under the shadow of her broad-brimmed hat. Something had happened; the same breath of life had passed through them both; they did not take each other’s arms again. They walked side by side.

“Ah, my dear, the world would be too beautiful, if men did not spoil it all! Albine is dead, and Serge is now rector of St. Eutrope, where he lives with his sister Desiree, a worthy creature who has the good fortune to be half an idiot. He is a holy man; I have never said the contrary. One may be an assassin and serve God.”

And he went on speaking of the hard things of life, of the blackness and execrability of humanity, without losing his gentle smile. He loved life; and the continuous work of life was a

continual joy to him in spite of all the evil, all the misery, that it might contain. It mattered not how dreadful life might appear, it must be great and good, since it was lived with so tenacious a will, for the purpose no doubt of this will itself, and of the great work which it unconsciously accomplished. True, he was a scientist, a clear-sighted man; he did not believe in any idyllic humanity living in a world of perpetual peace; he saw, on the contrary, its woes and its vices; he had laid them bare; he had examined them; he had catalogued them for thirty years past, but his passion for life, his admiration for the forces of life, sufficed to produce in him a perpetual gaiety, whence seemed to flow naturally his love for others, a fraternal compassion, a sympathy, which were felt under the roughness of the anatomist and under the affected impersonality of his studies.

“Bah!” he ended, taking a last glance at the vast, melancholy plains. “Le Paradou is no more. They have sacked it, defiled it, destroyed it; but what does that matter! Vines will be planted, corn will spring up, a whole growth of new crops; and people will still fall in love in vintages and harvests yet to come. Life is eternal; it is a perpetual renewal of birth and growth.”

He took her arm again and they returned to the town thus, arm in arm like good friends, while the glow of the sunset was slowly fading away in a tranquil sea of violets and roses. And seeing them both pass again, the ancient king, powerful and gentle, leaning against the shoulder of a charming and docile girl, supported by her youth, the women of the faubourg, sitting at their doors, looked after them with a smile of tender emotion.

At La Souleïade Martine was watching for them. She waved her hand to them from afar. What! Were they not going to dine to-day? Then, when they were near, she said:

“Ah! you will have to wait a little while. I did not venture to put on my leg of mutton yet.”

They remained outside to enjoy the charm of the closing day. The pine grove, wrapped in shadow, exhaled a balsamic resinous odor, and from the yard, still heated, in which a last red gleam was dying away, a chillness arose. It was like an assuagement, a sigh of relief, a resting of surrounding Nature, of the puny almond trees, the twisted olives, under the paling sky, cloudless and serene; while at the back of the house the clump of plane trees was a mass of black and impenetrable shadows, where the fountain was heard singing its eternal crystal song.

“Look!” said the doctor, “M. Bellombre has already dined, and he is taking the air.”

He pointed to a bench, on which a tall, thin old man of seventy was sitting, with a long face, furrowed with wrinkles, and large, staring eyes, and very correctly attired in a close-fitting coat and cravat.

“He is a wise man,” murmured Clotilde. “He is happy.”

“He!” cried Pascal. “I should hope not!”

He hated no one, and M. Bellombre, the old college professor, now retired, and living in his little house without any other company than that of a gardener who was deaf and dumb and older than himself, was the only person who had the power to exasperate him.

“A fellow who has been afraid of life; think of that! afraid of life! Yes, a hard and avaricious egotist! If he banished woman from his existence, it was only through fear of having to pay for her shoes. And he has known only the children of others, who have made him suffer – hence his hatred of the child – that flesh made to be flogged. The fear of life, the fear of burdens and of duties, of annoyances and of catastrophes! The fear of life, which makes us through dread of its sufferings refuse its joys. Ah! I tell you, this cowardliness enrages me; I cannot forgive it. We must live – live a complete life – live all our life. Better even suffering, suffering only, than such renunciation – the death of all there is in us that is living and human!”

M. Bellombre had risen, and was walking along one of the walks with slow, tranquil steps. Then, Clotilde, who had been watching him in silence, at last said:

“There is, however, the joy of renunciation. To renounce, not to live; to keep one’s self for the spiritual, has not this always been the great happiness of the saints?”

“If they had not lived,” cried Pascal, “they could not now be saints. Let suffering come, and I will bless it, for it is perhaps the only great happiness!”

But he felt that she rebelled against this; that he was going to lose her again. At the bottom of our anxiety about the beyond is the secret fear and hatred of life. So that he hastily assumed again his pleasant smile, so affectionate and conciliating.

“No, no! Enough for to-day; let us dispute no more; let us love each other dearly. And see! Martine is calling us, let us go in to dinner.”

III

For a month this unpleasant state of affairs continued, every day growing worse, and Clotilde suffered especially at seeing that Pascal now locked up everything. He had no longer the same tranquil confidence in her as before, and this wounded her so deeply that, if she had at any time found the press open, she would have thrown the papers into the fire as her grandmother Felicite had urged her to do. And the disagreements began again, so that they often remained without speaking to each other for two days together.

One morning, after one of these misunderstandings which had lasted since the day before, Martine said as she was serving the breakfast:

“Just now as I was crossing the Place de la Sous-Prefecture, I saw a stranger whom I thought I recognized going into Mme. Felicite’s house. Yes, mademoiselle, I should not be surprised if it were your brother.”

On the impulse of the moment, Pascal and Clotilde spoke.

“Your brother! Did your grandmother expect him, then?”

“No, I don’t think so, though she has been expecting him at any time for the past six months, I know that she wrote to him again a week ago.”

They questioned Martine.

“Indeed, monsieur, I cannot say; since I last saw M. Maxime four years ago, when he stayed two hours with us on his way to Italy, he may perhaps have changed greatly – I thought, however, that I recognized his back.”

The conversation continued, Clotilde seeming to be glad of this event, which broke at last the oppressive silence between them, and Pascal ended:

“Well, if it is he, he will come to see us.”

It was indeed Maxime. He had yielded, after months of refusal, to the urgent solicitations of old Mme. Rougon, who had still in this quarter an open family wound to heal. The trouble was an old one, and it grew worse every day.

