HONORÉ DE BALZAC

LETTERS OF TWO BRIDES

Honoré Balzac
Letters of Two Brides

http://www.litres.ru/pages/biblio_book/?art=25020059
Letters of Two Brides:

Содержание

Honoré de Balzac
Letters of Two Brides

DEDICATION

To George Sand

Your name, dear George, while casting a reflected radiance on my book, can gain no new glory from this page. And yet it is neither self-interest nor diffidence which has led me to place it there, but only the wish that it should bear witness to the solid friendship between us, which has survived our wanderings and separations, and triumphed over the busy malice of the world. This feeling is hardly likely now to change. The goodly company of friendly names, which will remain attached to my works, forms an element of pleasure in the midst of the vexation caused by their increasing number. Each fresh book, in fact, gives rise to fresh annoyance, were it only in the reproaches aimed at my too prolific pen, as though it could rival in fertility the world from which I draw my models! Would it not be a fine thing, George, if the future antiquarian of dead literatures were to find in this company none but great names and generous hearts, friends bound by pure and holy ties, the illustrious figures of the century? May I not justly pride myself on this assured possession, rather than on a popularity necessarily unstable? For him who knows you

well, it is happiness to be able to sign himself, as I do here,

Your friend,

DE BALZAC.

PARIS, June 1840.

FIRST PART

I. LOUISE DE CHAULIEU TO RENEE DE MAUCOMBE. PARIS, September

Sweetheart, I too am free! And I am the first too, unless you have written to Blois, at our sweet tryst of letter-writing.

Raise those great black eyes of yours, fixed on my opening sentence, and keep this excitement for the letter which shall tell you of my first love. By the way, why always "first?" Is there, I wonder, a second love?

Don't go running on like this, you will say, but tell me rather how you made your escape from the convent where you were to take your vows. Well, dear, I don't know about the Carmelites, but the miracle of my own deliverance was, I can assure you, most humdrum. The cries of an alarmed conscience triumphed over the dictates of a stern policy – there's the whole mystery. The sombre melancholy which seized me after you left hastened the happy climax, my aunt did not want to see me die of a decline, and my mother, whose one unfailing cure for my malady was a novitiate, gave way before her.

So I am in Paris, thanks to you, my love! Dear Renee, could you have seen me the day I found myself parted from you, well

might you have gloried in the deep impression you had made on so youthful a bosom. We had lived so constantly together, sharing our dreams and letting our fancy roam together, that I verily believe our souls had become welded together, like those two Hungarian girls, whose death we heard about from M. Beauvisage – poor misnamed being! Never surely was man better cut out by nature for the post of convent physician!

Tell me, did you not droop and sicken with your darling?

In my gloomy depression, I could do nothing but count over the ties which bind us. But it seemed as though distance had loosened them; I wearied of life, like a turtle-dove widowed of her mate. Death smiled sweetly on me, and I was proceeding quietly to die. To be at Blois, at the Carmelites, consumed by dread of having to take my vows there, a Mlle. de la Valliere, but without her prelude, and without my Renee! How could I not be sick – sick unto death?

How different it used to be! That monotonous existence, where every hour brings its duty, its prayer, its task, with such desperate regularity that you can tell what a Carmelite sister is doing in any place, at any hour of the night or day; that deadly dull routine, which crushes out all interest in one's surroundings, had become for us two a world of life and movement. Imagination had thrown open her fairy realms, and in these our spirits ranged at will, each in turn serving as magic steed to the other, the more alert quickening the drowsy; the world from which our bodies were shut out became the playground of our fancy, which

reveled there in frolicsome adventure. The very *Lives of the Saints* helped us to understand what was so carefully left unsaid! But the day when I was reft of your sweet company, I became a true Carmelite, such as they appeared to us, a modern Danaid, who, instead of trying to fill a bottomless barrel, draws every day, from Heaven knows what deep, an empty pitcher, thinking to find it full.

My aunt knew nothing of this inner life. How could she, who has made a paradise for herself within the two acres of her convent, understand my revolt against life? A religious life, if embraced by girls of our age, demands either an extreme simplicity of soul, such as we, sweetheart, do not possess, or else an ardor for self-sacrifice like that which makes my aunt so noble a character. But she sacrificed herself for a brother to whom she was devoted; to do the same for an unknown person or an idea is surely more than can be asked of mortals.

For the last fortnight I have been gulping down so many reckless words, burying so many reflections in my bosom, and accumulating such a store of things to tell, fit for your ear alone, that I should certainly have been suffocated but for the resource of letter-writing as a sorry substitute for our beloved talks. How hungry one's heart gets! I am beginning my journal this morning, and I picture to myself that yours is already started, and that, in a few days, I shall be at home in your beautiful Gemenos valley, which I know only through your descriptions, just as you will live that Paris life, revealed to you hitherto only in our dreams.

Well, then, sweet child, know that on a certain morning – a red-letter day in my life – there arrived from Paris a lady companion and Philippe, the last remaining of my grandmother's valets, charged to carry me off. When my aunt summoned me to her room and told me the news, I could not speak for joy, and only gazed at her stupidly.

"My child," she said, in her guttural voice, "I can see that you leave me without regret, but this farewell is not the last; we shall meet again. God has placed on your forehead the sign of the elect. You have the pride which leads to heaven or to hell, but your nature is too noble to choose the downward path. I know you better than you know yourself; with you, passion, I can see, will be very different from what it is with most women."

She drew me gently to her and kissed my forehead. The kiss made my flesh creep, for it burned with that consuming fire which eats away her life, which has turned to black the azure of her eyes, and softened the lines about them, has furrowed the warm ivory of her temples, and cast a sallow tinge over the beautiful face.

Before replying, I kissed her hands.

"Dear aunt," I said, "I shall never forget your kindness; and if it has not made your nunnery all that it ought to be for my health of body and soul, you may be sure nothing short of a broken heart will bring me back again – and that you would not wish for me. You will not see me here again till my royal lover has deserted me, and I warn you that if I catch him, death alone shall tear him

from me. I fear no Montespan."

She smiled and said:

"Go, madcap, and take your idle fancies with you. There is certainly more of the bold Montespan in you than of the gentle la Valliere."

I threw my arms round her. The poor lady could not refrain from escorting me to the carriage. There her tender gaze was divided between me and the armorial bearings.

At Beaugency night overtook me, still sunk in a stupor of the mind produced by these strange parting words. What can be awaiting me in this world for which I have so hungered?

To begin with, I found no one to receive me; my heart had been schooled in vain. My mother was at the Bois de Boulogne, my father at the Council; my brother, the Duc de Rhetore, never comes in, I am told, till it is time to dress for dinner. Miss Griffith (she is not unlike a griffin) and Philippe took me to my rooms.

The suite is the one which belonged to my beloved grandmother, the Princess de Vauremont, to whom I owe some sort of a fortune which no one has ever told me about. As you read this, you will understand the sadness which came over me as I entered a place sacred to so many memories, and found the rooms just as she had left them! I was to sleep in the bed where she died.

Sitting down on the edge of the sofa, I burst into tears, forgetting I was not alone, and remembering only how often I had stood there by her knees, the better to hear her words. There

I had gazed upon her face, buried in its brown laces, and worn as much by age as by the pangs of approaching death. The room seemed to me still warm with the heat which she kept up there. How comes it that Armande-Louise-Marie de Chaulieu must be like some peasant girl, who sleeps in her mother's bed the very morrow of her death? For to me it was as though the Princess, who died in 1817, had passed away but yesterday.

I saw many things in the room which ought to have been removed. Their presence showed the carelessness with which people, busy with the affairs of state, may treat their own, and also the little thought which had been given since her death to this grand old lady, who will always remain one of the striking figures of the eighteenth century. Philippe seemed to divine something of the cause of my tears. He told me that the furniture of the Princess had been left to me in her will and that my father had allowed all the larger suites to remain dismantled, as the Revolution had left them. On hearing this I rose, and Philippe opened the door of the small drawing-room which leads into the reception-rooms.

In these I found all the well-remembered wreckage; the panels above the doors, which had contained valuable pictures, bare of all but empty frames; broken marbles, mirrors carried off. In old days I was afraid to go up the state staircase and cross these vast, deserted rooms; so I used to get to the Princess' rooms by a small staircase which runs under the arch of the larger one and leads to the secret door of her dressing-room.

My suite, consisting of a drawing-room, bedroom, and the pretty morning-room in scarlet and gold, of which I have told you, lies in the wing on the side of the Invalides. The house is only separated from the boulevard by a wall, covered with creepers, and by a splendid avenue of trees, which mingle their foliage with that of the young elms on the sidewalk of the boulevard. But for the blue-and-gold dome of the Invalides and its gray stone mass, you might be in a wood.

The style of decoration in these rooms, together with their situation, indicates that they were the old show suite of the duchesses, while the dukes must have had theirs in the wing opposite. The two suites are decorously separated by the two main blocks, as well as by the central one, which contained those vast, gloomy, resounding halls shown me by Philippe, all despoiled of their splendor, as in the days of my childhood.

Philippe grew quite confidential when he saw the surprise depicted on my countenance. For you must know that in this home of diplomacy the very servants have a reserved and mysterious air. He went on to tell me that it was expected a law would soon be passed restoring to the fugitives of the Revolution the value of their property, and that my father is waiting to do up his house till this restitution is made, the king's architect having estimated the damage at three hundred thousand livres.

This piece of news flung me back despairing on my drawing-room sofa. Could it be that my father, instead of spending this money in arranging a marriage for me, would have left me to

die in the convent? This was the first thought to greet me on the threshold of my home.

Ah! Renee, what would I have given then to rest my head upon your shoulder, or to transport myself to the days when my grandmother made the life of these rooms? You two in all the world have been alone in loving me – you away at Maucombe, and she who survives only in my heart, the dear old lady, whose still youthful eyes used to open from sleep at my call. How well we understood each other!

These memories suddenly changed my mood. What at first had seemed profanation, now breathed of holy association. It was sweet to inhale the faint odor of the powder she loved still lingering in the room; sweet to sleep beneath the shelter of those yellow damask curtains with their white pattern, which must have retained something of the spirit emanating from her eyes and breath. I told Philippe to rub up the old furniture and make the rooms look as if they were lived in; I explained to him myself how I wanted everything arranged, and where to put each piece of furniture. In this way I entered into possession, and showed how an air of youth might be given to the dear old things.

The bedroom is white in color, a little dulled with time, just as the gilding of the fanciful arabesques shows here and there a patch of red; but this effect harmonizes well with the faded colors of the Savonnerie tapestry, which was presented to my grandmother by Louis XV. along with his portrait. The timepiece was a gift from the Marechal de Saxe, and the china ornaments

on the mantelpiece came from the Marechal de Richelieu. My grandmother's portrait, painted at the age of twenty-five, hangs in an oval frame opposite that of the King. The Prince, her husband, is conspicuous by his absence. I like this frank negligence, untinged by hypocrisy – a characteristic touch which sums up her charming personality. Once when my grandmother was seriously ill, her confessor was urgent that the Prince, who was waiting in the drawing-room, should be admitted.

