HONORÉ DE BALZAC

PETTY TROUBLES OF MARRIED LIFE, COMPLETE

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Содержание

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PART FIRST

PREFACE

IN WHICH EVERY ONE WILL FIND HIS OWN IMPRESSIONS OF MARRIAGE.

A friend, in speaking to you of a young woman, says: “Good family, well bred, pretty, and three hundred thousand in her own right.” You have expressed a desire to meet this charming creature.

Usually, chance interviews are premeditated. And you speak with this object, who has now become very timid.

YOU. – “A delightful evening!”

SHE. – “Oh! yes, sir.” You are allowed to become the suitor of this young person.

THE MOTHER-IN-LAW (to the intended groom). – “You can’t imagine how susceptible the dear girl is of attachment.” Meanwhile there is a delicate pecuniary question to be discussed by the two families.

YOUR FATHER (to the mother-in-law). – “My property is valued at five hundred thousand francs, my dear madame!”

YOUR FUTURE MOTHER-IN-LAW. – “And our house, my dear sir, is on a corner lot.”

A contract follows, drawn up by two hideous notaries, a small one, and a big one.

Then the two families judge it necessary to convoy you to the civil magistrate’s and to the church, before conducting the bride to her chamber.

Then what?.. Why, then come a crowd of petty unforeseen troubles, like the following:

THE UNKINDEST CUT OF ALL

Is it a petty or a profound trouble? I knew not; it is profound for your sons-in-law or daughters-in-law, but exceedingly petty for you.

"Petty! You must be joking; why, a child costs terribly dear!" exclaims a ten-times-too-happy husband, at the baptism of his eleventh, called the little last newcomer, – a phrase with which women beguile their families.

"What trouble is this?" you ask me. Well! this is, like many petty troubles of married life, a blessing for some one.

You have, four months since, married off your daughter, whom we will call by the sweet name of CAROLINE, and whom we will make the type of all wives. Caroline is, like all other young ladies, very charming, and you have found for her a husband who is either a lawyer, a captain, an engineer, a judge, or perhaps a young viscount. But he is more likely to be what sensible families must seek, – the ideal of their desires – the only son of a rich landed proprietor. (See the *Preface*.)

This phoenix we will call ADOLPHE, whatever may be his position in the world, his age, and the color of his hair.

The lawyer, the captain, the engineer, the judge, in short, the son-in-law, Adolphe, and his family, have seen in Miss Caroline:

I. – Miss Caroline;

II. – The only daughter of your wife and you.

Here, as in the Chamber of Deputies, we are compelled to call for a division of the house:

1. – As to your wife.

Your wife is to inherit the property of a maternal uncle, a gouty old fellow whom she humors, nurses, caresses, and muffles up; to say nothing of her father's fortune. Caroline has always adored her uncle, – her uncle who trotted her on his knee, her uncle who – her uncle whom – her uncle, in short, – whose property is estimated at two hundred thousand.

Further, your wife is well preserved, though her age has been the subject of mature reflection on the part of your son-in-law's grandparents and other ancestors. After many skirmishes between the mothers-in-law, they have at last confided to each other the little secrets peculiar to women of ripe years.

"How is it with you, my dear madame?"

"I, thank heaven, have passed the period; and you?"

"I really hope I have, too!" says your wife.

"You can marry Caroline," says Adolphe's mother to your future son-in-law; "Caroline will be the sole heiress of her mother, of her uncle, and her grandfather."

2. – As to yourself.

You are also the heir of your maternal grandfather, a good old man whose possessions will surely fall to you, for he has grown imbecile, and is therefore incapable of making a will.

You are an amiable man, but you have been very dissipated in your youth. Besides, you are fifty-nine years old, and your head

is bald, resembling a bare knee in the middle of a gray wig.

III. – A dowry of three hundred thousand.

IV. – Caroline's only sister, a little dunce of twelve, a sickly child, who bids fair to fill an early grave.

V. – Your own fortune, father-in-law (in certain kinds of society they say *papa father-in-law*) yielding an income of twenty thousand, and which will soon be increased by an inheritance.

VI. – Your wife's fortune, which will be increased by two inheritances – from her uncle and her grandfather. In all, thus:

Three inheritances and interest,	750,000
Your fortune,	250,000
Your wife's fortune,	250,000
Total,	1,250,000

which surely cannot take wing!