Fifteen years before, when he was seventeen, Maxime had had a child by a servant whom he had seduced. His father Saccard, and his stepmother Renee – the latter vexed more especially at his unworthy choice – had acted in the matter with indulgence. The servant, Justine Megot, belonged to one of the neighboring villages, and was a fair-haired girl, also seventeen, gentle and docile; and they had sent her back to Plassans, with an allowance of twelve hundred francs a year, to bring up little Charles. Three years later she had married there a harness-maker of the faubourg, Frederic Thomas by name, a good workman and a sensible fellow, who was tempted by the allowance. For the rest her conduct was now most exemplary, she had grown fat, and she appeared to be cured of a cough that had threatened a hereditary malady due to the alcoholic propensities of a long line of progenitors. And two other children born of her marriage, a boy who was now ten and a girl who was seven, both plump and rosy, enjoyed perfect health; so that she would have been the most respected and the happiest of women, if it had not been for the trouble which Charles caused in the household. Thomas, notwithstanding the allowance, execrated this son of another man and gave him no peace, which made the mother suffer in secret, being an uncomplaining and submissive wife. So that, although she adored him, she would willingly have given him up to his father’s family.

Charles, at fifteen, seemed scarcely twelve, and he had the infantine intelligence of a child of five, resembling in an extraordinary degree his great-great-grandmother, Aunt Dide, the madwoman at the Tulettes. He had the slender and delicate grace of one of those bloodless little kings with whom a race ends, crowned with their long, fair locks, light as spun silk. His large, clear eyes were expressionless, and on his disquieting beauty lay the shadow of death. And he had neither brain nor heart – he was nothing but a vicious little dog, who rubbed himself against people to be fondled. His

great-grandmother Felicite, won by this beauty, in which she affected to recognize her blood, had at first put him in a boarding school, taking charge of him, but he had been expelled from it at the end of six months for misconduct. Three times she had changed his boarding school, and each time he had been expelled in disgrace. Then, as he neither would nor could learn anything, and as his health was declining rapidly, they kept him at home, sending him from one to another of the family. Dr. Pascal, moved to pity, had tried to cure him, and had abandoned the hopeless task only after he had kept him with him for nearly a year, fearing the companionship for Clotilde. And now, when Charles was not at his mother's, where he scarcely ever lived at present, he was to be found at the house of Felicite, or that of some other relative, prettily dressed, laden with toys, living like the effeminate little dauphin of an ancient and fallen race.

Old Mme. Rougon, however, suffered because of this bastard, and she had planned to get him away from the gossiping tongues of Plassans, by persuading Maxime to take him and keep him with him in Paris. It would still be an ugly story of the fallen family. But Maxime had for a long time turned a deaf ear to her solicitations, in the fear which continually haunted him of spoiling his life. After the war, enriched by the death of his wife, he had come back to live prudently on his fortune in his mansion on the avenue of the Bois de Boulogne, tormented by the hereditary malady of which he was to die young, having gained from his precocious debauchery a salutary fear of pleasure, resolved above all to shun emotions and responsibilities, so that he might last as long as possible. Acute pains in the limbs, rheumatic he thought them, had been alarming him for some time past; he saw himself in fancy already an invalid tied down to an easy-chair; and his father's sudden return to France, the fresh activity which Saccard was putting forth, completed his disquietude. He knew well this devourer of millions; he trembled at finding him again bustling about him with his good-humored, malicious laugh. He felt that he was being watched, and he had the conviction that he would be cut up and devoured if he should be for a single day at his mercy, rendered helpless by the pains which were invading his limbs. And so great a fear of solitude had taken possession of him that he had now yielded to the idea of seeing his son again. If he found the boy gentle, intelligent, and healthy, why should he not take him to live with him? He would thus have a companion, an heir, who would protect him against the machinations of his father. Gradually he came to see himself, in his selfish forethought, loved, petted, and protected; yet for all that he might not have risked such a journey, if his physician had not just at that time sent him to the waters of St. Gervais. Thus, having to go only a few leagues out of his way, he had dropped in unexpectedly that morning on old Mme. Rougon, firmly resolved to take the train again in the evening, after having questioned her and seen the boy.

At two o'clock Pascal and Clotilde were still beside the fountain under the plane trees where they had taken their coffee, when Felicite arrived with Maxime.

"My dear, here's a surprise! I have brought you your brother."

Startled, the young girl had risen, seeing this thin and sallow stranger, whom she scarcely recognized. Since their parting in 1854 she had seen him only twice, once at Paris and again at Plassans. Yet his image, refined, elegant, and vivacious, had remained engraven on her mind; his face had grown hollow, his hair was streaked with silver threads. But notwithstanding, she found in him still, with his delicately handsome head, a languid grace, like that of a girl, even in his premature decrepitude.

"How well you look!" he said simply, as he embraced his sister.

"But," she responded, "to be well one must live in the sunshine. Ah, how happy it makes me to see you again!"

Pascal, with the eye of the physician, had examined his nephew critically. He embraced him in his turn.

"Goodday, my boy. And she is right, mind you; one can be well only out in the sunshine – like the trees."

Felicite had gone hastily to the house. She returned, crying:

“Charles is not here, then?”

“No,” said Clotilde. “We went to see him yesterday. Uncle Macquart has taken him, and he is to remain for a few days at the Tulettes.”

Felicite was in despair. She had come only in the certainty of finding the boy at Pascal's. What was to be done now? The doctor, with his tranquil air, proposed to write to Uncle Macquart, who would bring him back in the morning. But when he learned that Maxime wished positively to go away again by the nine o'clock train, without remaining over night, another idea occurred to him. He would send to the livery stable for a landau, and all four would go to see Charles at Uncle Macquart's. It would even be a delightful drive. It was not quite three leagues from Plassans to the Tulettes – an hour to go, and an hour to return, and they would still have almost two hours to remain there, if they wished to be back by seven. Martine would get dinner, and Maxime would have time enough to dine and catch his train.

But Felicite objected, visibly disquieted by this visit to Macquart.

“Oh, no, indeed! If you think I am going down there in this frightful weather, you are mistaken. It is much simpler to send some one to bring Charles to us.”

Pascal shook his head. Charles was not always to be brought back when one wished. He was a boy without reason, who sometimes, if the whim seized him, would gallop off like an untamed animal. And old Mme. Rougon, overruled and furious at having been unable to make any preparation, was at last obliged to yield, in the necessity in which she found herself of leaving the matter to chance.

“Well, be it as you wish, then! Good Heavens, how unfortunately things have turned out!”

Martine hurried away to order the landau, and before three o'clock had struck the horses were on the Nice road, descending the declivity which slopes down to the bridge over the Viorne. Then they turned to the left, and followed the wooded banks of the river for about two miles. After this the road entered the gorges of the Seille, a narrow pass between two giant walls of rock scorched by the ardent rays of the summer sun. Pine trees pushed their way through the clefts; clumps of trees, scarcely thicker at the roots than tufts of grass, fringed the crests and hung over the abyss. It was a chaos; a blasted landscape, a mouth of hell, with its wild turns, its droppings of blood-colored earth sliding down from every cut, its desolate solitude invaded only by the eagles' flight.