"He can come in with the doctor and his drugs," was the reply.

The bed has a canopy and well-stuffed back, and the curtains are looped up with fine wide bands. The furniture is of gilded wood, upholstered in the same yellow damask with white flowers which drapes the windows, and which is lined there with a white silk that looks as though it were watered. The panels over the doors have been painted, by what artist I can't say, but they represent one a sunrise, the other a moonlight scene.

The fireplace is a very interesting feature in the room. It is easy to see that life in the last century centered largely round the hearth, where great events were enacted. The copper gilt grate is a marvel of workmanship, and the mantelpiece is most delicately finished; the fire-irons are beautifully chased; the bellows are a perfect gem. The tapestry of the screen comes from the Gobelins and is exquisitely mounted; charming fantastic figures run all over the frame, on the feet, the supporting bar, and the wings; the whole thing is wrought like a fan.

Dearly should I like to know who was the giver of this dainty

work of art, which was such a favorite with her. How often have I seen the old lady, her feet upon the bar, reclining in the easy-chair, with her dress half raised in front, toying with the snuff-box, which lay upon the ledge between her box of pastilles and her silk mits. What a coquette she was! to the day of her death she took as much pains with her appearance as though the beautiful portrait had been painted only yesterday, and she were waiting to receive the throng of exquisites from the Court! How the armchair recalls to me the inimitable sweep of her skirts as she sank back in it!

These women of a past generation have carried off with them secrets which are very typical of their age. The Princess had a certain turn of the head, a way of dropping her glance and her remarks, a choice of words, which I look for in vain, even in my mother. There was subtlety in it all, and there was good-nature; the points were made without any affectation. Her talk was at once lengthy and concise; she told a good story, and could put her meaning in three words. Above all, she was extremely free-thinking, and this has undoubtedly had its effect on my way of looking at things.

From seven years old till I was ten, I never left her side; it pleased her to attract me as much as it pleased me to go. This preference was the cause of more than one passage at arms between her and my mother, and nothing intensifies feeling like the icy breath of persecution. How charming was her greeting, "Here you are, little rogue!" when curiosity had taught me how

to glide with stealthy snake-like movements to her room. She felt that I loved her, and this childish affection was welcome as a ray of sunshine in the winter of her life.

I don't know what went on in her rooms at night, but she had many visitors; and when I came on tiptoe in the morning to see if she were awake, I would find the drawing-room furniture disarranged, the card-tables set out, and patches of snuff scattered about.

This drawing-room is furnished in the same style as the bedroom. The chairs and tables are oddly shaped, with claw feet and hollow mouldings. Rich garlands of flowers, beautifully designed and carved, wind over the mirrors and hang down in festoons. On the consoles are fine china vases. The ground colors are scarlet and white. My grandmother was a high-spirited, striking brunette, as might be inferred from her choice of colors. I have found in the drawing-room a writing-table I remember well; the figures on it used to fascinate me; it is plaited in graven silver, and was a present from one of the Genoese Lomellini. Each side of the table represents the occupations of a different season; there are hundreds of figures in each picture, and all in relief.

I remained alone for two hours, while old memories rose before me, one after another, on this spot, hallowed by the death of a woman most remarkable even among the witty and beautiful Court ladies of Louis XV.'s day.

You know how abruptly I was parted from her, at a day's

notice, in 1816.

"Go and bid good-bye to your grandmother," said my mother.

The Princess received me as usual, without any display of feeling, and expressed no surprise at my departure.

"You are going to the convent, dear," she said, "and will see your aunt there, who is an excellent woman. I shall take care, though, that they don't make a victim of you; you shall be independent, and able to marry whom you please."

Six months later she died. Her will had been given into the keeping of the Prince de Talleyrand, the most devoted of all her old friends. He contrived, while paying a visit to Mlle. de Chargeboeuf, to intimate to me, through her, that my grandmother forbade me to take the vows. I hope, sooner or later, to meet the Prince, and then I shall doubtless learn more from him.

Thus, sweetheart, if I have found no one in flesh and blood to meet me, I have comforted myself with the shade of the dear Princess, and have prepared myself for carrying out one of our pledges, which was, as you know, to keep each other informed of the smallest details in our homes and occupations. It makes such a difference to know where and how the life of one we love is passed. Send me a faithful picture of the veriest trifles around you, omitting nothing, not even the sunset lights among the tall trees.

October 19th.

It was three in the afternoon when I arrived. About half-past

five, Rose came and told me that my mother had returned, so I went downstairs to pay my respects to her.

My mother lives in a suite on the ground floor, exactly corresponding to mine, and in the same block. I am just over her head, and the same secret staircase serves for both. My father's rooms are in the block opposite, but are larger by the whole of the space occupied by the grand staircase on our side of the building. These ancestral mansions are so spacious, that my father and mother continue to occupy the ground-floor rooms, in spite of the social duties which have once more devolved on them with the return of the Bourbons, and are even able to receive in them.

I found my mother, dressed for the evening, in her drawing-room, where nothing is changed. I came slowly down the stairs, speculating with every step how I should be met by this mother who had shown herself so little of a mother to me, and from whom, during eight years, I had heard nothing beyond the two letters of which you know. Judging it unworthy to simulate an affection I could not possibly feel, I put on the air of a pious imbecile, and entered the room with many inward qualms, which however soon disappeared. My mother's tack was equal to the occasion. She made no pretence of emotion; she neither held me at arm's-length nor hugged me to her bosom like a beloved daughter, but greeted me as though we had parted the evening before. Her manner was that of the kindliest and most sincere friend, as she addressed me like a grown person, first kissing me on the forehead.

"My dear little one," she said, "if you were to die at the convent, it is much better to live with your family. You frustrate your father's plans and mine; but the age of blind obedience to parents is past. M. de Chaulieu's intention, and in this I am quite at one with him, is to lose no opportunity of making your life pleasant and of letting you see the world. At your age I should have thought as you do, therefore I am not vexed with you; it is impossible you should understand what we expected from you. You will not find any absurd severity in me; and if you have ever thought me heartless, you will soon find out your mistake. Still, though I wish you to feel perfectly free, I think that, to begin with, you would do well to follow the counsels of a mother, who wishes to be a sister to you."

I was quite charmed by the Duchess, who talked in a gentle voice, straightening my convent tippet as she spoke. At the age of thirty-eight she is still exquisitely beautiful. She has dark-blue eyes, with silken lashes, a smooth forehead, and a complexion so pink and white that you might think she paints. Her bust and shoulders are marvelous, and her waist is as slender as yours. Her hand is milk-white and extraordinarily beautiful; the nails catch the light in their perfect polish, the thumb is like ivory, the little finger stands just a little apart from the rest, and the foot matches the hand; it is the Spanish foot of Mlle. de Vandenesse. If she is like this at forty, at sixty she will still be a beautiful woman.

I replied, sweetheart, like a good little girl. I was as nice to her as she to me, nay, nicer. Her beauty completely vanquished me; it

seemed only natural that such a woman should be absorbed in her regal part. I told her this as simply as though I had been talking to you. I daresay it was a surprise to her to hear words of affection from her daughter's mouth, and the unfeigned homage of my admiration evidently touched her deeply. Her manner changed and became even more engaging; she dropped all formality as she said:

"I am much pleased with you, and I hope we shall remain good friends."

The words struck me as charmingly naive, but I did not let this appear, for I saw at once that the prudent course was to allow her to believe herself much deeper and cleverer than her daughter. So I only stared vacantly and she was delighted. I kissed her hands repeatedly, telling her how happy it made me to be so treated and to feel at my ease with her. I even confided to her my previous tremors. She smiled, put her arm round my neck, and drawing me towards her, kissed me on the forehead most affectionately.

"Dear child," she said, "we have people coming to dinner to-day. Perhaps you will agree with me that it is better for you not to make your first appearance in society till you have been in the dressmaker's hands; so, after you have seen your father and brother, you can go upstairs again."

I assented most heartily. My mother's exquisite dress was the first revelation to me of the world which our dreams had pictured; but I did not feel the slightest desire to rival her.

My father now entered, and the Duchess presented me to him.

He became all at once most affectionate, and played the father's part so well, that I could not but believe his heart to be in it. Taking my two hands in his, and kissing them, with more of the lover than the father in his manner, he said:

"So this is my rebel daughter!"

And he drew me towards him, with his arm passed tenderly round my waist, while he kissed me on the cheeks and forehead.

"The pleasure with which we shall watch your success in society will atone for the disappointment we felt at your change of vocation," he said. Then, turning to my mother, "Do you know that she is going to turn out very pretty, and you will be proud of her some day? – Here is your brother, Rhetore. – Alphonse," he said to a fine young man who came in, "here is your convent-bred sister, who threatens to send her nun's frock to the deuce."

My brother came up in a leisurely way and took my hand, which he pressed.

"Come, come, you may kiss her," said my father.

And he kissed me on both cheeks.

"I am delighted to see you," he said, "and I take your side against my father."

I thanked him, but could not help thinking he might have come to Blois when he was at Orleans visiting our Marquis brother in his quarters.

Fearing the arrival of strangers, I now withdrew. I tidied up my rooms, and laid out on the scarlet velvet of my lovely table all the materials necessary for writing to you, meditating all the

while on my new situation.

This, my fair sweetheart, is a true and veracious account of the return of a girl of eighteen, after an absence of nine years, to the bosom of one of the noblest families in the kingdom. I was tired by the journey as well as by all the emotions I had been through, so I went to bed in convent fashion, at eight o'clock after supper. They have preserved even a little Saxe service which the dear Princess used when she had a fancy for taking her meals alone.

II. THE SAME TO THE SAME November 25th

Next day I found my rooms done out and dusted, and even flowers put in the vases, by old Philippe. I began to feel at home. Only it didn't occur to anybody that a Carmelite schoolgirl has an early appetite, and Rose had no end of trouble in getting breakfast for me.

"Mlle. goes to bed at dinner-time," she said to me, "and gets up when the Duke is just returning home."

I began to write. About one o'clock my father knocked at the door of the small drawing-room and asked if he might come in. I opened the door; he came in, and found me writing to you.

"My dear," he began, "you will have to get yourself clothes, and to make these rooms comfortable. In this purse you will find twelve thousand francs, which is the yearly income I purpose allowing you for your expenses. You will make arrangements with your mother as to some governess whom you may like, in case Miss Griffith doesn't please you, for Mme. de Chaulieu will not have time to go out with you in the mornings. A carriage and man-servant shall be at your disposal."

"Let me keep Philippe," I said.

"So be it," he replied. "But don't be uneasy; you have money enough of your own to be no burden either to your mother or me."

"May I ask how much I have?"

"Certainly, my child," he said. "Your grandmother left you five hundred thousand francs; this was the amount of her savings, for she would not alienate a foot of land from the family. This sum has been placed in Government stock, and, with the accumulated interest, now brings in about forty thousand francs a year. With this I had purposed making an independence for your second brother, and it is here that you have upset my plans. Later, however, it is possible that you may fall in with them. It shall rest with yourself, for I have confidence in your good sense far more than I had expected.