Such is the autopsy of all those brilliant marriages that conduct their processions of dancers and eaters, in white gloves, flowering at the button-hole, with bouquets of orange flowers, furbelows, veils, coaches and coach-drivers, from the magistrate's to the church, from the church to the banquet, from the banquet to the dance, from the dance to the nuptial chamber, to the music of the orchestra and the accompaniment of the immemorial pleasantries uttered by relics of dandies, for are there not, here and there in society, relics of dandies, as there are relics of

English horses? To be sure, and such is the osteology of the most amorous intent.

The majority of the relatives have had a word to say about this marriage.

Those on the side of the bridegroom:

"Adolphe has made a good thing of it."

Those on the side of the bride:

"Caroline has made a splendid match. Adolphe is an only son, and will have an income of sixty thousand, *some day or other*!"

Some time afterwards, the happy judge, the happy engineer, the happy captain, the happy lawyer, the happy only son of a rich landed proprietor, in short Adolphe, comes to dine with you, accompanied by his family.

Your daughter Caroline is exceedingly proud of the somewhat rounded form of her waist. All women display an innocent artfulness, the first time they find themselves facing motherhood. Like a soldier who makes a brilliant toilet for his first battle, they love to play the pale, the suffering; they rise in a certain manner, and walk with the prettiest affectation. While yet flowers, they bear a fruit; they enjoy their maternity by anticipation. All those little ways are exceedingly charming – the first time.

Your wife, now the mother-in-law of Adolphe, subjects herself to the pressure of tight corsets. When her daughter laughs, she weeps; when Caroline wishes her happiness public, she tries to conceal hers. After dinner, the discerning eye of the co-mother-in-law divines the work of darkness.

Your wife also is an expectant mother! The news spreads like lightning, and your oldest college friend says to you laughingly: "Ah! so you are trying to increase the population again!"

You have some hope in a consultation that is to take place tomorrow. You, kind-hearted man that you are, you turn red, you hope it is merely the dropsy; but the doctors confirm the arrival of a *little last one*!

In such circumstances some timorous husbands go to the country or make a journey to Italy. In short, a strange confusion reigns in your household; both you and your wife are in a false position.

"Why, you old rogue, you, you ought to be ashamed of yourself!" says a friend to you on the Boulevard.

"Well! do as much if you can," is your angry retort.

"It's as bad as being robbed on the highway!" says your son-in-law's family. "Robbed on the highway" is a flattering expression for the mother-in-law.

The family hopes that the child which divides the expected fortune in three parts, will be, like all old men's children, scrofulous, feeble, an abortion. Will it be likely to live? The family awaits the delivery of your wife with an anxiety like that which agitated the house of Orleans during the confinement of the Duchess de Berri: a second son would secure the throne to the younger branch without the onerous conditions of July; Henry V would easily seize the crown. From that moment the house of Orleans was obliged to play double or quits: the event gave them

the game.

The mother and the daughter are put to bed nine days apart.

Caroline's first child is a pale, cadaverous little girl that will not live.

Her mother's last child is a splendid boy, weighing twelve pounds, with two teeth and luxuriant hair.

For sixteen years you have desired a son. This conjugal annoyance is the only one that makes you beside yourself with joy. For your rejuvenated wife has attained what must be called the *Indian Summer* of women; she nurses, she has a full breast of milk! Her complexion is fresh, her color is pure pink and white. In her forty-second year, she affects the young woman, buys little baby stockings, walks about followed by a nurse, embroiders caps and tries on the cunningest headdresses. Alexandrine has resolved to instruct her daughter by her example; she is delightful and happy. And yet this is a trouble, a petty one for you, a serious one for your son-in-law. This annoyance is of the two sexes, it is common to you and your wife. In short, in this instance, your paternity renders you all the more proud from the fact that it is incontestable, my dear sir!

REVELATIONS

Generally speaking, a young woman does not exhibit her true character till she has been married two or three years. She hides her faults, without intending it, in the midst of her first joys, of her first parties of pleasure. She goes into society to dance, she visits her relatives to show you off, she journeys on with an escort of love's first wiles; she is gradually transformed from girlhood to womanhood. Then she becomes mother and nurse, and in this situation, full of charming pangs, that leaves neither a word nor a moment for observation, such are its multiplied cares, it is impossible to judge of a woman. You require, then, three or four years of intimate life before you discover an exceedingly melancholy fact, one that gives you cause for constant terror.