Felicite did not open her lips; her brain was at work, and she seemed completely absorbed in her thoughts. The atmosphere was oppressive, the sun sent his burning rays from behind a veil of great livid clouds. Pascal was almost the only one who talked, in his passionate love for this scorched land – a love which he endeavored to make his nephew share. But it was in vain that he uttered enthusiastic exclamations, in vain that he called his attention to the persistence of the olives, the fig trees, and the thorn bushes in pushing through the rock; the life of the rock itself, that colossal and puissant frame of the earth, from which they could almost fancy they heard a sound of breathing arise. Maxime remained cold, filled with a secret anguish in presence of those blocks of savage majesty, whose mass seemed to crush him. And he preferred to turn his eyes toward his sister, who was seated in front of him. He was becoming more and more charmed with her. She looked so healthy and so happy, with her pretty round head, with its straight, well-molded forehead. Now and then their glances met, and she gave him an affectionate smile which consoled him.

But the wildness of the gorge was beginning to soften, the two walls of rock to grow lower; they passed between two peaceful hills, with gentle slopes covered with thyme and lavender. It was the desert still, there were still bare spaces, green or violet hued, from which the faintest breeze brought a pungent perfume.

Then abruptly, after a last turn they descended to the valley of the Tulettes, which was refreshed by springs. In the distance stretched meadows dotted by large trees. The village was seated midway on the slope, among olive trees, and the country house of Uncle Macquart stood a little apart on the left, full in view. The landau turned into the road which led to the insane asylum, whose white walls they could see before them in the distance.

Felicite's silence had grown somber, for she was not fond of exhibiting Uncle Macquart. Another whom the family would be well rid of the day when he should take his departure. For the credit of every one he ought to have been sleeping long ago under the sod. But he persisted in living, he carried his eighty-three years well, like an old drunkard saturated with liquor, whom the alcohol seemed to preserve. At Plassans he had left a terrible reputation as a do-nothing and a scoundrel, and the old men whispered the execrable story of the corpses that lay between him and the Rougons, an act of treachery in the troublous days of December, 1851, an ambushade in which he had left comrades with their bellies ripped open, lying on the bloody pavement. Later, when he had returned to France, he had preferred to the good place of which he had obtained the promise this little domain of the Tulettes, which Felicite had bought for him. And he had lived comfortably here ever since; he had no longer any other ambition than that of enlarging it, looking out once more for the good chances, and he had even found the means of obtaining a field which he had long coveted, by making himself useful to his sister-in-law at the time when the latter again reconquered Plassans from the legitimists – another frightful story that was whispered also, of a madman secretly let loose from the asylum, running in the night to avenge himself, setting fire to his house in which four persons were burned. But these were old stories and Macquart, settled down now, was no longer the redoubtable scoundrel who had made all the family tremble. He led a perfectly correct life; he was a wily diplomat, and he had retained nothing of his air of jeering at the world but his bantering smile.

"Uncle is at home," said Pascal, as they approached the house.

This was one of those Provencal structures of a single story, with discolored tiles and four walls washed with a bright yellow. Before the facade extended a narrow terrace shaded by ancient mulberry trees, whose thick, gnarled branches drooped down, forming an arbor. It was here that Uncle Macquart smoked his pipe in the cool shade, in summer. And on hearing the sound of the carriage, he came and stood at the edge of the terrace, straightening his tall form neatly clad in blue cloth, his head covered with the eternal fur cap which he wore from one year's end to the other.

As soon as he recognized his visitors, he called out with a sneer:

"Oh, here come some fine company! How kind of you; you are out for an airing."

But the presence of Maxime puzzled him. Who was he? Whom had he come to see? They mentioned his name to him, and he immediately cut short the explanations they were adding, to enable him to straighten out the tangled skein of relationship.

"The father of Charles – I know, I know! The son of my nephew Saccard, *pardi!* the one who made a fine marriage, and whose wife died – "

He stared at Maxime, seeming happy to find him already wrinkled at thirty-two, with his hair and beard sprinkled with snow.

"Ah, well!" he added, "we are all growing old. But I, at least, have no great reason to complain. I am solid."

And he planted himself firmly on his legs with his air of ferocious mockery, while his fiery red face seemed to flame and burn. For a long time past ordinary brandy had seemed to him like pure water; only spirits of 36 degrees tickled his blunted palate; and he took such draughts of it that he was full of it – his flesh saturated with it – like a sponge. He perspired alcohol. At the slightest breath whenever he spoke, he exhaled from his mouth a vapor of alcohol.

"Yes, truly; you are solid, uncle!" said Pascal, amazed. "And you have done nothing to make you so; you have good reason to ridicule us. Only there is one thing I am afraid of, look you, that some day in lighting your pipe, you may set yourself on fire – like a bowl of punch."

Macquart, flattered, gave a sneering laugh.

"Have your jest, have your jest, my boy! A glass of cognac is worth more than all your filthy drugs. And you will all touch glasses with me, hey? So that it may be said truly that your uncle is a credit to you all. As for me, I laugh at evil tongues. I have corn and olive trees, I have almond trees and vines and land, like any *bourgeois*. In summer I smoke my pipe under the shade of my mulberry

trees; in winter I go to smoke it against my wall, there in the sunshine. One has no need to blush for an uncle like that, hey? Clotilde, I have syrup, if you would like some. And you, Felicite, my dear, I know that you prefer anisette. There is everything here, I tell you, there is everything here!”

He waved his arm as if to take possession of the comforts he enjoyed, now that from an old sinner he had become a hermit, while Felicite, whom he had disturbed a moment before by the enumeration of his riches, did not take her eyes from his face, waiting to interrupt him.

“Thank you, Macquart, we will take nothing; we are in a hurry. Where is Charles?”

“Charles? Very good, presently! I understand, papa has come to see his boy. But that is not going to prevent you taking a glass.”

And as they positively refused he became offended, and said, with his malicious laugh:

“Charles is not here; he is at the asylum with the old woman.”

Then, taking Maxime to the end of the terrace, he pointed out to him the great white buildings, whose inner gardens resembled prison yards.

“Look, nephew, you see those three trees in front of you? Well, beyond the one to the left, there is a fountain in a court. Follow the ground floor, and the fifth window to the right is Aunt Dide’s. And that is where the boy is. Yes, I took him there a little while ago.”

This was an indulgence of the directors. In the twenty years that she had been in the asylum the old woman had not given a moment’s uneasiness to her keeper. Very quiet, very gentle, she passed the days motionless in her easy-chair, looking straight before her; and as the boy liked to be with her, and as she herself seemed to take an interest in him, they shut their eyes to this infraction of the rules and left him there sometimes for two or three hours at a time, busily occupied in cutting out pictures.