"I do not need to tell you how a daughter of the Chaulieus ought to behave. The pride so plainly written in your features is my best guarantee. Safeguards, such as common folk surround their daughters with, would be an insult in our family. A slander reflecting on your name might cost the life of the man bold enough to utter it, or the life of one of your brothers, if by chance the right should not prevail. No more on this subject. Good-bye, little one."

He kissed me on the forehead and went out. I cannot understand the relinquishment of this plan after nine years' persistence in it. My father's frankness is what I like. There is no ambiguity about his words. My money ought to belong to his Marquis son. Who, then, has had bowels of mercy? My mother? My father? Or could it be my brother?

I remained sitting on my grandmother's sofa, staring at the

purse which my father had left on the mantelpiece, at once pleased and vexed that I could not withdraw my mind from the money. It is true, further speculation was useless. My doubts had been cleared up and there was something fine in the way my pride was spared.

Philippe has spent the morning rushing about among the various shops and workpeople who are to undertake the task of my metamorphosis. A famous dressmaker, by name Victorine, has come, as well as a woman for underclothing, and a shoemaker. I am as impatient as a child to know what I shall be like when I emerge from the sack which constituted the conventual uniform; but all these tradespeople take a long time; the corset-maker requires a whole week if my figure is not to be spoilt. You see, I have a figure, dear; this becomes serious. Janssen, the Operatic shoemaker, solemnly assures me that I have my mother's foot. The whole morning has gone in these weighty occupations. Even a glovemaker has come to take the measure of my hand. The underclothing woman has got my orders.

At the meal which I call dinner, and the others lunch, my mother told me that we were going together to the milliner's to see some hats, so that my taste should be formed, and I might be in a position to order my own.

This burst of independence dazzles me. I am like a blind man who has just recovered his sight. Now I begin to understand the vast interval which separates a Carmelite sister from a girl in society. Of ourselves we could never have conceived it.

During this lunch my father seemed absent-minded, and we left him to his thoughts; he is deep in the King's confidence. I was entirely forgotten; but, from what I have seen, I have no doubt he will remember me when he has need of me. He is a very attractive man in spite of his fifty years. His figure is youthful; he is well made, fair, and extremely graceful in his movements. He has a diplomatic face, at once dumb and expressive; his nose is long and slender, and he has brown eyes.

What a handsome pair! Strange thoughts assail me as it becomes plain to me that these two, so perfectly matched in birth, wealth, and mental superiority, live entirely apart, and have nothing in common but their name. The show of unity is only for the world.

The cream of the Court and diplomatic circles were here last night. Very soon I am going to a ball given by the Duchesse de Maufrigneuse, and I shall be presented to the society I am so eager to know. A dancing-master is coming every morning to give me lessons, for I must be able to dance in a month, or I can't go to the ball.

Before dinner, my mother came to talk about the governess with me. I have decided to keep Miss Griffith, who was recommended by the English ambassador. Miss Griffith is the daughter of a clergyman; her mother was of good family, and she is perfectly well bred. She is thirty-six, and will teach me English. The good soul is quite handsome enough to have ambitions; she is Scotch – poor and proud – and will act as my chaperon. She

is to sleep in Rose's room. Rose will be under her orders. I saw at a glance that my governess would be governed by me. In the six days we have been together, she has made very sure that I am the only person likely to take an interest in her; while, for my part, I have ascertained that, for all her statuesque features, she will prove accommodating. She seems to me a kindly soul, but cautious. I have not been able to extract a word of what passed between her and my mother.

Another trifling piece of news! My father has this morning refused the appointment as Minister of State which was offered him. This accounts for his preoccupied manner last night. He says he would prefer an embassy to the worries of public debate. Spain in especial attracts him.

This news was told me at lunch, the one moment of the day when my father, mother, and brother see each other in an easy way. The servants then only come when they are rung for. The rest of the day my brother, as well as my father, spends out of the house. My mother has her toilet to make; between two and four she is never visible; at four o'clock she goes out for an hour's drive; when she is not dining out, she receives from six to seven, and the evening is given to entertainments of various kinds – theatres, balls, concerts, at homes. In short, her life is so full, that I don't believe she ever has a quarter of an hour to herself. She must spend a considerable time dressing in the morning; for at lunch, which takes place between eleven and twelve, she is exquisite. The meaning of the things that are said

about her is dawning on me. She begins the day with a bath barely warmed, and a cup of cold coffee with cream; then she dresses. She is never, except on some great emergency, called before nine o'clock. In summer there are morning rides, and at two o'clock she receives a young man whom I have never yet contrived to see.

Behold our family life! We meet at lunch and dinner, though often I am alone with my mother at this latter meal, and I foresee that still oftener I shall take it in my own rooms (following the example of my grandmother) with only Miss Griffith for company, for my mother frequently dines out. I have ceased to wonder at the indifference my family have shown to me. In Paris, my dear, it is a miracle of virtue to love the people who live with you, for you see little enough of them; as for the absent – they do not exist!

Knowing as this may sound, I have not yet set foot in the streets, and am deplorably ignorant. I must wait till I am less of the country cousin and have brought my dress and deportment into keeping with the society I am about to enter, the whirl of which amazes me even here, where only distant murmurs reach my ear. So far I have not gone beyond the garden; but the Italian opera opens in a few days, and my mother has a box there. I am crazy with delight at the thought of hearing Italian music and seeing French acting.

Already I begin to drop convent habits for those of society. I spend the evening writing to you till the moment for going to bed arrives. This has been postponed to ten o'clock, the hour at

which my mother goes out, if she is not at the theatre. There are twelve theatres in Paris.

I am grossly ignorant and I read a lot, but quite indiscriminately, one book leading to another. I find the names of fresh books on the cover of the one I am reading; but as I have no one to direct me, I light on some which are fearfully dull. What modern literature I have read all turns upon love, the subject which used to bulk so largely in our thoughts, because it seemed that our fate was determined by man and for man. But how inferior are these authors to two little girls, known as Sweetheart and Darling – otherwise Renee and Louise. Ah! my love, what wretched plots, what ridiculous situations, and what poverty of sentiment! Two books, however, have given me wonderful pleasure —*Corinne* and *Adolphe*. Apropos of this, I asked my father one day whether it would be possible for me to see Mme. de Stael. My father, mother, and Alphonse all burst out laughing, and Alphonse said:

"Where in the world has she sprung from?"

To which my father replied:

"What fools we are! She springs from the Carmelites."

"My child, Mme. de Stael is dead," said my mother gently.

When I finished *Adolphe*, I asked Miss Griffith how a woman could be betrayed.

"Why, of course, when she loves," was her reply.

Renee, tell me, do you think we could be betrayed by a man?

Miss Griffith has at last discerned that I am not an utter

ignoramus, that I have somewhere a hidden vein of knowledge, the knowledge we learned from each other in our random arguments. She sees that it is only superficial facts of which I am ignorant. The poor thing has opened her heart to me. Her curt reply to my question, when I compare it with all the sorrows I can imagine, makes me feel quite creepy. Once more she urged me not to be dazzled by the glitter of society, to be always on my guard, especially against what most attracted me. This is the sum-total of her wisdom, and I can get nothing more out of her. Her lectures, therefore, become a trifle monotonous, and she might be compared in this respect to the bird which has only one cry.

III. THE SAME TO THE SAME December

My Darling, – Here I am ready to make my bow to the world. By way of preparation I have been trying to commit all the follies I could think of before sobering down for my entry. This morning, I have seen myself, after many rehearsals, well and duly equipped – stays, shoes, curls, dress, ornaments, – all in order. Following the example of duelists before a meeting, I tried my arms in the privacy of my chamber. I wanted to see how I would look, and had no difficulty in discovering a certain air of victory and triumph, bound to carry all before it. I mustered all my forces, in accordance with that splendid maxim of antiquity, "Know thyself!" and boundless was my delight in thus making my own acquaintance. Griffith was the sole spectator of this doll's play, in which I was at once doll and child. You think you know me? You are hugely mistaken.

Here is a portrait, then, Renee, of your sister, formerly disguised as a Carmelite, now brought to life again as a frivolous society girl. She is one of the greatest beauties in France – Provence, of course, excepted. I don't see that I can give a more accurate summary of this interesting topic.

True, I have my weak points; but were I a man, I should adore them. They arise from what is most promising in me. When you have spent a fortnight admiring the exquisite curves of your

mother's arms, and that mother the Duchesse de Chaulieu, it is impossible, my dear, not to deplore your own angular elbows. Yet there is consolation in observing the fineness of the wrist, and a certain grace of line in those hollows, which will yet fill out and show plump, round, and well modeled, under the satiny skin. The somewhat crude outline of the arms is seen again in the shoulders. Strictly speaking, indeed, I have no shoulders, but only two bony blades, standing out in harsh relief. My figure also lacks pliancy; there is a stiffness about the side lines.

Poof! There's the worst out. But then the contours are bold and delicate, the bright, pure flame of health bites into the vigorous lines, a flood of life and of blue blood pulses under the transparent skin, and the fairest daughter of Eve would seem a Negress beside me! I have the foot of a gazelle! My joints are finely turned, my features of a Greek correctness. It is true, madame, that the flesh tints do not melt into each other; but, at least, they stand out clear and bright. In short, I am a very pretty green fruit, with all the charm of unripeness. I see a great likeness to the face in my aunt's old missal, which rises out of a violet lily.

There is no silly weakness in the blue of my insolent eyes; the white is pure mother-of-pearl, prettily marked with tiny veins, and the thick, long lashes fall like a silken fringe. My forehead sparkles, and the hair grows deliciously; it ripples into waves of pale gold, growing browner towards the centre, whence escape little rebel locks, which alone would tell that my fairness is not of the insipid and hysterical type. I am a tropical blonde, with

plenty of blood in my veins, a blonde more apt to strike than to turn the cheek. What do you think the hairdresser proposed? He wanted, if you please, to smooth my hair into two bands, and place over my forehead a pearl, kept in place by a gold chain! He said it would recall the Middle Ages.

I told him I was not aged enough to have reached the middle, or to need an ornament to freshen me up!

The nose is slender, and the well-cut nostrils are separated by a sweet little pink partition – an imperious, mocking nose, with a tip too sensitive ever to grow fat or red. Sweetheart, if this won't find a husband for a dowerless maiden, I'm a donkey. The ears are daintily curled, a pearl hanging from either lobe would show yellow. The neck is long, and has an undulating motion full of dignity. In the shade the white ripens to a golden tinge. Perhaps the mouth is a little large. But how expressive! what a color on the lips! how prettily the teeth laugh!

Then, dear, there is a harmony running through all. What a gait! what a voice! We have not forgotten how our grandmother's skirts fell into place without a touch. In a word, I am lovely and charming. When the mood comes, I can laugh one of our good old laughs, and no one will think the less of me; the dimples, impressed by Comedy's light fingers on my fair cheeks, will command respect. Or I can let my eyes fall and my heart freeze under my snowy brows. I can pose as a Madonna with melancholy, swan-like neck, and the painters' virgins will be nowhere; my place in heaven would be far above them. A man

would be forced to chant when he spoke to me.