Your wife, the young lady in whom the first pleasures of life and love supplied the place of grace and wit, so arch, so animated, so vivacious, whose least movements spoke with delicious eloquence, has cast off, slowly, one by one, her natural artifices. At last you perceive the truth! You try to disbelieve it, you think yourself deceived; but no: Caroline lacks intellect, she is dull, she can neither joke nor reason, sometimes she has little tact. You are frightened. You find yourself forever obliged to lead this darling through the thorny paths, where you must perforce leave your self-esteem in tatters.

You have already been annoyed several times by replies that,

in society, were politely received: people have held their tongues instead of smiling; but you were certain that after your departure the women looked at each other and said: “Did you hear Madame Adolphe?”

“Your little woman, she is – ”

“A regular cabbage-head.”

“How could he, who is certainly a man of sense, choose – ?”

“He should educate, teach his wife, or make her hold her tongue.”

AXIOMS

Axiom. – In our system of civilization a man is entirely responsible for his wife.

Axiom. – The husband does not mould the wife.

Caroline has one day obstinately maintained, at the house of Madame de Fischtaminel, a very distinguished lady, that her little last one resembled neither its father nor its mother, but looked like a certain friend of the family. She perhaps enlightens Monsieur de Fischtaminel, and overthrows the labors of three years, by tearing down the scaffolding of Madame de Fischtaminel's assertions, who, after this visit, will treat you will coolness, suspecting, as she does, that you have been making indiscreet remarks to your wife.

On another occasion, Caroline, after having conversed with a writer about his works, counsels the poet, who is already a prolific author, to try to write something likely to live. Sometimes she complains of the slow attendance at the tables of people who have but one servant and have put themselves to great trouble to receive her. Sometimes she speaks ill of widows who marry again, before Madame Deschars who has married a third time, and on this occasion, an ex-notary, Nicolas-Jean-Jerome-Nepomucene-Ange-Marie-Victor-Joseph Deschars, a friend of your father's.

In short, you are no longer yourself when you are in society

with your wife. Like a man who is riding a skittish horse and glares straight between the beast's two ears, you are absorbed by the attention with which you listen to your Caroline.

In order to compensate herself for the silence to which young ladies are condemned, Caroline talks; or rather babbles. She wants to make a sensation, and she does make a sensation; nothing stops her. She addresses the most eminent men, the most celebrated women. She introduces herself, and puts you on the rack. Going into society is going to the stake.

She begins to think you are cross-grained, moody. The fact is, you are watching her, that's all! In short, you keep her within a small circle of friends, for she has already embroiled you with people on whom your interests depended.

How many times have you recoiled from the necessity of a remonstrance, in the morning, on awakening, when you had put her in a good humor for listening! A woman rarely listens. How many times have you recoiled from the burthen of your imperious obligations!

The conclusion of your ministerial communication can be no other than: "You have no sense." You foresee the effect of your first lesson. Caroline will say to herself: "Ah I have no sense! Haven't I though?"

No woman ever takes this in good part. Both of you must draw the sword and throw away the scabbard. Six weeks after, Caroline may prove to you that she has quite sense enough to *minotaurize* you without your perceiving it.

Frightened at such a prospect, you make use of all the eloquent phrases to gild this pill. In short, you find the means of flattering Caroline's various self-loves, for:

Axiom. – A married woman has several self-loves.

You say that you are her best friend, the only one well situated to enlighten her; the more careful you are, the more watchful and puzzled she is. At this moment she has plenty of sense.

You ask your dear Caroline, whose waist you clasp, how she, who is so brilliant when alone with you, who retorts so charmingly (you remind her of sallies that she has never made, which you put in her mouth, and, which she smilingly accepts), how she can say this, that, and the other, in society. She is, doubtless, like many ladies, timid in company.

"I know," you say, "many very distinguished men who are just the same."

You cite the case of some who are admirable tea-party oracles, but who cannot utter half a dozen sentences in the tribune. Caroline should keep watch over herself; you vaunt silence as the surest method of being witty. In society, a good listener is highly prized.