But this new disappointment put the finishing stroke to Felicite’s ill-humor; she grew angry when Macquart proposed that all five should go in a body in search of the boy.

“What an idea! Go you alone, and come back quickly. We have no time to lose.”

Her suppressed rage seemed to amuse Uncle Macquart, and perceiving how disagreeable his proposition was to her, he insisted, with his sneering laugh:

“But, my children, we should at the same time have an opportunity of seeing the old mother; the mother of us all. There is no use in talking; you know that we are all descended from her, and it would hardly be polite not to go wish her a good-day, when my grandnephew, who has come from such a distance, has perhaps never before had a good look at her. I’ll not disown her, may the devil take me if I do. To be sure she is mad, but all the same, old mothers who have passed their hundredth year are not often to be seen, and she well deserves that we should show ourselves a little kind to her.”

There was silence for a moment. A little shiver had run through every one. And it was Clotilde, silent until now, who first declared in a voice full of feeling:

“You are right, uncle; we will all go.”

Felicite herself was obliged to consent. They re-entered the landau, Macquart taking the seat beside the coachman. A feeling of disquietude had given a sallow look to Maxime’s worn face; and during the short drive he questioned Pascal concerning Charles with an air of paternal interest, which concealed a growing anxiety. The doctor constrained by his mother’s imperious glances, softened the truth. Well, the boy’s health was certainly not very robust; it was on that account, indeed, that they were glad to leave him for weeks together in the country with his uncle: but he had no definite disease. Pascal did not add that he had for a moment cherished the dream of giving him a brain and muscles by treating him with his hypodermic injections of nerve substance, but that he had always been met by the same difficulty; the slightest puncture brought on a hemorrhage which it was found necessary to stop by compresses; there was a laxness of the tissues, due to degeneracy; a bloody dew which exuded from the skin; he had especially, bleedings at the nose so sudden and so violent that they did not dare to leave him alone, fearing lest all the blood in his veins should flow out. And the doctor ended by saying that although the boy’s intelligence had been sluggish, he still hoped that it would develop in an environment of quicker mental activity.

They arrived at the asylum and Macquart, who had been listening to the doctor, descended from his seat, saying:

“He is a gentle little fellow, a very gentle little fellow! And then, he is so beautiful – an angel!”

Maxime, who was still pale, and who shivered in spite of the stifling heat, put no more questions. He looked at the vast buildings of the asylum, the wings of the various quarters separated by gardens, the men’s quarters from those of the women, those of the harmless insane from those of the violent insane. A scrupulous cleanliness reigned everywhere, a gloomy silence – broken from time to time by footsteps and the noise of keys. Old Macquart knew all the keepers. Besides, the doors were always to open to Dr. Pascal, who had been authorized to attend certain of the inmates. They followed a passage and entered a court; it was here – one of the chambers on the ground floor, a room covered with a light carpet, furnished with a bed, a press, a table, an armchair, and two chairs. The nurse, who had orders never to quit her charge, happened just now to be absent, and the only occupants of the room were the madwoman, sitting rigid in her armchair at one side of the table, and the boy, sitting on a chair on the opposite side, absorbed in cutting out his pictures.

“Go in, go in!” Macquart repeated. “Oh, there is no danger, she is very gentle!”

The grandmother, Adelaide Fouque, whom her grandchildren, a whole swarm of descendants, called by the pet name of Aunt Dide, did not even turn her head at the noise. In her youth hysterical troubles had unbalanced her mind. Of an ardent and passionate nature and subject to nervous attacks, she had yet reached the great age of eighty-three when a dreadful grief, a terrible moral shock, destroyed her reason. At that time, twenty-one years before, her mind had ceased to act; it had become suddenly weakened without the possibility of recovery. And now, at the age of 104 years, she lived here as if forgotten by the world, a quiet madwoman with an ossified brain, with whom insanity might remain stationary for an indefinite length of time without causing death. Old age had come, however, and had gradually atrophied her muscles. Her flesh was as if eaten away by age. The skin only remained on her bones, so that she had to be carried from her chair to her bed, for it had become impossible for her to walk or even to move. And yet she held herself erect against the back of her chair, a yellow, dried-up skeleton – like an ancient tree of which the bark only remains – with only her eyes still living in her thin, long visage, in which the wrinkles had been, so to say, worn away. She was looking fixedly at Charles.

Clotilde approached her a little tremblingly.

“Aunt Dide, it is we; we have come to see you. Don’t you know me, then? Your little girl who comes sometimes to kiss you.”

But the madwoman did not seem to hear. Her eyes remained fixed upon the boy, who was finishing cutting out a picture – a purple king in a golden mantle.

“Come, mamma,” said Macquart, “don’t pretend to be stupid. You may very well look at us. Here is a gentleman, a grandson of yours, who has come from Paris expressly to see you.”

At this voice Aunt Dide at last turned her head. Her clear, expressionless eyes wandered slowly from one to another, then rested again on Charles with the same fixed look as before.

They all shivered, and no one spoke again.

“Since the terrible shock she received,” explained Pascal in a low voice, “she has been that way; all intelligence, all memory seem extinguished in her. For the most part she is silent; at times she pours forth a flood of stammering and indistinct words. She laughs and cries without cause, she is a thing that nothing affects. And yet I should not venture to say that the darkness of her mind is complete, that no memories remain stored up in its depths. Ah! the poor old mother, how I pity her, if the light has not yet been finally extinguished. What can her thoughts have been for the last twenty-one years, if she still remembers?”

With a gesture he put this dreadful past which he knew from him. He saw her again young, a tall, pale, slender girl with frightened eyes, a widow, after fifteen months of married life with Rougon, the clumsy gardener whom she had chosen for a husband, throwing herself immediately afterwards

into the arms of the smuggler Macquart, whom she loved with a wolfish love, and whom she did not even marry. She had lived thus for fifteen years, with her three children, one the child of her marriage, the other two illegitimate, a capricious and tumultuous existence, disappearing for weeks at a time, and returning all bruised, her arms black and blue. Then Macquart had been killed, shot down like a dog by a *gendarme*; and the first shock had paralyzed her, so that even then she retained nothing living but her water-clear eyes in her livid face; and she shut herself up from the world in the hut which her lover had left her, leading there for forty years the dead existence of a nun, broken by terrible nervous attacks. But the other shock was to finish her, to overthrow her reason, and Pascal recalled the atrocious scene, for he had witnessed it – a poor child whom the grandmother had taken to live with her, her grandson Silvere, the victim of family hatred and strife, whose head another *gendarme* shattered with a pistol shot, at the suppression of the insurrectionary movement of 1851. She was always to be bespattered with blood.