So, you see, my panoply is complete, and I can run the whole gamut of coquetry from deepest bass to shrillest treble. It is a huge advantage not to be all of one piece. Now, my mother is neither playful nor virginal. Her only attitude is an imposing one; when she ceases to be majestic, she is ferocious. It is difficult for her to heal the wounds she makes, whereas I can wound and heal together. We are absolutely unlike, and therefore there could not possibly be rivalry between us, unless indeed we quarreled over the greater or less perfection of our extremities, which are similar. I take after my father, who is shrewd and subtle. I have the manner of my grandmother and her charming voice, which becomes falsetto when forced, but is a sweet-toned chest voice at the ordinary pitch of a quiet talk.

I feel as if I had left the convent to-day for the first time. For society I do not yet exist; I am unknown to it. What a ravishing moment! I still belong only to myself, like a flower just blown, unseen yet of mortal eye.

In spite of this, my sweet, as I paced the drawing-room during my self-inspection, and saw the poor cast-off school-clothes, a queer feeling came over me. Regret for the past, anxiety about the future, fear of society, a long farewell to the pale daisies which we used to pick and strip of their petals in light-hearted innocence, there was something of all that; but strange, fantastic visions also rose, which I crushed back into the inner depths, whence they had sprung, and whither I dared not follow them.

My Renee, I have a regular trousseau! It is all beautifully laid away and perfumed in the cedar-wood drawers with lacquered front of my charming dressing-table. There are ribbons, shoes, gloves, all in lavish abundance. My father has kindly presented me with the pretty gewgaws a girl loves – a dressing-case, toilet service, scent-box, fan, sunshade, prayer-book, gold chain, cashmere shawl. He has also promised to give me riding lessons. And I can dance! To-morrow, yes, to-morrow evening, I come out!

My dress is white muslin, and on my head I wear a garland of white roses in Greek style. I shall put on my Madonna face; I mean to play the simpleton, and have all the women on my side. My mother is miles away from any idea of what I write to you. She believes me quite destitute of mind, and would be dumfounded if she read my letter. My brother honors me with a profound contempt, and is uniformly and politely indifferent.

He is a handsome young fellow, but melancholy, and given to moods. I have divined his secret, though neither the Duke nor Duchess has an inkling of it. In spite of his youth and his title, he is jealous of his father. He has no position in the State, no post at Court, he never has to say, "I am going to the Chamber." I alone in the house have sixteen hours for meditation. My father is absorbed in public business and his own amusements; my mother, too, is never at leisure; no member of the household practises self-examination, they are constantly in company, and have hardly time to live.

I should immensely like to know what is the potent charm wielded by society to keep people prisoner from nine every evening till two or three in the morning, and force them to be so lavish alike of strength and money. When I longed for it, I had no idea of the separations it brought about, or its overmastering spell. But, then, I forget, it is Paris which does it all.

It is possible, it seems, for members of one family to live side by side and know absolutely nothing of each other. A half-fledged nun arrives, and in a couple of weeks has grasped domestic details, of which the master diplomatist at the head of the house is quite ignorant. Or perhaps he *does* see, and shuts his eyes deliberately, as part of the father's *role*. There is a mystery here which I must plumb.

IV. THE SAME TO THE SAME December 15th

Yesterday, at two o'clock, I went to drive in the Champs-Elysees and the Bois de Boulogne. It was one of those autumn days which we used to find so beautiful on the banks of the Loire. So I have seen Paris at last! The Place Louis XV. is certainly very fine, but the beauty is that of man's handiwork.

I was dressed to perfection, pensive, with set face (though inwardly much tempted to laugh), under a lovely hat, my arms crossed. Would you believe it? Not a single smile was thrown at me, not one poor youth was struck motionless as I passed, not a soul turned to look again; and yet the carriage proceeded with a deliberation worthy of my pose.

No, I am wrong, there was one – a duke, and a charming man – who suddenly reined in as we went by. The individual who thus saved appearances for me was my father, and he proclaimed himself highly gratified by what he saw. I met my mother also, who sent me a butterfly kiss from the tips of her fingers. The worthy Griffith, who fears no man, cast her glances hither and thither without discrimination. In my judgment, a young woman should always know exactly what her eye is resting on.

I was mad with rage. One man actually inspected my carriage without noticing me. This flattering homage probably came from a carriage-maker. I have been quite out in the reckoning of my

forces. Plainly, beauty, that rare gift which comes from heaven, is commoner in Paris than I thought. I saw hats doffed with deference to simpering fools; a purple face called forth murmurs of, "It is she!" My mother received an immense amount of admiration. There is an answer to this problem, and I mean to find it.

The men, my dear, seemed to me generally very ugly. The very few exceptions are bad copies of us. Heaven knows what evil genius has inspired their costume; it is amazingly inelegant compared with those of former generations. It has no distinction, no beauty of color or romance; it appeals neither to the senses, nor the mind, nor the eye, and it must be very uncomfortable. It is meagre and stunted. The hat, above all, struck me; it is a sort of truncated column, and does not adapt itself in the least to the shape of the head; but I am told it is easier to bring about a revolution than to invent a graceful hat. Courage in Paris recoils before the thought of appearing in a round felt; and for lack of one day's daring, men stick all their lives to this ridiculous headpiece. And yet Frenchmen are said to be fickle!

The men are hideous anyway, whatever they put on their heads. I have seen nothing but worn, hard faces, with no calm nor peace in the expression; the harsh lines and furrows speak of foiled ambition and smarting vanity. A fine forehead is rarely seen.

"And these are the product of Paris!" I said to Miss Griffith.

"Most cultivated and pleasant men," she replied.

I was silent. The heart of a spinster of thirty-six is a well of tolerance.

In the evening I went to the ball, where I kept close to my mother's side. She gave me her arm with a devotion which did not miss its reward. All the honors were for her; I was made the pretext for charming compliments. She was clever enough to find me fools for my partners, who one and all expatiated on the heat and the beauty of the ball, till you might suppose I was freezing and blind. Not one failed to enlarge on the strange, unheard-of, extraordinary, odd, remarkable fact – that he saw me for the first time.

My dress, which dazzled me as I paraded alone in my white-and-gold drawing-room, was barely noticeable amidst the gorgeous finery of most of the married women. Each had her band of faithful followers, and they all watched each other askance. A few were radiant in triumphant beauty, and amongst these was my mother. A girl at a ball is a mere dancing-machine – a thing of no consequence whatever.

The men, with rare exceptions, did not impress me more favorably here than at the Champs-Elysees. They have a used-up look; their features are meaningless, or rather they have all the same meaning. The proud, stalwart bearing which we find in the portraits of our ancestors – men who joined moral to physical vigor – has disappeared. Yet in this gathering there was one man of remarkable ability, who stood out from the rest by the beauty of his face. But even he did not rouse in me the feeling which I

should have expected. I do not know his works, and he is a man of no family. Whatever the genius and the merits of a plebeian or a commoner, he could never stir my blood. Besides, this man was obviously so much more taken up with himself than with anybody else, that I could not but think these great brain-workers must look on us as things rather than persons. When men of intellectual power love, they ought to give up writing, otherwise their love is not the real thing. The lady of their heart does not come first in all their thoughts. I seemed to read all this in the bearing of the man I speak of. I am told he is a professor, orator, and author, whose ambition makes him the slave of every bigwig.

My mind was made up on the spot. It was unworthy of me, I determined, to quarrel with society for not being impressed by my merits, and I gave myself up to the simple pleasure of dancing, which I thoroughly enjoyed. I heard a great deal of inept gossip about people of whom I know nothing; but perhaps it is my ignorance on many subjects which prevents me from appreciating it, as I saw that most men and women took a lively pleasure in certain remarks, whether falling from their own lips or those of others. Society bristles with enigmas which look hard to solve. It is a perfect maze of intrigue. Yet I am fairly quick of sight and hearing, and as to my wits, Mlle. de Maucombe does not need to be told!

I returned home tired with a pleasant sort of tiredness, and in all innocence began describing my sensations to my mother, who was with me. She checked me with the warning that I must never

say such things to any one but her.

"My dear child," she added, "it needs as much tact to know when to be silent as when to speak."

This advice brought home to me the nature of the sensations which ought to be concealed from every one, not excepting perhaps even a mother. At a glance I measured the vast field of feminine duplicity. I can assure you, sweetheart, that we, in our unabashed simplicity, would pass for two very wide-awake little scandal-mongers. What lessons may be conveyed in a finger on the lips, in a word, a look! All in a moment I was seized with excessive shyness. What! may I never again speak of the natural pleasure I feel in the exercise of dancing? "How then," I said to myself, "about the deeper feelings?"

I went to bed sorrowful, and I still suffer from the shock produced by this first collision of my frank, joyous nature with the harsh laws of society. Already the highway hedges are flecked with my white wool! Farewell, beloved.

V. RENEE DE MAUCOMBE TO LOUISE DE CHAULIEU October

How deeply your letter moved me; above all, when I compare our widely different destinies! How brilliant is the world you are entering, how peaceful the retreat where I shall end my modest career!

In the Castle of Maucombe, which is so well known to you by description that I shall say no more of it, I found my room almost exactly as I left it; only now I can enjoy the splendid view it gives of the Gemenos valley, which my childish eyes used to see without comprehending. A fortnight after my arrival, my father and mother took me, along with my two brothers, to dine with one of our neighbors, M. de l'Estorade, an old gentleman of good family, who has made himself rich, after the provincial fashion, by scraping and paring.

M. de l'Estorade was unable to save his only son from the clutches of Bonaparte; after successfully eluding the conscription, he was forced to send him to the army in 1813, to join the Emperor's bodyguard. After Leipsic no more was heard of him. M. de Montriveau, whom the father interviewed in 1814, declared that he had seen him taken by the Russians. Mme. de l'Estorade died of grief whilst a vain search was being made in Russia. The Baron, a very pious old man, practised that fine theological virtue which we used to cultivate at Blois – Hope!

Hope made him see his son in dreams. He hoarded his income for him, and guarded carefully the portion of inheritance which fell to him from the family of the late Mme. de l'Estorade, no one venturing to ridicule the old man.

At last it dawned upon me that the unexpected return of this son was the cause of my own. Who could have imagined, whilst fancy was leading us a giddy dance, that my destined husband was slowly traveling on foot through Russia, Poland, and Germany? His bad luck only forsook him at Berlin, where the French Minister helped his return to his native country. M. de l'Estorade, the father, who is a small landed proprietor in Provence, with an income of about ten thousand livres, has not sufficient European fame to interest the world in the wandering Knight de l'Estorade, whose name smacks of his adventures.

The accumulated income of twelve thousand livres from the property of Mme. de l'Estorade, with the addition of the father's savings, provides the poor guard of honor with something like two hundred and fifty thousand livres, not counting house and lands – quite a considerable fortune in Provence. His worthy father had bought, on the very eve of the Chevalier's return, a fine but badly-managed estate, where he designs to plant ten thousand mulberry-trees, raised in his nursery with a special view to this acquisition. The Baron, having found his long-lost son, has now but one thought, to marry him, and marry him to a girl of good family.