You have broken the ice, though you have not even scratched its glossy surface: you have placed your hand upon the croup of the most ferocious and savage, the most wakeful and clear-sighted, the most restless, the swiftest, the most jealous, the most ardent and violent, the simplest and most elegant, the most unreasonable, the most watchful chimera of the moral world –

THE VANITY OF A WOMAN!

Caroline clasps you in her arms with a saintly embrace, thanks you for your advice, and loves you the more for it; she wishes to be beholden to you for everything, even for her intellect; she may be a dunce, but, what is better than saying fine things, she knows how to do them! But she desires also to be your pride! It is not a question of taste in dress, of elegance and beauty; she wishes to make you proud of her intelligence. You are the luckiest of men in having successfully managed to escape from this first dangerous pass in conjugal life.

"We are going this evening to Madame Deschars', where they never know what to do to amuse themselves; they play all sorts of forfeit games on account of a troop of young women and girls there; you shall see!" she says.

You are so happy at this turn of affairs, that you hum airs and carelessly chew bits of straw and thread, while still in your shirt and drawers. You are like a hare frisking on a flowering dew-perfumed meadow. You leave off your morning gown till the last extremity, when breakfast is on the table. During the day, if you meet a friend and he happens to speak of women, you defend them; you consider women charming, delicious, there is something divine about them.

How often are our opinions dictated to us by the unknown events of our life!

You take your wife to Madame Deschars'. Madame Deschars is a mother and is exceedingly devout. You never see any

newspapers at her house: she keeps watch over her daughters by three different husbands, and keeps them all the more closely from the fact that she herself has, it is said, some little things to reproach herself with during the career of her two former lords. At her house, no one dares risk a jest. Everything there is white and pink and perfumed with sanctity, as at the houses of widows who are approaching the confines of their third youth. It seems as if every day were Sunday there.

You, a young husband, join the juvenile society of young women and girls, misses and young people, in the chamber of Madame Deschars. The serious people, politicians, whist-players, and tea-drinkers, are in the parlor.

In Madame Deschars' room they are playing a game which consists in hitting upon words with several meanings, to fit the answers that each player is to make to the following questions:

How do you like it?

What do you do with it?

Where do you put it?

Your turn comes to guess the word, you go into the parlor, take part in a discussion, and return at the call of a smiling young lady. They have selected a word that may be applied to the most enigmatical replies. Everybody knows that, in order to puzzle the strongest heads, the best way is to choose a very ordinary word, and to invent phrases that will send the parlor Oedipus a thousand leagues from each of his previous thoughts.

This game is a poor substitute for lansquenet or dice, but it is

not very expensive.

The word MAL has been made the Sphinx of this particular occasion. Every one has determined to put you off the scent. The word, among other acceptations, has that of *mal* [evil], a substantive that signifies, in aesthetics, the opposite of good; of *mal* [pain, disease, complaint], a substantive that enters into a thousand pathological expressions; then *malle* [a mail-bag], and finally *malle* [a trunk], that box of various forms, covered with all kinds of skin, made of every sort of leather, with handles, that journeys rapidly, for it serves to carry travelling effects in, as a man of Delille's school would say.

For you, a man of some sharpness, the Sphinx displays his wiles; he spreads his wings and folds them up again; he shows you his lion's paws, his woman's neck, his horse's loins, and his intellectual head; he shakes his sacred fillets, he strikes an attitude and runs away, he comes and goes, and sweeps the place with his terrible equine tail; he shows his shining claws, and draws them in; he smiles, frisks, and murmurs. He puts on the looks of a joyous child and those of a matron; he is, above all, there to make fun of you.

You ask the group collectively, "How do you like it?"

"I like it for love's sake," says one.

"I like it regular," says another.

"I like it with a long mane."

"I like it with a spring lock."

"I like it unmasked."

"I like it on horseback."

"I like it as coming from God," says Madame Deschars.

"How do you like it?" you say to your wife.

"I like it legitimate."

This response of your wife is not understood, and sends you a journey into the constellated fields of the infinite, where the mind, dazzled by the multitude of creations, finds it impossible to make a choice.

"Where do you put it?"

"In a carriage."

"In a garret."

"In a steamboat."

"In the closet."

"On a cart."

"In prison."

"In the ears."

"In a shop."

Your wife says to you last of all: "In bed."

You were on the point of guessing it, but you know no word that fits this answer, Madame Deschars not being likely to have allowed anything improper.