Felicite, meanwhile, had approached Charles, who was so engrossed with his pictures that all these people did not disturb him.

“My darling, this gentleman is your father. Kiss him,” she said.

And then they all occupied themselves with Charles. He was very prettily dressed in a jacket and short trousers of black velvet, braided with gold cord. Pale as a lily, he resembled in truth one of those king’s sons whose pictures he was cutting out, with his large, light eyes and his shower of fair curls. But what especially struck the attention at this moment was his resemblance to Aunt Dide; this resemblance which had overleaped three generations, which had passed from this withered centenarian’s countenance, from these dead features wasted by life, to this delicate child’s face that was also as if worn, aged, and wasted, through the wear of the race. Fronting each other, the imbecile child of a deathlike beauty seemed the last of the race of which she, forgotten by the world, was the ancestress.

Maxime bent over to press a kiss on the boy’s forehead; and a chill struck to his heart – this very beauty disquieted him; his uneasiness grew in this chamber of madness, whence, it seemed to him, breathed a secret horror come from the far-off past.

“How beautiful you are, my pet! Don’t you love me a little?”

Charles looked at him without comprehending, and went back to his play.

But all were chilled. Without the set expression of her countenance changing Aunt Dide wept, a flood of tears rolled from her living eyes over her dead cheeks. Her gaze fixed immovably upon the boy, she wept slowly, endlessly. A great thing had happened.

And now an extraordinary emotion took possession of Pascal. He caught Clotilde by the arm and pressed it hard, trying to make her understand. Before his eyes appeared the whole line, the legitimate branch and the bastard branch, which had sprung from this trunk already vitiated by neurosis. Five generations were there present – the Rougons and the Macquarts, Adelaide Fouque at the root, then the scoundrelly old uncle, then himself, then Clotilde and Maxime, and lastly, Charles. Felicite occupied the place of her dead husband. There was no link wanting; the chain of heredity, logical and implacable, was unbroken. And what a world was evoked from the depths of the tragic cabin which breathed this horror that came from the far-off past in such appalling shape that every one, notwithstanding the oppressive heat, shivered.

“What is it, master?” whispered Clotilde, trembling.

“No, no, nothing!” murmured the doctor. “I will tell you later.”

Macquart, who alone continued to sneer, scolded the old mother. What an idea was hers, to receive people with tears when they put themselves out to come and make her a visit. It was scarcely polite. And then he turned to Maxime and Charles.

“Well, nephew, you have seen your boy at last. Is it not true that he is pretty, and that he is a credit to you, after all?”

Felicite hastened to interfere. Greatly dissatisfied with the turn which affairs were taking, she was now anxious only to get away.

"He is certainly a handsome boy, and less backward than people think. Just see how skilful he is with his hands. And you will see when you have brightened him up in Paris, in a different way from what we have been able to do at Plassans, eh?"

"No doubt," murmured Maxime. "I do not say no; I will think about it."

He seemed embarrassed for a moment, and then added:

"You know I came only to see him. I cannot take him with me now as I am to spend a month at St. Gervais. But as soon as I return to Paris I will think of it, I will write to you."

Then, taking out his watch, he cried:

"The devil! Half-past five. You know that I would not miss the nine o'clock train for anything in the world."

"Yes, yes, let us go," said Felicite brusquely. "We have nothing more to do here."

Macquart, whom his sister-in-law's anger seemed still to divert, endeavored to delay them with all sorts of stories. He told of the days when Aunt Dide talked, and he affirmed that he had found her one morning singing a romance of her youth. And then he had no need of the carriage, he would take the boy back on foot, since they left him to him.

"Kiss your papa, my boy, for you know now that you see him, but you don't know whether you shall ever see him again or not."

With the same surprised and indifferent movement Charles raised his head, and Maxime, troubled, pressed another kiss on his forehead.

"Be very good and very pretty, my pet. And love me a little."

"Come, come, we have no time to lose," repeated Felicite.

But the keeper here re-entered the room. She was a stout, vigorous girl, attached especially to the service of the madwoman. She carried her to and from her bed, night and morning; she fed her and took care of her like a child. And she at once entered into conversation with Dr. Pascal, who questioned her. One of the doctor's most cherished dreams was to cure the mad by his treatment of hypodermic injections. Since in their case it was the brain that was in danger, why should not hypodermic injections of nerve substance give them strength and will, repairing the breaches made in the organ? So that for a moment he had dreamed of trying the treatment with the old mother; then he began to have scruples, he felt a sort of awe, without counting that madness at that age was total, irreparable ruin. So that he had chosen another subject – a hatter named Sarteur, who had been for a year past in the asylum, to which he had come himself to beg them to shut him up to prevent him from committing a crime. In his paroxysms, so strong an impulse to kill seized him that he would have thrown himself upon the first passer-by. He was of small stature, very dark, with a retreating forehead, an aquiline face with a large nose and a very short chin, and his left cheek was noticeably larger than his right. And the doctor had obtained miraculous results with this victim of emotional insanity, who for a month past had had no attack. The nurse, indeed being questioned, answered that Sarteur had become quiet and was growing better every day.

"Do you hear, Clotilde?" cried Pascal, enchanted. "I have not the time to see him this evening, but I will come again to-morrow. It is my visiting day. Ah, if I only dared; if she were young still –"

His eyes turned toward Aunt Dide. But Clotilde, whom his enthusiasm made smile, said gently:

"No, no, master, you cannot make life anew. There, come. We are the last."

It was true; the others had already gone. Macquart, on the threshold, followed Felicite and Maxime with his mocking glance as they went away. Aunt Dide, the forgotten one, sat motionless, appalling in her leanness, her eyes again fixed upon Charles with his white, worn face framed in his royal locks.

The drive back was full of constraint. In the heat which exhaled from the earth, the landau rolled on heavily to the measured trot of the horses. The stormy sky took on an ashen, copper-colored

hue in the deepening twilight. At first a few indifferent words were exchanged; but from the moment in which they entered the gorges of the Seille all conversation ceased, as if they felt oppressed by the menacing walls of giant rock that seemed closing in upon them. Was not this the end of the earth, and were they not going to roll into the unknown, over the edge of some abyss? An eagle soared by, uttering a shrill cry.

Willows appeared again, and the carriage was rolling lightly along the bank of the Viorne, when Felicite began without transition, as if she were resuming a conversation already commenced.