My father and mother entered into their neighbor's idea with

an eye to my interests so soon as they discovered that Renee de Maucombe would be acceptable without a dowry, and that the money the said Renee ought to inherit from her parents would be duly acknowledged as hers in the contract. In a similar way, my younger brother, Jean de Maucombe, as soon as he came of age, signed a document stating that he had received from his parents an advance upon the estate equal in amount to one-third of whole. This is the device by which the nobles of Provence elude the infamous Civil Code of M. de Bonaparte, a code which will drive as many girls of good family into convents as it will find husbands for. The French nobility, from the little I have been able to gather, seem to be divided on these matters.

The dinner, darling, was a first meeting between your sweetheart and the exile. The Comte de Maucombe's servants donned their old laced liveries and hats, the coachman his great top-boots; we sat five in the antiquated carriage, and arrived in state about two o'clock – the dinner was for three – at the grange, which is the dwelling of the Baron de l'Estorade.

My father-in-law to be has, you see, no castle, only a simple country house, standing beneath one of our hills, at the entrance of that noble valley, the pride of which is undoubtedly the Castle of Maucombe. The building is quite unpretentious: four pebble walls covered with a yellowish wash, and roofed with hollow tiles of a good red, constitute the grange. The rafters bend under the weight of this brick-kiln. The windows, inserted casually, without any attempt at symmetry, have enormous shutters,

painted yellow. The garden in which it stands is a Provencal garden, enclosed by low walls, built of big round pebbles set in layers, alternately sloping or upright, according to the artistic taste of the mason, which finds here its only outlet. The mud in which they are set is falling away in places.

Thanks to an iron railing at the entrance facing the road, this simple farm has a certain air of being a country-seat. The railing, long sought with tears, is so emaciated that it recalled Sister Angelique to me. A flight of stone steps leads to the door, which is protected by a pent-house roof, such as no peasant on the Loire would tolerate for his coquettish white stone house, with its blue roof, glittering in the sun. The garden and surrounding walks are horribly dusty, and the trees seem burnt up. It is easy to see that for years the Baron's life has been a mere rising up and going to bed again, day after day, without a thought beyond that of piling up coppers. He eats the same food as his two servants, a Provencal lad and the old woman who used to wait on his wife. The rooms are scantily furnished.

Nevertheless, the house of l'Estorade had done its best; the cupboards had been ransacked, and its last man beaten up for the dinner, which was served to us on old silver dishes, blackened and battered. The exile, my darling pet, is like the railing, emaciated! He is pale and silent, and bears traces of suffering. At thirty-seven he might be fifty. The once beautiful ebon locks of youth are streaked with white like a lark's wing. His fine blue eyes are cavernous; he is a little deaf, which suggests the Knight of the

Sorrowful Countenance.

Spite of all this, I have graciously consented to become Mme. de l'Estorade and to receive a dowry of two hundred and fifty thousand livres, but only on the express condition of being allowed to work my will upon the grange and make a park there. I have demanded from my father, in set terms, a grant of water, which can be brought thither from Maucombe. In a month I shall be Mme. de l'Estorade; for, dear, I have made a good impression. After the snows of Siberia a man is ready enough to see merit in those black eyes, which according to you, used to ripen fruit with a look. Louis de l'Estorade seems well content to marry the *fair Renee de Maucombe*– such is your friend's splendid title.

Whilst you are preparing to reap the joys of that many-sided existence which awaits a young lady of the Chaulieu family, and to queen it in Paris, your poor little sweetheart, Renee, that child of the desert, has fallen from the empyrean, whither together we had soared, into the vulgar realities of a life as homely as a daisy's. I have vowed to myself to comfort this young man, who has never known youth, but passed straight from his mother's arms to the embrace of war, and from the joys of his country home to the frosts and forced labor of Siberia.

Humble country pleasures will enliven the monotony of my future. It shall be my ambition to enlarge the oasis round my house, and to give it the lordly shade of fine trees. My turf, though Provencal, shall be always green. I shall carry my park up the hillside and plant on the highest point some pretty

kiosque, whence, perhaps, my eyes may catch the shimmer of the Mediterranean. Orange and lemon trees, and all choicest things that grow, shall embellish my retreat; and there will I be a mother among my children. The poetry of Nature, which nothing can destroy, shall hedge us round; and standing loyally at the post of duty, we need fear no danger. My religious feelings are shared by my father-in-law and by the Chevalier.

Ah! darling, my life unrolls itself before my eyes like one of the great highways of France, level and easy, shaded with evergreen trees. This century will not see another Bonaparte; and my children, if I have any, will not be rent from me. They will be mine to train and make men of – the joy of my life. If you also are true to your destiny, you who ought to find your mate amongst the great ones of the earth, the children of your Renee will not lack a zealous protectress.

Farewell, then, for me at least, to the romances and thrilling adventures in which we used ourselves to play the part of heroine. The whole story of my life lies before me now; its great crises will be the teething and nutrition of the young Masters de l'Estorade, and the mischief they do to my shrubs and me. To embroider their caps, to be loved and admired by a sickly man at the mouth of the Gemenos valley – there are my pleasures. Perhaps some day the country dame may go and spend a winter in Marseilles; but danger does not haunt the purlieus of a narrow provincial stage. There will be nothing to fear, not even an admiration such as could only make a woman proud. We shall take a great deal

of interest in the silkworms for whose benefit our mulberry-leaves will be sold! We shall know the strange vicissitudes of life in Provence, and the storms that may attack even a peaceful household. Quarrels will be impossible, for M. de l'Estorade has formally announced that he will leave the reins in his wife's hands; and as I shall do nothing to remind him of this wise resolve, it is likely he may persevere in it.

You, my dear Louise, will supply the romance of my life. So you must narrate to me in full all your adventures, describe your balls and parties, tell me what you wear, what flowers crown your lovely golden locks, and what are the words and manners of the men you meet. Your other self will be always there – listening, dancing, feeling her finger-tips pressed – with you. If only I could have some fun in Paris now and then, while you played the house-mother at La Crampade! such is the name of our grange. Poor M. de l'Estorade, who fancies he is marrying one woman! Will he find out there are two?

I am writing nonsense now, and as henceforth I can only be foolish by proxy, I had better stop. One kiss, then, on each cheek – my lips are still virginal, he has only dared to take my hand. Oh! our deference and propriety are quite disquieting, I assure you. There, I am off again… Good-bye, dear.

P. S.– I have just opened your third letter. My dear, I have about one thousand livres to dispose of; spend them for me on pretty things, such as we can't find here, nor even at Marseilles. While speeding on your own business, give a thought to the

recluse of La Crampade. Remember that on neither side have the heads of the family any people of taste in Paris to make their purchases. I shall reply to your letter later.

VI. DON FELIPE HENAREZ TO DON FERNAND PARIS, September

The address of this letter, my brother, will show you that the head of your house is out of reach of danger. If the massacre of our ancestors in the Court of Lions made Spaniards and Christians of us against our will, it left us a legacy of Arab cunning; and it may be that I owe my safety to the blood of the Abencerrages still flowing in my veins.

Fear made Ferdinand's acting so good, that Valdez actually believed in his protestations. But for me the poor Admiral would have been done for. Nothing, it seems, will teach the Liberals what a king is. This particular Bourbon has been long known to me; and the more His Majesty assured me of his protection, the stronger grew my suspicions. A true Spaniard has no need to repeat a promise. A flow of words is a sure sign of duplicity.

Valdez took ship on an English vessel. For myself, no sooner did I see the cause of my beloved Spain wrecked in Andalusia, than I wrote to the steward of my Sardinian estate to make arrangements for my escape. Some hardy coral fishers were despatched to wait for me at a point on the coast; and when Ferdinand urged the French to secure my person, I was already in my barony of Macumer, amidst brigands who defy all law and all avengers.

The last Hispano-Moorish family of Granada has found once

more the shelter of an African desert, and even a Saracen horse, in an estate which comes to it from Saracens. How the eyes of these brigands – who but yesterday had dreaded my authority – sparkled with savage joy and pride when they found they were protecting against the King of Spain's vendetta the Duc de Soria, their master and a Henarez – the first who had come to visit them since the time when the island belonged to the Moors. More than a score of rifles were ready to point at Ferdinand of Bourbon, son of a race which was still unknown when the Abencerrages arrived as conquerors on the banks of the Loire.

My idea had been to live on the income of these huge estates, which, unfortunately, we have so greatly neglected; but my stay there convinced me that this was impossible, and that Queverdo's reports were only too correct. The poor man had twenty-two lives at my disposal, and not a single *real*; prairies of twenty thousand acres, and not a house; virgin forests, and not a stick of furniture! A million piastres and a resident master for half a century would be necessary to make these magnificent lands pay. I must see to this.

The conquered have time during their flight to ponder their own case and that of their vanquished party. At the spectacle of my noble country, a corpse for monks to prey on, my eyes filled with tears; I read in it the presage of Spain's gloomy future.

At Marseilles I heard of Riego's end. Painfully did it come home to me that my life also would henceforth be a martyrdom, but a martyrdom protracted and unnoticed. Is existence worthy

the name, when a man can no longer die for his country or live for a woman? To love, to conquer, this twofold form of the same thought, is the law graven on our sabres, emblazoned on the vaulted roofs of our palaces, ceaselessly whispered by the water, which rises and falls in our marble fountains. But in vain does it nerve my heart; the sabre is broken, the palace in ashes, the living spring sucked up by the barren sand.

Here, then, is my last will and testament.

Don Fernand, you will understand now why I put a check upon your ardor and ordered you to remain faithful to the *rey netto*. As your brother and friend, I implore you to obey me; as your master, I command. You will go to the King and will ask from him the grant of my dignities and property, my office and titles. He will perhaps hesitate, and may treat you to some regal scowls; but you must tell him that you are loved by Marie Heredia, and that Marie can marry none but a Duc de Soria. This will make the King radiant. It is the immense fortune of the Heredia family which alone has stood between him and the accomplishment of my ruin. Your proposal will seem to him, therefore, to deprive me of a last resource, and he will gladly hand over to you my spoils.

You will then marry Marie. The secret of the mutual love against which you fought was no secret to me, and I have prepared the old Count to see you take my place. Marie and I were merely doing what was expected of us in our position and carrying out the wishes of our fathers; everything else is in your

favor. You are beautiful as a child of love, and are possessed of Marie's heart. I am an ill-favored Spanish grandee, for whom she feels an aversion to which she will not confess. Some slight reluctance there may be on the part of the noble Spanish girl on account of my misfortunes, but this you will soon overcome.

Duc de Soria, your predecessor would neither cost you a regret nor rob you of a maravedi. My mother's diamonds, which will suffice to make me independent, I will keep, because the gap caused by them in the family estate can be filled by Marie's jewels. You can send them, therefore, by my nurse, old Urraca, the only one of my servants whom I wish to retain. No one can prepare my chocolate as she does.

During our brief revolution, my life of unremitting toil was reduced to the barest necessaries, and these my salary was sufficient to provide. You will therefore find the income of the last two years in the hands of your steward. This sum is mine; but a Duc de Soria cannot marry without a large expenditure of money, therefore we will divide it. You will not refuse this wedding-present from your brigand brother. Besides, I mean to have it so.