"What do you do with it?"

"I make it my sole happiness," says your wife, after the answers of all the rest, who have sent you spinning through a whole world of linguistic suppositions.

This response strikes everybody, and you especially; so you

persist in seeking the meaning of it. You think of the bottle of hot water that your wife has put to her feet when it is cold, – of the warming pan, above all! Now of her night-cap, – of her handkerchief, – of her curling paper, – of the hem of her chemise, – of her embroidery, – of her flannel jacket, – of your bandanna, – of the pillow.

In short, as the greatest pleasure of the respondents is to see their Oedipus mystified, as each word guessed by you throws them into fits of laughter, superior men, perceiving no word that will fit all the explanations, will sooner give it up than make three unsuccessful attempts. According to the law of this innocent game you are condemned to return to the parlor after leaving a forfeit; but you are so exceedingly puzzled by your wife's answers, that you ask what the word was.

"Mal," exclaims a young miss.

You comprehend everything but your wife's replies: she has not played the game. Neither Madame Deschars, nor any one of the young women understand. She has cheated. You revolt, there is an insurrection among the girls and young women. They seek and are puzzled. You want an explanation, and every one participates in your desire.

"In what sense did you understand the word, my dear?" you say to Caroline.

"Why, *male*!" [male.]

Madame Deschars bites her lips and manifests the greatest displeasure; the young women blush and drop their eyes; the little

girls open theirs, nudge each other and prick up their ears. Your feet are glued to the carpet, and you have so much salt in your throat that you believe in a repetition of the event which delivered Lot from his wife.

You see an infernal life before you; society is out of the question.

To remain at home with this triumphant stupidity is equivalent to condemnation to the state's prison.

Axiom. – Moral tortures exceed physical sufferings by all the difference which exists between the soul and the body.

THE ATTENTIONS OF A WIFE

Among the keenest pleasures of bachelor life, every man reckons the independence of his getting up. The fancies of the morning compensate for the glooms of evening. A bachelor turns over and over in his bed: he is free to gape loud enough to justify apprehensions of murder, and to scream at a pitch authorizing the suspicion of joys untold. He can forget his oaths of the day before, let the fire burn upon the hearth and the candle sink to its socket, – in short, go to sleep again in spite of pressing work. He can curse the expectant boots which stand holding their black mouths open at him and pricking up their ears. He can pretend not to see the steel hooks which glitter in a sunbeam which has stolen through the curtains, can disregard the sonorous summons of the obstinate clock, can bury himself in a soft place, saying: "Yes, I was in a hurry, yesterday, but am so no longer to-day. Yesterday was a dotard. To-day is a sage: between them stands the night which brings wisdom, the night which gives light. I ought to go, I ought to do it, I promised I would – I am weak, I know. But how can I resist the downy creases of my bed? My feet feel flaccid, I think I must be sick, I am too happy just here. I long to see the ethereal horizon of my dreams again, those women without claws, those winged beings and their obliging ways. In short, I have found the grain of salt to put upon the tail of that bird that was always flying away: the coquette's feet are caught

in the line. I have her now – ”

Your servant, meantime, reads your newspaper, half-opens your letters, and leaves you to yourself. And you go to sleep again, lulled by the rumbling of the morning wagons. Those terrible, vexatious, quivering teams, laden with meat, those trucks with big tin teats bursting with milk, though they make a clatter most infernal and even crush the paving stones, seem to you to glide over cotton, and vaguely remind you of the orchestra of Napoleon Musard. Though your house trembles in all its timbers and shakes upon its keel, you think yourself a sailor cradled by a zephyr.

You alone have the right to bring these joys to an end by throwing away your night-cap as you twist up your napkin after dinner, and by sitting up in bed. Then you take yourself to task with such reproaches as these: “Ah, mercy on me, I must get up!” “Early to bed and early to rise, makes a man healthy – !” “Get up, lazy bones!”

All this time you remain perfectly tranquil. You look round your chamber, you collect your wits together. Finally, you emerge from the bed, spontaneously! Courageously! of your own accord! You go to the fireplace, you consult the most obliging of timepieces, you utter hopeful sentences thus couched: “Whatshisname is a lazy creature, I guess I shall find him in. I’ll run. I’ll catch him if he’s gone. He’s sure to wait for me. There is a quarter of an hour’s grace in all appointments, even between debtor and creditor.”