“You have no refusal to fear from the mother. She loves Charles dearly, but she is a very sensible woman, and she understands perfectly that it is to the boy’s advantage that you should take him with you. And I must tell you, too, that the poor boy is not very happy with her, since, naturally, the husband prefers his own son and daughter. For you ought to know everything.”

And she went on in this strain, hoping, no doubt, to persuade Maxime and draw a formal promise from him. She talked until they reached Plassans. Then, suddenly, as the landau rolled over the pavement of the faubourg, she said:

“But look! there is his mother. That stout blond at the door there.”

At the threshold of a harness-maker’s shop hung round with horse trappings and halters, Justine sat, knitting a stocking, taking the air, while the little girl and boy were playing on the ground at her feet. And behind them in the shadow of the shop was to be seen Thomas, a stout, dark man, occupied in repairing a saddle.

Maxime leaned forward without emotion, simply curious. He was greatly surprised at sight of this robust woman of thirty-two, with so sensible and so commonplace an air, in whom there was not a trace of the wild little girl with whom he had been in love when both of the same age were entering their seventeenth year. Perhaps a pang shot through his heart to see her plump and tranquil and blooming, while he was ill and already aged.

“I should never have recognized her,” he said.

And the landau, still rolling on, turned into the Rue de Rome. Justine had disappeared; this vision of the past – a past so different from the present – had sunk into the shadowy twilight, with Thomas, the children, and the shop.

At La Soulejade the table was set; Martine had an eel from the Viorne, a *sauted* rabbit, and a leg of mutton. Seven o’clock was striking, and they had plenty of time to dine quietly.

“Don’t be uneasy,” said Dr. Pascal to his nephew. “We will accompany you to the station; it is not ten minutes’ walk from here. As you left your trunk, you have nothing to do but to get your ticket and jump on board the train.”

Then, meeting Clotilde in the vestibule, where she was hanging up her hat and her umbrella, he said to her in an undertone:

“Do you know that I am uneasy about your brother?”

“Why so?”

“I have observed him attentively. I don’t like the way in which he walks; and have you noticed what an anxious look he has at times? That has never deceived me. In short, your brother is threatened with ataxia.”

“Ataxia!” she repeated turning very pale.

A cruel image rose before her, that of a neighbor, a man still young, whom for the past ten years she had seen driven about in a little carriage by a servant. Was not this infirmity the worst of all ills, the ax stroke that separates a living being from social and active life?

“But,” she murmured, “he complains only of rheumatism.”

Pascal shrugged his shoulders; and putting a finger to his lip he went into the dining-room, where Felicite and Maxime were seated.

The dinner was very friendly. The sudden disquietude which had sprung up in Clotilde’s heart made her still more affectionate to her brother, who sat beside her. She attended to his wants gayly,

forcing him to take the most delicate morsels. Twice she called back Martine, who was passing the dishes too quickly. And Maxime was more and more enchanted by this sister, who was so good, so healthy, so sensible, whose charm enveloped him like a caress. So greatly was he captivated by her that gradually a project, vague at first, took definite shape within him. Since little Charles, his son, terrified him so greatly with his deathlike beauty, his royal air of sickly imbecility, why should he not take his sister Clotilde to live with him? The idea of having a woman in his house alarmed him, indeed, for he was afraid of all women, having had too much experience of them in his youth; but this one seemed to him truly maternal. And then, too, a good woman in his house would make a change in it, which would be a desirable thing. He would at least be left no longer at the mercy of his father, whom he suspected of desiring his death so that he might get possession of his money at once. His hatred and terror of his father decided him.

“Don’t you think of marrying, then?” he asked, wishing to try the ground.

The young girl laughed.

“Oh, there is no hurry,” she answered.

Then, suddenly, looking at Pascal, who had raised his head, she added:

“How can I tell? Oh, I shall never marry.”

But Felicite protested. When she saw her so attached to the doctor, she often wished for a marriage that would separate her from him, that would leave her son alone in a deserted home, where she herself might become all powerful, mistress of everything. Therefore she appealed to him. Was it not true that a woman ought to marry, that it was against nature to remain an old maid?

And he gravely assented, without taking his eyes from Clotilde’s face.

“Yes, yes, she must marry. She is too sensible not to marry.”

“Bah!” interrupted Maxime, “would it be really sensible in her to marry? In order to be unhappy, perhaps; there are so many ill-assorted marriages!”

And coming to a resolution, he added:

“Don’t you know what you ought to do? Well, you ought to come and live with me in Paris. I have thought the matter over. The idea of taking charge of a child in my state of health terrifies me. Am I not a child myself, an invalid who needs to be taken care of? You will take care of me; you will be with me, if I should end by losing the use of my limbs.”

There was a sound of tears in his voice, so great a pity did he feel for himself. He saw himself, in fancy, sick; he saw his sister at his bedside, like a Sister of Charity; if she consented to remain unmarried he would willingly leave her his fortune, so that his father might not have it. The dread which he had of solitude, the need in which he should perhaps stand of having a sick-nurse, made him very pathetic.

“It would be very kind on your part, and you should have no cause to repent it.”

Martine, who was serving the mutton, stopped short in surprise; and the proposition caused the same surprise at the table. Felicite was the first to approve, feeling that the girl’s departure would further her plans. She looked at Clotilde, who was still silent and stunned, as it were; while Dr. Pascal waited with a pale face.

“Oh, brother, brother,” stammered the young girl, unable at first to think of anything else to say.

Then her grandmother cried:

“Is that all you have to say? Why, the proposition your brother has just made you is a very advantageous one. If he is afraid of taking Charles now, why, you can go with him, and later on you can send for the child. Come, come, that can be very well arranged. Your brother makes an appeal to your heart. Is it not true, Pascal, that she owes him a favorable answer?”

The doctor, by an effort, recovered his self-possession. The chill that had seized him made itself felt, however, in the slowness with which he spoke.

“The offer, in effect, is very kind. Clotilde, as I said before, is very sensible and she will accept it, if it is right that she should do so.”

The young girl, greatly agitated, rebelled at this.

“Do you wish to send me away, then, master? Maxime is very good, and I thank him from the bottom of my heart. But to leave everything, my God! To leave all that love me, all that I have loved until now!”

She made a despairing gesture, indicating the place and the people, taking in all La Souleïade.

“But,” responded Pascal, looking at her fixedly, “what if Maxime should need you, what if you had a duty to fulfil toward him?”

Her eyes grew moist, and she remained for a moment trembling and desperate; for she alone understood. The cruel vision again arose before her – Maxime, helpless, driven, about in a little carriage by a servant, like the neighbor whom she used to pity. Had she indeed any duty toward a brother who for fifteen years had been a stranger to her? Did not her duty lie where her heart was? Nevertheless, her distress of mind continued; she still suffered in the struggle.