The barony of Macumer, not being Spanish territory, remains to me. Thus I have still a country and a name, should I wish to take up a position in the world again.

Thank Heaven, this finishes our business, and the house of Soria is saved!

At the very moment when I drop into simple Baron de

Macumer, the French cannon announce the arrival of the Duc d'Angouleme. You will understand why I break off…

October.

When I arrived here I had not ten doubloons in my pocket. He would indeed be a poor sort of leader who, in the midst of calamities he has not been able to avert, has found means to feather his own nest. For the vanquished Moor there remains a horse and the desert; for the Christian foiled of his hopes, the cloister and a few gold pieces.

But my present resignation is mere weariness. I am not yet so near the monastery as to have abandoned all thoughts of life. Ozalga had given me several letters of introduction to meet all emergencies, amongst these one to a bookseller, who takes with our fellow-countrymen the place which Galignani holds with the English in Paris. This man has found eight pupils for me at three francs a lesson. I go to my pupils every alternate day, so that I have four lessons a day and earn twelve francs, which is more than I require. When Urraca comes I shall make some Spanish exile happy by passing on to him my connection.

I lodge in the Rue Hillerin-Bertin with a poor widow, who takes boarders. My room faces south and looks out on a little garden. It is perfectly quiet; I have green trees to look upon, and spend the sum of one piastre a day. I am amazed at the amount of calm, pure pleasure which I enjoy in this life, after the fashion of Dionysius at Corinth. From sunrise until ten o'clock I smoke and take my chocolate, sitting at my window and contemplating two

Spanish plants, a broom which rises out of a clump of jessamine – gold on a white ground, colors which must send a thrill through any scion of the Moors. At ten o'clock I start for my lessons, which last till four, when I return for dinner. Afterwards I read and smoke till I go to bed.

I can put up for a long time with a life like this, compounded of work and meditation, of solitude and society. Be happy, therefore, Fernand; my abdication has brought no afterthoughts; I have no regrets like Charles V., no longing to try the game again like Napoleon. Five days and nights have passed since I wrote my will; to my mind they might have been five centuries. Honor, titles, wealth, are for me as though they had never existed.

Now that the conventional barrier of respect which hedged me round has fallen, I can open my heart to you, dear boy. Though cased in the armor of gravity, this heart is full of tenderness and devotion, which have found no object, and which no woman has divined, not even she who, from her cradle, has been my destined bride. In this lies the secret of my political enthusiasm. Spain has taken the place of a mistress and received the homage of my heart. And now Spain, too, is gone! Beggared of all, I can gaze upon the ruin of what once was me and speculate over the mysteries of my being.

Why did life animate this carcass, and when will it depart? Why has that race, pre-eminent in chivalry, breathed all its primitive virtues – its tropical love, its fiery poetry – into this its last offshoot, if the seed was never to burst its rugged shell,

if no stem was to spring forth, no radiant flower scatter aloft its Eastern perfumes? Of what crime have I been guilty before my birth that I can inspire no love? Did fate from my very infancy decree that I should be stranded, a useless hulk, on some barren shore! I find in my soul the image of the deserts where my fathers ranged, illumined by a scorching sun which shrivels up all life. Proud remnant of a fallen race, vain force, love run to waste, an old man in the prime of youth, here better than elsewhere shall I await the last grace of death. Alas! under this murky sky no spark will kindle these ashes again to flame. Thus my last words may be those of Christ, *My God, Thou hast forsaken me!* Cry of agony and terror, to the core of which no mortal has ventured yet to penetrate!

You can realize now, Fernand, what a joy it is to me to live afresh in you and Marie. I shall watch you henceforth with the pride of a creator satisfied in his work. Love each other well and go on loving if you would not give me pain; any discord between you would hurt me more than it would yourselves.

Our mother had a presentiment that events would one day serve her wishes. It may be that the longing of a mother constitutes a pact between herself and God. Was she not, moreover, one of those mysterious beings who can hold converse with Heaven and bring back thence a vision of the future? How often have I not read in the lines of her forehead that she was coveting for Fernand the honors and the wealth of Felipe! When I said so to her, she would reply with tears, laying bare the wounds

of a heart, which of right was the undivided property of both her sons, but which an irresistible passion gave to you alone.

Her spirit, therefore, will hover joyfully above your heads as you bow them at the altar. My mother, have you not a caress for your Felipe now that he has yielded to your favorite even the girl whom you regretfully thrust into his arms? What I have done is pleasing to our womankind, to the dead, and to the King; it is the will of God. Make no difficulty then, Fernand; obey, and be silent.

P. S. Tell Urraca to be sure and call me nothing but M. Henarez. Don't say a word about me to Marie. You must be the one living soul to know the secrets of the last Christianized Moor, in whose veins runs the blood of a great family, which took its rise in the desert and is now about to die out in the person of a solitary exile.

Farewell.

VII. LOUISE DE CHAULIEU TO RENEE DE MAUCOMBE

WHAT! To be married so soon. But this is unheard of. At the end of a month you become engaged to a man who is a stranger to you, and about whom you know nothing. The man may be deaf – there are so many kinds of deafness! – he may be sickly, tiresome, insufferable!

Don't you see, Renee, what they want with you? You are needful for carrying on the glorious stock of the l'Estorades, that is all. You will be buried in the provinces. Are these the promises we made each other? Were I you, I would sooner set off to the Hyeres islands in a caique, on the chance of being captured by an Algerian corsair and sold to the Grand Turk. Then I should be a Sultana some day, and wouldn't I make a stir in the harem while I was young – yes, and afterwards too!

You are leaving one convent to enter another. I know you; you are a coward, and you will submit to the yoke of family life with a lamblike docility. But I am here to direct you; you must come to Paris. There we shall drive the men wild and hold a court like queens. Your husband, sweetheart, in three years from now may become a member of the Chamber. I know all about members now, and I will explain it to you. You will work that machine very well; you can live in Paris, and become there what my mother calls a woman of fashion. Oh! you needn't suppose I will leave

you in your grange!

Monday.

For a whole fortnight now, my dear, I have been living the life of society; one evening at the Italiens, another at the Grand Opera, and always a ball afterwards. Ah! society is a witching world. The music of the Opera enchants me; and whilst my soul is plunged in divine pleasure, I am the centre of admiration and the focus of all the opera-glasses. But a single glance will make the boldest youth drop his eyes.

I have seen some charming young men there; all the same, I don't care for any of them; not one has roused in me the emotion which I feel when I listen to Garcia in his splendid duet with Pellegrini in *Otello*. Heavens! how jealous Rossini must have been to express jealousy so well! What a cry in "Il mio cor si divide!" I'm speaking Greek to you, for you never heard Garcia, but then you know how jealous I am!

What a wretched dramatist Shakespeare is! Othello is in love with glory; he wins battles, he gives orders, he struts about and is all over the place while Desdemona sits at home; and Desdemona, who sees herself neglected for the silly fuss of public life, is quite meek all the time. Such a sheep deserves to be slaughtered. Let the man whom I deign to love beware how he thinks of anything but loving me!

For my part, I like those long trials of the old-fashioned chivalry. That lout of a young lord, who took offence because his sovereign-lady sent him down among the lions to fetch her glove,

was, in my opinion, very impertinent, and a fool too. Doubtless the lady had in reserve for him some exquisite flower of love, which he lost, as he well deserved – the puppy!

But here am I running on as though I had not a great piece of news to tell you. My father is certainly going to represent our master the King at Madrid. I say *our* master, for I shall make part of the embassy. My mother wishes to remain here, and my father will take me so as to have some woman with him.

My dear, this seems to you, no doubt, very simple, but there are horrors behind it, all the same: in a fortnight I have probed the secrets of the house. My mother would accompany my father to Madrid if he would take M. de Canalis as a secretary to the embassy. But the King appoints the secretaries; the Duke dare neither annoy the King, who hates to be opposed, nor vex my mother; and the wily diplomat believes he has cut the knot by leaving the Duchess here. M. de Canalis, who is the great poet of the day, is the young man who cultivates my mother's society, and who no doubt studies diplomacy with her from three o'clock to five. Diplomacy must be a fine subject, for he is as regular as a gambler on the Stock Exchange.

The Duc de Rhetore, our elder brother, solemn, cold, and whimsical, would be extinguished by his father at Madrid, therefore he remains in Paris. Miss Griffith has found out also that Alphonse is in love with a ballet-girl at the Opera. How is it possible to fall in love with legs and pirouettes? We have noticed that my brother comes to the theatre only when Tullia

dances there; he applauds the steps of this creature, and then goes out. Two ballet-girls in a family are, I fancy, more destructive than the plague. My second brother is with his regiment, and I have not yet seen him. Thus it comes about that I have to act as the Antigone of His Majesty's ambassador. Perhaps I may get married in Spain, and perhaps my father's idea is a marriage there without dowry, after the pattern of yours with this broken-down guard of honor. My father asked if I would go with him, and offered me the use of his Spanish master.

"Spain, the country for castles in the air!" I cried. "Perhaps you hope that it may mean marriages for me!"

For sole reply he honored me with a meaning look. For some days he has amused himself with teasing me at lunch; he watches me, and I dissemble. In this way I have played with him cruelly as father and ambassador *in petto*. Hadn't he taken me for a fool? He asked me what I thought of this and that young man, and of some girls whom I had met in several houses. I replied with quite inane remarks on the color of their hair, their faces, and the difference in their figures. My father seemed disappointed at my crassness, and inwardly blamed himself for having asked me.

"Still, father," I added, "don't suppose I am saying what I really think: mother made me afraid the other day that I had spoken more frankly than I ought of my impressions."

"With your family you can speak quite freely," my mother replied.

"Very well, then," I went on. "The young men I have met so far

strike me as too self-centered to excite interest in others; they are much more taken up with themselves than with their company. They can't be accused of lack of candor at any rate. They put on a certain expression to talk to us, and drop it again in a moment, apparently satisfied that we don't use our eyes. The man as he converses is the lover; silent, he is the husband. The girls, again, are so artificial that it is impossible to know what they really are, except from the way they dance; their figures and movements alone are not a sham. But what has alarmed me most in this fashionable society is its brutality. The little incidents which take place when supper is announced give one some idea – to compare small things with great – of what a popular rising might be. Courtesy is only a thin veneer on the general selfishness. I imagined society very different. Women count for little in it; that may perhaps be a survival of Bonapartist ideas."

"Armande is coming on extraordinarily," said my mother.

"Mother, did you think I should never get beyond asking to see Mme. de Stael?"

My father smiled, and rose from the table.

Saturday.

My dear, I have left one thing out. Here is the tidbit I have reserved for you. The love which we pictured must be extremely well hidden; I have seen not a trace of it. True, I have caught in drawing-rooms now and again a quick exchange of glances, but how colorless it all is! Love, as we imagined it, a world of wonders, of glorious dreams, of charming realities, of

sorrows that waken sympathy, and smiles that make sunshine, does not exist. The bewitching words, the constant interchange of happiness, the misery of absence, the flood of joy at the presence of the beloved one – where are they? What soil produces these radiant flowers of the soul? Which is wrong? We or the world?