You put on your boots with fury, you dress yourself as if you were afraid of being caught half-dressed, you have the delight of being in a hurry, you call your buttons into action, you finally go out like a conqueror, whistling, brandishing your cane, pricking up your ears and breaking into a canter.

After all, you say to yourself, you are responsible to no one, you are your own master!

But you, poor married man, you were stupid enough to say to your wife, "To-morrow, my dear" (sometimes she knows it two days beforehand), "I have got to get up early." Unfortunate Adolphe, you have especially proved the importance of this appointment: "It's to – and to – and above all to – in short to – "

Two hours before dawn, Caroline wakes you up gently and says to you softly: "Adolphy dear, Adolphy love!"

"What's the matter? Fire?"

"No, go to sleep again, I've made a mistake; but the hour hand was on it, any way! It's only four, you can sleep two hours more."

Is not telling a man, "You've only got two hours to sleep," the same thing, on a small scale, as saying to a criminal, "It's five in the morning, the ceremony will be performed at half-past seven"? Such sleep is troubled by an idea dressed in grey and furnished with wings, which comes and flaps, like a bat, upon the windows of your brain.

A woman in a case like this is as exact as a devil coming to claim a soul he has purchased. When the clock strikes five, your wife's voice, too well known, alas! resounds in your ear;

she accompanies the stroke, and says with an atrocious calmness, "Adolphe, it's five o'clock, get up, dear."

"Ye-e-e-s, ah-h-h-h!"

"Adolphe, you'll be late for your business, you said so yourself."

"Ah-h-h-h, ye-e-e-e-s." You turn over in despair.

"Come, come, love. I got everything ready last night; now you must, my dear; do you want to miss him? There, up, I say; it's broad daylight."

Caroline throws off the blankets and gets up: she wants to show you that *she* can rise without making a fuss. She opens the blinds, she lets in the sun, the morning air, the noise of the street, and then comes back.

"Why, Adolphe, you *must* get up! Who ever would have supposed you had no energy! But it's just like you men! I am only a poor, weak woman, but when I say a thing, I do it."

You get up grumbling, execrating the sacrament of marriage. There is not the slightest merit in your heroism; it wasn't you, but your wife, that got up. Caroline gets you everything you want with provoking promptitude; she foresees everything, she gives you a muffler in winter, a blue-striped cambric shirt in summer, she treats you like a child; you are still asleep, she dresses you and has all the trouble. She finally thrusts you out of doors. Without her nothing would go straight! She calls you back to give you a paper, a pocketbook, you had forgotten. You don't think of anything, she thinks of everything!

You return five hours afterwards to breakfast, between eleven and noon. The chambermaid is at the door, or on the stairs, or on the landing, talking with somebody's valet: she runs in on hearing or seeing you. Your servant is laying the cloth in a most leisurely style, stopping to look out of the window or to lounge, and coming and going like a person who knows he has plenty of time. You ask for your wife, supposing that she is up and dressed.

"Madame is still in bed," says the maid.

You find your wife languid, lazy, tired and asleep. She had been awake all night to wake you in the morning, so she went to bed again, and is quite hungry now.

You are the cause of all these disarrangements. If breakfast is not ready, she says it's because you went out. If she is not dressed, and if everything is in disorder, it's all your fault. For everything which goes awry she has this answer: "Well, you would get up so early!" "He would get up so early!" is the universal reason. She makes you go to bed early, because you got up early. She can do nothing all day, because you would get up so unusually early.

Eighteen months afterwards, she still maintains, "Without me, you would never get up!" To her friends she says, "My husband get up! If it weren't for me, he never *would* get up!"

To this a man whose hair is beginning to whiten, replies, "A graceful compliment to you, madame!" This slightly indelicate comment puts an end to her boasts.

This petty trouble, repeated several times, teaches you to live alone in the bosom of your family, not to tell all you know, and

to have no confidant but yourself: and it often seems to you a question whether the inconveniences of the married state do not exceed its advantages.

SMALL VEXATIONS

You have made a transition from the frolicsome allegretto of the bachelor to the heavy andante of the father of a family.