“Listen, Maxime,” she said at last, “give me also time to reflect. I will see. Be assured that I am very grateful to you. And if you should one day really have need of me, well, I should no doubt decide to go.”

This was all they could make her promise. Felicite, with her usual vehemence, exhausted all her efforts in vain, while the doctor now affected to say that she had given her word. Martine brought a cream, without thinking of hiding her joy. To take away mademoiselle! what an idea, in order that monsieur might die of grief at finding himself all alone. And the dinner was delayed, too, by this unexpected incident. They were still at the dessert when half-past eight struck.

Then Maxime grew restless, tapped the floor with his foot, and declared that he must go.

At the station, whither they all accompanied him he kissed his sister a last time, saying:

“Remember!”

“Don’t be afraid,” declared Felicite, “we are here to remind her of her promise.”

The doctor smiled, and all three, as soon as the train was in motion, waved their handkerchiefs.

On this day, after accompanying the grandmother to her door, Dr. Pascal and Clotilde returned peacefully to La Souleïade, and spent a delightful evening there. The constraint of the past few weeks, the secret antagonism which had separated them, seemed to have vanished. Never had it seemed so sweet to them to feel so united, inseparable. Doubtless it was only this first pang of uneasiness suffered by their affection, this threatened separation, the postponement of which delighted them. It was for them like a return to health after an illness, a new hope of life. They remained for long time in the warm night, under the plane trees, listening to the crystal murmur of the fountain. And they did not even speak, so profoundly did they enjoy the happiness of being together.

IV

Ten days later the household had fallen back into its former state of unhappiness. Pascal and Clotilde remained entire afternoons without exchanging a word; and there were continual outbursts of ill-humor. Even Martine was constantly out of temper. The home of these three had again become a hell.

Then suddenly the condition of affairs was still further aggravated. A Capuchin monk of great sanctity, such as often pass through the towns of the South, came to Plassans to conduct a mission. The pulpit of St. Saturnin resounded with his bursts of eloquence. He was a sort of apostle, a popular and fiery orator, a florid speaker, much given to the use of metaphors. And he preached on the nothingness of modern science with an extraordinary mystical exaltation, denying the reality of this world, and disclosing the unknown, the mysteries of the Beyond. All the devout women of the town were full of excitement about his preaching.

On the very first evening on which Clotilde, accompanied by Martine, attended the sermon, Pascal noticed her feverish excitement when she returned. On the following day her excitement increased, and she returned home later, having remained to pray for an hour in a dark corner of a chapel. From this time she was never absent from the services, returning languid, and with the luminous eyes of a seer; and the Capuchin's burning words haunted her; certain of his images stirred her to ecstasy. She grew irritable, and she seemed to have conceived a feeling of anger and contempt for every one and everything around her.

Pascal, filled with uneasiness, determined to have an explanation with Martine. He came down early one morning as she was sweeping the dining-room.

"You know that I leave you and Clotilde free to go to church, if that pleases you," he said. "I do not believe in oppressing any one's conscience. But I do not wish that you should make her sick."

The servant, without stopping in her work, said in a low voice:

"Perhaps the sick people are those who don't think that they are sick."

She said this with such an air of conviction that he smiled.

"Yes," he returned; "I am the sick soul whose conversion you pray for; while both of you are in possession of health and of perfect wisdom. Martine, if you continue to torment me and to torment yourselves, as you are doing, I shall grow angry."

He spoke in so furious and so harsh a voice that the servant stopped suddenly in her sweeping, and looked him full in the face. An infinite tenderness, an immense desolation passed over the face of the old maid cloistered in his service. And tears filled her eyes and she hurried out of the room stammering:

"Ah, monsieur, you do not love us."

Then Pascal, filled with an overwhelming sadness, gave up the contest. His remorse increased for having shown so much tolerance, for not having exercised his authority as master, in directing Clotilde's education and bringing up. In his belief that trees grew straight if they were not interfered with, he had allowed her to grow up in her own way, after teaching her merely to read and write. It was without any preconceived plan, while aiding him in making his researches and correcting his manuscripts, and simply by the force of circumstances, that she had read everything and acquired a fondness for the natural sciences. How bitterly he now regretted his indifference! What a powerful impulse he might have given to this clear mind, so eager for knowledge, instead of allowing it to go astray, and waste itself in that desire for the Beyond, which Grandmother Felicite and the good Martine favored. While he had occupied himself with facts, endeavoring to keep from going beyond the phenomenon, and succeeding in doing so, through his scientific discipline, he had seen her give all her thoughts to the unknown, the mysterious. It was with her an obsession, an instinctive curiosity which amounted to torture when she could not satisfy it. There was in her a longing which nothing

could appease, an irresistible call toward the unattainable, the unknowable. Even when she was a child, and still more, later, when she grew up, she went straight to the why and the how of things, she demanded ultimate causes. If he showed her a flower, she asked why this flower produced a seed, why this seed would germinate. Then, it would be the mystery of birth and death, and the unknown forces, and God, and all things. In half a dozen questions she would drive him into a corner, obliging him each time to acknowledge his fatal ignorance; and when he no longer knew what to answer her, when he would get rid of her with a gesture of comic fury, she would give a gay laugh of triumph, and go to lose herself again in her dreams, in the limitless vision of all that we do not know, and all that we may believe. Often she astounded him by her explanations. Her mind, nourished on science, started from proved truths, but with such an impetus that she bounded at once straight into the heaven of the legends. All sorts of mediators passed there, angels and saints and supernatural inspirations, modifying matter, endowing it with life; or, again, it was only one single force, the soul of the world, working to fuse things and beings in a final kiss of love in fifty centuries more. She had calculated the number of them, she said.

For the rest, Pascal had never before seen her so excited. For the past week, during which she had attended the Capuchin's mission in the cathedral, she had spent the days visibly in the expectation of the sermon of the evening; and she went to hear it with the rapt exaltation of a girl who is going to her first rendezvous of love. Then, on the following day, everything about her declared her detachment from the exterior life, from her accustomed existence, as if the visible world, the necessary actions of every moment, were but a snare and a folly. She retired within herself in the vision of what was not. Thus she had almost completely given up her habitual occupations, abandoning herself to a sort of unconquerable indolence, remaining for hours at a time with her hands in her lap, her gaze lost in vacancy, rapt in the contemplation of some far-off vision. Now she, who had been so active, so early a riser, rose late, appearing barely in time for the second breakfast, and it could not have been at her toilet that she spent these long hours, for she forgot her feminine coquetry, and would come down with her hair scarcely combed, negligently attired in a gown buttoned awry, but even thus adorable, thanks to her triumphant youth. The morning walks through La Souleïade that she had been so fond of, the races from the top to the bottom of the terraces planted with olive and almond trees, the visits to the pine grove balmy with the odor of resin, the long sun baths in the hot threshing yard, she indulged in no more; she preferred to remain shut up in her darkened room, from which not a movement was to be heard. Then, in the afternoon, in the work room, she would drag herself about languidly from chair to chair, doing nothing, tired and disgusted with everything that had formerly interested her.