I have already seen hundreds of men, young and middle-aged; not one has stirred the least feeling in me. No proof of admiration and devotion on their part, not even a sword drawn in my behalf, would have moved me. Love, dear, is the product of such rare conditions that it is quite possible to live a lifetime without coming across the being on whom nature has bestowed the power of making one's happiness. The thought is enough to make one shudder; for if this being is found too late, what then?

For some days I have begun to tremble when I think of the destiny of women, and to understand why so many wear a sad face beneath the flush brought by the unnatural excitement of social dissipation. Marriage is a mere matter of chance. Look at yours. A storm of wild thoughts has passed over my mind. To be loved every day the same, yet with a difference, to be loved as much after ten years of happiness as on the first day! – such a love demands years. The lover must be allowed to languish, curiosity must be piqued and satisfied, feeling roused and responded to.

Is there, then, a law for the inner fruits of the heart, as there is for the visible fruits of nature? Can joy be made lasting? In what proportion should love mingle tears with pleasures? The cold policy of the funereal, monotonous, persistent routine of the

convent seemed to me at these moments the only real life; while the wealth, the splendor, the tears, the delights, the triumph, the joy, the satisfaction, of a love equal, shared, and sanctioned, appeared a mere idle vision.

I see no room in this city for the gentle ways of love, for precious walks in shady alleys, the full moon sparkling on the water, while the suppliant pleads in vain. Rich, young, and beautiful, I have only to love, and love would become my sole occupation, my life; yet in the three months during which I have come and gone, eager and curious, nothing has appealed to me in the bright, covetous, keen eyes around me. No voice has thrilled me, no glance has made the world seem brighter.

Music alone has filled my soul, music alone has at all taken the place of our friendship. Sometimes, at night, I will linger for an hour by my window, gazing into the garden, summoning the future, with all it brings, out of the mystery which shrouds it. There are days too when, having started for a drive, I get out and walk in the Champs-Elysees, and picture to myself that the man who is to waken my slumbering soul is at hand, that he will follow and look at me. Then I meet only mountebanks, vendors of gingerbread, jugglers, passers-by hurrying to their business, or lovers who try to escape notice. These I am tempted to stop, asking them, "You who are happy, tell me what is love."

But the impulse is repressed, and I return to my carriage, swearing to die an old maid. Love is undoubtedly an incarnation, and how many conditions are needful before it can take place!

We are not certain of never quarreling with ourselves, how much less so when there are two? This is a problem which God alone can solve.

I begin to think that I shall return to the convent. If I remain in society, I shall do things which will look like follies, for I cannot possibly reconcile myself to what I see. I am perpetually wounded either in my sense of delicacy, my inner principles, or my secret thoughts.

Ah! my mother is the happiest of women, adored as she is by Canalis, her great little man. My love, do you know I am seized sometimes with a horrible craving to know what goes on between my mother and that young man? Griffith tells me she has gone through all these moods; she has longed to fly at women, whose happiness was written in their face; she has blackened their character, torn them to pieces. According to her, virtue consists in burying all these savage instincts in one's innermost heart. But what then of the heart? It becomes the sink of all that is worst in us.

It is very humiliating that no adorer has yet turned up for me. I am a marriageable girl, but I have brothers, a family, relations, who are sensitive on the point of honor. Ah! if that is what keeps men back, they are poltroons.

The part of Chimene in the *Cid* and that of the Cid delight me. What a marvelous play! Well, good-bye.

VIII. THE SAME TO THE SAME January

Our master is a poor refugee, forced to keep in hiding on account of the part he played in the revolution which the Duc d'Angouleme has just quelled – a triumph to which we owe some splendid fetes. Though a Liberal, and doubtless a man of the people, he has awakened my interest: I fancy that he must have been condemned to death. I make him talk for the purpose of getting at his secret; but he is of a truly Castilian taciturnity, proud as though he were Gonsalvo di Cordova, and nevertheless angelic in his patience and gentleness. His pride is not irritable like Miss Griffith's, it belongs to his inner nature; he forces us to civility because his own manners are so perfect, and holds us at a distance by the respect he shows us. My father declares that there is a great deal of the nobleman in Senor Henarez, whom, among ourselves, he calls in fun Don Henarez.

A few days ago I took the liberty of addressing him thus. He raised his eyes, which are generally bent on the ground, and flashed a look from them that quite abashed me; my dear, he certainly has the most beautiful eyes imaginable. I asked him if I had offended him in any way, and he said to me in his grand, rolling Spanish:

"I am here only to teach you Spanish."

I blushed and felt quite snubbed. I was on the point of making

some pert answer, when I remembered what our dear mother in God used to say to us, and I replied instead:

"It would be a kindness to tell me if you have anything to complain of."

A tremor passed through him, the blood rose in his olive cheeks; he replied in a voice of some emotion:

"Religion must have taught you, better than I can, to respect the unhappy. Had I been a *don* in Spain, and lost everything in the triumph of Ferdinand VII., your witticism would be unkind; but if I am only a poor teacher of languages, is it not a heartless satire? Neither is worthy of a young lady of rank."

I took his hand, saying:

"In the name of religion also, I beg you to pardon me."

He bowed, opened my *Don Quixote*, and sat down.

This little incident disturbed me more than the harvest of compliments, gazing and pretty speeches on my most successful evening. During the lesson I watched him attentively, which I could do the more safely, as he never looks at me.

As the result of my observations, I made out that the tutor, whom we took to be forty, is a young man, some years under thirty. My governess, to whom I had handed him over, remarked on the beauty of his black hair and of his pearly teeth. As to his eyes, they are velvet and fire; but he is plain and insignificant. Though the Spaniards have been described as not a cleanly people, this man is most carefully got up, and his hands are whiter than his face. He stoops a little, and has an extremely large,

oddly-shaped head. His ugliness, which, however, has a dash of piquancy, is aggravated by smallpox marks, which seam his face. His forehead is very prominent, and the shaggy eyebrows meet, giving a repellent air of harshness. There is a frowning, plaintive look on his face, reminding one of a sickly child, which owes its life to superhuman care, as Sister Marthe did. As my father observed, his features are a shrunken reproduction of those of Cardinal Ximenes. The natural dignity of our tutor's manners seems to disconcert the dear Duke, who doesn't like him, and is never at ease with him; he can't bear to come in contact with superiority of any kind.

As soon as my father knows enough Spanish, we start for Madrid. When Henarez returned, two days after the reproof he had given me, I remarked by way of showing my gratitude:

"I have no doubt that you left Spain in consequence of political events. If my father is sent there, as seems to be expected, we shall be in a position to help you, and might be able to obtain your pardon, in case you are under sentence."

"It is impossible for any one to help me," he replied.

"But," I said, "is that because you refuse to accept any help, or because the thing itself is impossible?"

"Both," he said, with a bow, and in a tone which forbade continuing the subject.

My father's blood chafed in my veins. I was offended by this haughty demeanor, and promptly dropped Senor Henarez.

All the same, my dear, there is something fine in this rejection

of any aid. "He would not accept even our friendship," I reflected, whilst conjugating a verb. Suddenly I stopped short and told him what was in my mind, but in Spanish. Henarez replied very politely that equality of sentiment was necessary between friends, which did not exist in this case, and therefore it was useless to consider the question.

"Do you mean equality in the amount of feeling on either side, or equality in rank?" I persisted, determined to shake him out of this provoking gravity.

He raised once more those awe-inspiring eyes, and mine fell before them. Dear, this man is a hopeless enigma. He seemed to ask whether my words meant love; and the mixture of joy, pride, and agonized doubt in his glance went to my heart. It was plain that advances, which would be taken for what they were worth in France, might land me in difficulties with a Spaniard, and I drew back into my shell, feeling not a little foolish.

The lesson over, he bowed, and his eyes were eloquent of the humble prayer: "Don't trifle with a poor wretch."

This sudden contrast to his usual grave and dignified manner made a great impression on me. It seems horrible to think and to say, but I can't help believing that there are treasures of affection in that man.

IX. MME. DE L'ESTORADE TO MLLE. DE CHAULIEU. December

All is over, my dear child, and it is Mme. de l'Estorade who writes to you. But between us there is no change; it is only a girl the less.

Don't be troubled; I did not give my consent recklessly or without much thought. My life is henceforth mapped out for me, and the freedom from all uncertainty as to the road for me to follow suits my mind and disposition. A great moral power has stepped in, and once for all swept what we call chance out of my life. We have the property to develop, our home to beautify and adorn; for me there is also a household to direct and sweeten and a husband to reconcile to life. In all probability I shall have a family to look after, children to educate.

What would you have? Everyday life cannot be cast in heroic mould. No doubt there seems, at any rate at first sight, no room left in this scheme of life for that longing after the infinite which expands the mind and soul. But what is there to prevent me from launching on that boundless sea our familiar craft? Nor must you suppose that the humble duties to which I dedicate my life give no scope for passion. To restore faith in happiness to an unfortunate, who has been the sport of adverse circumstances, is a noble work, and one which alone may suffice to relieve the monotony of my existence. I can see no opening left for suffering, and I see a great

deal of good to be done. I need not hide from you that the love I have for Louis de l'Estorade is not of the kind which makes the heart throb at the sound of a step, and thrills us at the lightest tones of a voice, or the caress of a burning glance; but, on the other hand, there is nothing in him which offends me.

What am I to do, you will ask, with that instinct for all which is great and noble, with those mental energies, which have made the link between us, and which we still possess? I admit that this thought has troubled me. But are these faculties less ours because we keep them concealed, using them only in secret for the welfare of the family, as instruments to produce the happiness of those confided to our care, to whom we are bound to give ourselves without reserve? The time during which a woman can look for admiration is short, it will soon be past; and if my life has not been a great one, it will at least have been calm, tranquil, free from shocks.

Nature has favored our sex in giving us a choice between love and motherhood. I have made mine. My children shall be my gods, and this spot of earth my Eldorado.

I can say no more to-day. Thank you much for all the things you have sent me. Give a glance at my needs on the enclosed list. I am determined to live in an atmosphere of refinement and luxury, and to take from provincial life only what makes its charm. In solitude a woman can never be vulgarized – she remains herself. I count greatly on your kindness for keeping me up to the fashion. My father-in-law is so delighted that he

can refuse me nothing, and turns his house upside down. We are getting workpeople from Paris and renovating everything.

X. MLLE. DE CHAULIEU TO MME. DE L'ESTORADE January

Oh! Renee, you have made me miserable for days! So that bewitching body, those beautiful proud features, that natural grace of manner, that soul full of priceless gifts, those eyes, where the soul can slake its thirst as at a fountain of love, that heart, with its exquisite delicacy, that breadth of mind, those rare powers – fruit of nature and of our interchange of thought – treasures whence should issue a unique satisfaction for passion and desire, hours of poetry to outweigh years, joys to make a man serve a lifetime for one gracious gesture, – all this is to be buried in the tedium of a tame, commonplace marriage, to vanish in the emptiness of an existence which you will come to loath! I hate your children before they are born. They will be monsters!