Instead of that fine English steed prancing and snorting between the polished shafts of a tilbury as light as your own heart, and moving his glistening croup under the quadruple network of the reins and ribbons that you so skillfully manage with what grace and elegance the Champs Elysees can bear witness – you drive a good solid Norman horse with a steady, family gait.

You have learned what paternal patience is, and you let no opportunity slip of proving it. Your countenance, therefore, is serious.

By your side is a domestic, evidently for two purposes like the carriage. The vehicle is four-wheeled and hung upon English springs: it is corpulent and resembles a Rouen scow: it has glass windows, and an infinity of economical arrangements. It is a barouche in fine weather, and a brougham when it rains. It is apparently light, but, when six persons are in it, it is heavy and tires out your only horse.

On the back seat, spread out like flowers, is your young wife in full bloom, with her mother, a big marshmallow with a great many leaves. These two flowers of the female species twitteringly talk of you, though the noise of the wheels and your attention to the horse, joined to your fatherly caution, prevent you from

hearing what they say.

On the front seat, there is a nice tidy nurse holding a little girl in her lap: by her side is a boy in a red plaited shirt, who is continually leaning out of the carriage and climbing upon the cushions, and who has a thousand times drawn down upon himself those declarations of every mother, which he knows to be threats and nothing else: "Be a good boy, Adolphe, or else – " "I declare I'll never bring you again, so there!"

His mamma is secretly tired to death of this noisy little boy: he has provoked her twenty times, and twenty times the face of the little girl asleep has calmed her.

"I am his mother," she says to herself. And so she finally manages to keep her little Adolphe quiet.

You have put your triumphant idea of taking your family to ride into execution. You left your home in the morning, all the opposite neighbors having come to their windows, envying you the privilege which your means give you of going to the country and coming back again without undergoing the miseries of a public conveyance. So you have dragged your unfortunate Norman horse through Paris to Vincennes, from Vincennes to Saint Maur, from Saint Maur to Charenton, from Charenton opposite some island or other which struck your wife and mother-in-law as being prettier than all the landscapes through which you had driven them.

"Let's go to Maison's!" somebody exclaims.

So you go to Maison's, near Alfort. You come home by the left

bank of the Seine, in the midst of a cloud of very black Olympian dust. The horse drags your family wearily along. But alas! your pride has fled, and you look without emotion upon his sunken flanks, and upon two bones which stick out on each side of his belly. His coat is roughened by the sweat which has repeatedly come out and dried upon him, and which, no less than the dust, has made him gummy, sticky and shaggy. The horse looks like a wrathy porcupine: you are afraid he will be foundered, and you caress him with the whip-lash in a melancholy way that he perfectly understands, for he moves his head about like an omnibus horse, tired of his deplorable existence.

You think a good deal of this horse; your consider him an excellent one and he cost you twelve hundred francs. When a man has the honor of being the father of a family, he thinks as much of twelve hundred francs as you think of this horse. You see at once the frightful amount of your extra expenses, in case Coco should have to lie by. For two days you will have to take hackney coaches to go to your business. You wife will pout if she can't go out: but she will go out, and take a carriage. The horse will cause the purchase of numerous extras, which you will find in your coachman's bill, – your only coachman, a model coachman, whom you watch as you do a model anybody.

To these thoughts you give expression in the gentle movement of the whip as it falls upon the animal's ribs, up to his knees in the black dust which lines the road in front of La Verrerie.

At this moment, little Adolphe, who doesn't know what to do

in this rolling box, has sadly twisted himself up into a corner, and his grandmother anxiously asks him, "What is the matter?"

"I'm hungry," says the child.

"He's hungry," says the mother to her daughter.

"And why shouldn't he be hungry? It is half-past five, we are not at the barrier, and we started at two!"

"Your husband might have treated us to dinner in the country."

"He'd rather make his horse go a couple of leagues further, and get back to the house."

"The cook might have had the day to herself. But Adolphe is right, after all: it's cheaper to dine at home," adds the mother-in-law.

"Adolphe," exclaims your wife, stimulated by the word "cheaper," "we go so slow that I shall be seasick, and you keep driving right in this nasty dust. What are you thinking of? My gown and hat will be ruined!"

"Would you rather ruin the horse?" you ask, with the air of a man who can't be answered.

"Oh, no matter for your horse; just think of your son who is dying of hunger: he hasn't tasted a thing for seven hours. Whip up your old horse! One would really think you cared more for your nag than for your child!"