Pascal was obliged to renounce her assistance; a paper which he gave her to copy remained three days untouched on her desk. She no longer classified anything; she would not have stooped down to pick up a paper from the floor. More than all, she abandoned the pastels, copies of flowers from nature that she had been making, to serve as plates to a work on artificial fecundations. Some large red mallows, of a new and singular coloring, faded in their vase before she had finished copying them. And yet for a whole afternoon she worked enthusiastically at a fantastic design of dream flowers, an extraordinary efflorescence blooming in the light of a miraculous sun, a burst of golden spike-shaped rays in the center of large purple corollas, resembling open hearts, whence shot, for pistils, a shower of stars, myriads of worlds streaming into the sky, like a milky way.

"Ah, my poor girl," said the doctor to her on this day, "how can you lose your time in such conceits! And I waiting for the copy of those mallows that you have left to die there. And you will make yourself ill. There is no health, nor beauty, even, possible outside reality."

Often now she did not answer, intrenching herself behind her fierce convictions, not wishing to dispute. But doubtless he had this time touched her beliefs to the quick.

"There is no reality," she answered sharply.

The doctor, amused by this bold philosophy from this big child, laughed.

“Yes, I know,” he said; “our senses are fallible. We know this world only through our senses, consequently it is possible that the world does not exist. Let us open the door to madness, then; let us accept as possible the most absurd chimeras, let us live in the realm of nightmare, outside of laws and facts. For do you not see that there is no longer any law if you suppress nature, and that the only thing that gives life any interest is to believe in life, to love it, and to put all the forces of our intelligence to the better understanding of it?”

She made a gesture of mingled indifference and bravado, and the conversation dropped. Now she was laying large strokes of blue crayon on the pastel, bringing out its flaming splendor in strong relief on the background of a clear summer night.

But two days later, in consequence of a fresh discussion, matters went still further amiss. In the evening, on leaving the table, Pascal went up to the study to write, while she remained out of doors, sitting on the terrace. Hours passed by, and he was surprised and uneasy, when midnight struck, that he had not yet heard her return to her room. She would have had to pass through the study, and he was very certain that she had not passed unnoticed by him. Going downstairs, he found that Martine was asleep; the vestibule door was not locked, and Clotilde must have remained outside, oblivious of the flight of time. This often happened to her on these warm nights, but she had never before remained out so late.

The doctor’s uneasiness increased when he perceived on the terrace the chair, now vacant, in which the young girl had been sitting. He had expected to find her asleep in it. Since she was not there, why had she not come in. Where could she have gone at such an hour? The night was beautiful: a September night, still warm, with a wide sky whose dark, velvety expanse was studded with stars; and from the depths of this moonless sky the stars shone so large and bright that they lighted the earth with a pale, mysterious radiance. He leaned over the balustrade of the terrace, and examined the slope and the stone steps which led down to the railroad; but there was not a movement. He saw nothing but the round motionless tops of the little olive trees. The idea then occurred to him that she must certainly be under the plane trees beside the fountain, whose murmuring waters made perpetual coolness around. He hurried there, and found himself enveloped in such thick darkness that he, who knew every tree, was obliged to walk with outstretched hands to avoid stumbling. Then he groped his way through the dark pine grove, still without meeting any one. And at last he called in a muffled voice:

“Clotilde! Clotilde!”

The darkness remained silent and impenetrable.

“Clotilde! Clotilde!” he cried again, in a louder voice. Not a sound, not a breath. The very echoes seemed asleep. His cry was drowned in the infinitely soft lake of blue shadows. And then he called her with all the force of his lungs. He returned to the plane trees. He went back to the pine grove, beside himself with fright, scouring the entire domain. Then, suddenly, he found himself in the threshing yard.

At this cool and tranquil hour, the immense yard, the vast circular paved court, slept too. It was so many years since grain had been threshed here that grass had sprung up among the stones, quickly scorched a russet brown by the sun, resembling the long threads of a woolen carpet. And, under the tufts of this feeble vegetation, the ancient pavement did not cool during the whole summer, smoking from sunset, exhaling in the night the heat stored up from so many sultry noons.

The yard stretched around, bare and deserted, in the cooling atmosphere, under the infinite calm of the sky, and Pascal was crossing it to hurry to the orchard, when he almost fell over a form that he had not before observed, extended at full length upon the ground. He uttered a frightened cry.

“What! Are you here?”

Clotilde did not deign even to answer. She was lying on her back, her hands clasped under the back of her neck, her face turned toward the sky; and in her pale countenance, only her large shining eyes were visible.

“And here I have been tormenting myself and calling you for an hour past! Did you not hear me shouting?”

She at last unclosed her lips.

“Yes.”

“Then that is very senseless! Why did you not answer me?”

But she fell back into her former silence, refusing all explanation, and with a stubborn brow kept her gaze fixed steadily on the sky.

“There, come in and go to bed, naughty child. You will tell me to-morrow.”

She did not stir, however; he begged her ten times over to go into the house, but she would not move. He ended by sitting down beside her on the short grass, through which penetrated the warmth of the pavement beneath.

“But you cannot sleep out of doors. At least answer me. What are you doing here?”

“I am looking.”

And from her large eyes, fixed and motionless, her gaze seemed to mount up among the stars. She seemed wholly absorbed in the contemplation of the pure starry depths of the summer sky.

“Ah, master!” she continued, in a low monotone; “how narrow and limited is all that you know compared to what there is surely up there. Yes, if I did not answer you it was because I was thinking of you, and I was filled with grief. You must not think me bad.”

In her voice there was a thrill of such tenderness that it moved him profoundly. He stretched himself on the grass beside her, so that their elbows touched, and they went on talking.

“I greatly fear, my dear, that your griefs are not rational. It gives you pain to think of me. Why so?”

“Oh, because of things that I should find it hard to explain to you; I am not a *savante*. You have taught me much, however, and I have learned more myself, being with you. Besides, they are things that I feel. Perhaps I might try to tell them to you, as we are all alone here, and the night is so beautiful.”

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