So you know all that lies before you; you have nothing left to hope, or fear, or suffer? And supposing the glorious morning rises which will bring you face to face with the man destined to rouse you from the sleep into which you are plunging!.. Ah! a cold shiver goes through me at the thought!

Well, at least you have a friend. You, it is understood, are to be the guardian angel of your valley. You will grow familiar with its beauties, will live with it in all its aspects, till the grandeur of nature, the slow growth of vegetation, compared with the lightning rapidity of thought, become like a part of yourself; and

as your eye rests on the laughing flowers, you will question your own heart. When you walk between your husband, silent and contented, in front, and your children screaming and romping behind, I can tell you beforehand what you will write to me. Your misty valley, your hills, bare or clothed with magnificent trees, your meadow, the wonder of Provence, with its fresh water dispersed in little runlets, the different effects of the atmosphere, this whole world of infinity which laps you round, and which God has made so various, will recall to you the infinite sameness of your soul's life. But at least I shall be there, my Renee, and in me you will find a heart which no social pettiness shall ever corrupt, a heart all your own.

Monday.

My dear, my Spaniard is quite adorably melancholy; there is something calm, severe, manly, and mysterious about him which interests me profoundly. His unvarying solemnity and the silence which envelops him act like an irritant on the mind. His mute dignity is worthy of a fallen king. Griffith and I spend our time over him as though he were a riddle.

How odd it is! A language-master captures my fancy as no other man has done. Yet by this time I have passed in review all the young men of family, the attaches to embassies, and the ambassadors, generals, and inferior officers, the peers of France, their sons and nephews, the court, and the town.

The coldness of the man provokes me. The sandy waste which he tries to place, and does place, between us is covered by his

deeprooted pride; he wraps himself in mystery. The hanging back is on his side, the boldness on mine. This odd situation affords me the more amusement because the whole thing is mere trifling. What is a man, a Spaniard, and a teacher of languages to me? I make no account of any man whatever, were he a king. We are worth far more, I am sure, than the greatest of them. What a slave I would have made of Napoleon! If he had loved me, shouldn't he have felt the whip!

Yesterday I aimed a shaft at M. Henarez which must have touched him to the quick. He made no reply; the lesson was over, and he bowed with a glance at me, in which I read that he would never return. This suits me capitally; there would be something ominous in starting an imitation *Nouvelle Heloise*. I have just been reading Rousseau's, and it has left me with a strong distaste for love. Passion which can argue and moralize seems to me detestable.

Clarissa also is much too pleased with herself and her long, little letter; but Richardson's work is an admirable picture, my father tells me, of English women. Rousseau's seems to me a sort of philosophical sermon, cast in the form of letters.

Love, as I conceive it, is a purely subjective poem. In all that books tell us about it, there is nothing which is not at once false and true. And so, my pretty one, as you will henceforth be an authority only on conjugal love, it seems to me my duty – in the interest, of course, of our common life – to remain unmarried, and have a grand passion, so that we may enlarge our experience.

Tell me every detail of what happens to you, especially in the first few days, with that strange animal called a husband. I promise to do the same for you if ever I am loved.

Farewell, poor martyred darling.

XI. MME. DE L'ESTORADE TO MLLE. DE CHAULIEU La Crampade

Your Spaniard and you make me shudder, my darling. I write this line to beg of you to dismiss him. All that you say of him corresponds with the character of those dangerous adventurers who, having nothing to lose, will take any risk. This man cannot be your husband, and must not be your lover. I will write to you more fully about the inner history of my married life when my heart is free from the anxiety your last letter has roused in it.

XII. MLLE. DE CHAULIEU TO MME. DE L'ESTORADE February

At nine o'clock this morning, sweetheart, my father was announced in my rooms. I was up and dressed. I found him solemnly seated beside the fire in the drawing-room, looking more thoughtful than usual. He pointed to the armchair opposite to him. Divining his meaning, I sank into it with a gravity, which so well aped his, that he could not refrain from smiling, though the smile was dashed with melancholy.

"You are quite a match for your grandmother in quick-wittedness," he said.

"Come, father, don't play the courtier here," I replied; "you want something from me."

He rose, visibly agitated, and talked to me for half an hour. This conversation, dear, really ought to be preserved. As soon as he had gone, I sat down to my table and tried to recall his words. This is the first time that I have seen my father revealing his inner thoughts.

He began by flattering me, and he did not do it badly. I was bound to be grateful to him for having understood and appreciated me.

"Armande," he said, "I was quite mistaken in you, and you have agreeably surprised me. When you arrived from the convent, I took you for an average young girl, ignorant and not

particularly intelligent, easily to be bought off with gewgaws and ornaments, and with little turn for reflection."

"You are complimentary to young girls, father."

"Oh! there is no such thing as youth nowadays," he said, with the air of a diplomat. "Your mind is amazingly open. You take everything at its proper worth; your clear-sightedness is extraordinary, there is no hoodwinking you. You pass for being blind, and all the time you have laid your hand on causes, while other people are still puzzling over effects. In short, you are a minister in petticoats, the only person here capable of understanding me. It follows, then, that if I have any sacrifice to ask from you, it is only to yourself I can turn for help in persuading you.

"I am therefore going to explain to you, quite frankly, my former plans, to which I still adhere. In order to recommend them to you, I must show that they are connected with feelings of a very high order, and I shall thus be obliged to enter into political questions of the greatest importance to the kingdom, which might be wearisome to any one less intelligent than you are. When you have heard me, I hope you will take time for consideration, six months if necessary. You are entirely your own mistress; and if you decline to make the sacrifice I ask, I shall bow to your decision and trouble you no further."

This preface, my sweetheart, made me really serious, and I said:

"Speak, father."

Here, then, is the deliverance of the statesman:

"My child, France is in a very critical position, which is understood only by the King and a few superior minds. But the King is a head without arms; the great nobles, who are in the secret of the danger, have no authority over the men whose co-operation is needful in order to bring about a happy result. These men, cast up by popular election, refuse to lend themselves as instruments. Even the able men among them carry on the work of pulling down society, instead of helping us to strengthen the edifice.

"In a word, there are only two parties – the party of Marius and the party of Sulla. I am for Sulla against Marius. This, roughly speaking, is our position. To go more into details: the Revolution is still active; it is embedded in the law and written on the soil; it fills people's minds. The danger is all the greater because the greater number of the King's counselors, seeing it destitute of armed forces and of money, believe it completely vanquished. The King is an able man, and not easily blinded; but from day to day he is won over by his brother's partisans, who want to hurry things on. He has not two years to live, and thinks more of a peaceful deathbed than of anything else.

"Shall I tell you, my child, which is the most destructive of all the consequences entailed by the Revolution? You would never guess. In Louis XVI. the Revolution has decapitated every head of a family. The family has ceased to exist; we have only individuals. In their desire to become a nation, Frenchmen have

abandoned the idea of empire; in proclaiming the equal rights of all children to their father's inheritance, they have killed the family spirit and created the State treasury. But all this has paved the way for weakened authority, for the blind force of the masses, for the decay of art and the supremacy of individual interests, and has left the road open to the foreign invader.

"We stand between two policies – either to found the State on the basis of the family, or to rest it on individual interest – in other words, between democracy and aristocracy, between free discussion and obedience, between Catholicism and religious indifference. I am among the few who are resolved to oppose what is called the people, and that in the people's true interest. It is not now a question of feudal rights, as fools are told, nor of rank; it is a question of the State and of the existence of France. The country which does not rest on the foundation of paternal authority cannot be stable. That is the foot of the ladder of responsibility and subordination, which has for its summit the King.

"The King stands for us all. To die for the King is to die for oneself, for one's family, which, like the kingdom, cannot die. All animals have certain instincts; the instinct of man is for family life. A country is strong which consists of wealthy families, every member of whom is interested in defending a common treasure; it is weak when composed of scattered individuals, to whom it matters little whether they obey seven or one, a Russian or a Corsican, so long as each keeps his own plot of land, blind, in

their wretched egotism, to the fact that the day is coming when this too will be torn from them.

"Terrible calamities are in store for us, in case our party fails. Nothing will be left but penal or fiscal laws – your money or your life. The most generous nation on the earth will have ceased to obey the call of noble instincts. Wounds past curing will have been fostered and aggravated, an all pervading jealousy being the first. Then the upper classes will be submerged; equality of desire will be taken for equality of strength; true distinction, even when proved and recognized, will be threatened by the advancing tide of middle-class prejudice. It was possible to choose one man out of a thousand, but, amongst three millions, discrimination becomes impossible, when all are moved by the same ambitions and attired in the same livery of mediocrity. No foresight will warn this victorious horde of that other terrible horde, soon to be arrayed against them in the peasant proprietors; in other words, twenty million acres of land, alive, stirring, arguing, deaf to reason, insatiable of appetite, obstructing progress, masters in their brute force – "

"But," said I, interrupting my father, "what can I do to help the State. I feel no vocation for playing Joan of Arc in the interests of the family, or for finding a martyr's block in the convent."

"You are a little hussy," cried my father. "If I speak sensibly to you, you are full of jokes; when I jest, you talk like an ambassadress."

"Love lives on contrasts," was my reply.

And he laughed till the tears stood in his eyes.

"You will reflect on what I have told you; you will do justice to the large and confiding spirit in which I have broached the matter, and possibly events may assist my plans. I know that, so far as you are concerned, they are injurious and unfair, and this is the reason why I appeal for your sanction of them less to your heart and your imagination than to your reason. I have found more judgment and commonsense in you than in any one I know – "

"You flatter yourself," I said, with a smile, "for I am every inch your child!"

"In short," he went on, "one must be logical. You can't have the end without the means, and it is our duty to set an example to others. From all this I deduce that you ought not to have money of your own till your younger brother is provided for, and I want to employ the whole of your inheritance in purchasing an estate for him to go with the title."

"But," I said, "you won't interfere with my living in my own fashion and enjoying life if I leave you my fortune?"

"Provided," he replied, "that your view of life does not conflict with the family honor, reputation, and, I may add, glory."

"Come, come," I cried, "what has become of my excellent judgment?"

"There is not in all France," he said with bitterness, "a man who would take for wife a daughter of one of our noblest families without a dowry and bestow one on her. If such a husband could

be found, it would be among the class of rich *parvenus*; on this point I belong to the eleventh century."

"And I also," I said. "But why despair? Are there no aged peers?"

"You are an apt scholar, Louise!" he exclaimed.

Then he left me, smiling and kissing my hand.

I received your letter this very morning, and it led me to contemplate that abyss into which you say that I may fall. A voice within seemed to utter the same warning. So I took my precautions. Henarez, my dear, dares to look at me, and his eyes are disquieting. They inspire me with what I can only call an unreasoning dread. Such a man ought no more to be looked at than a frog; he is ugly and fascinating.

For two days I have been hesitating whether to tell my father point-blank that I want no more Spanish lessons and have Henarez sent about his business. But in spite of all my brave resolutions, I feel that the horrible sensation which comes over me when I see that man has become necessary to me. I say to myself, "Once more, and then I will speak."

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.