You dare not give your horse a single crack with the whip, for he might still have vigor enough left to break into a gallop and run away.

"No, Adolphe tries to vex me, he's going slower," says the

young wife to her mother. “My dear, go as slow as you like. But I know you’ll say I am extravagant when you see me buying another hat.”

Upon this you utter a series of remarks which are lost in the racket made by the wheels.

“What’s the use of replying with reasons that haven’t got an ounce of common-sense?” cries Caroline.

You talk, turning your face to the carriage and then turning back to the horse, to avoid an accident.

“That’s right, run against somebody and tip us over, do, you’ll be rid of us. Adolphe, your son is dying of hunger. See how pale he is!”

“But Caroline,” puts in the mother-in-law, “he’s doing the best he can.”

Nothing annoys you so much as to have your mother-in-law take your part. She is a hypocrite and is delighted to see you quarreling with her daughter. Gently and with infinite precaution she throws oil on the fire.

When you arrive at the barrier, your wife is mute. She says not a word, she sits with her arms crossed, and will not look at you. You have neither soul, heart, nor sentiment. No one but you could have invented such a party of pleasure. If you are unfortunate enough to remind Caroline that it was she who insisted on the excursion, that morning, for her children’s sake, and in behalf of her milk – she nurses the baby – you will be overwhelmed by an avalanche of frigid and stinging reproaches.

You bear it all so as "not to turn the milk of a nursing mother, for whose sake you must overlook some little things," so your atrocious mother-in-law whispers in your ear.

All the furies of Orestes are rankling in your heart.

In reply to the sacramental words pronounced by the officer of the customs, "Have you anything to declare?" your wife says, "I declare a great deal of ill-humor and dust."

She laughs, the officer laughs, and you feel a desire to tip your family into the Seine.

Unluckily for you, you suddenly remember the joyous and perverse young woman who wore a pink bonnet and who made merry in your tilbury six years before, as you passed this spot on your way to the chop-house on the river's bank. What a reminiscence! Was Madame Schontz anxious about babies, about her bonnet, the lace of which was torn to pieces in the bushes? No, she had no care for anything whatever, not even for her dignity, for she shocked the rustic police of Vincennes by the somewhat daring freedom of her style of dancing.

You return home, you have frantically hurried your Norman horse, and have neither prevented an indisposition of the animal, nor an indisposition of your wife.

That evening, Caroline has very little milk. If the baby cries and if your head is split in consequence, it is all your fault, as you preferred the health of your horse to that of your son who was dying of hunger, and of your daughter whose supper has disappeared in a discussion in which your wife was right, *as she*

always is.

"Well, well," she says, "men are not mothers!"

As you leave the chamber, you hear your mother-in-law consoling her daughter by these terrible words: "Come, be calm, Caroline: that's the way with them all: they are a selfish lot: your father was just like that!"

THE ULTIMATUM

It is eight o'clock; you make your appearance in the bedroom of your wife. There is a brilliant light. The chambermaid and the cook hover lightly about. The furniture is covered with dresses and flowers tried on and laid aside.

The hair-dresser is there, an artist par excellence, a sovereign authority, at once nobody and everything. You hear the other domestics going and coming: orders are given and recalled, errands are well or ill performed. The disorder is at its height. This chamber is a studio from whence to issue a parlor Venus.

Your wife desires to be the fairest at the ball which you are to attend. Is it still for your sake, or only for herself, or is it for somebody else? Serious questions these.

The idea does not even occur to you.

You are squeezed, hampered, harnessed in your ball accoutrement: you count your steps as you walk, you look around, you observe, you contemplate talking business on neutral ground with a stock-broker, a notary or a banker, to whom you would not like to give an advantage over you by calling at their house.

A singular fact which all have probably observed, but the causes of which can hardly be determined, is the peculiar repugnance which men dressed and ready to go to a party have for discussions or to answer questions. At the moment of starting,

there are few husbands who are not taciturn and profoundly absorbed in reflections which vary with their characters. Those who reply give curt and peremptory answers.

But women, at this time, are exceedingly aggravating. They consult you, they ask your advice upon the best way of concealing the stem of a rose, of giving a graceful fall to a bunch of briar, or a happy turn to a scarf. As a neat English expression has it, "they fish for compliments," and sometimes for better than compliments.

A boy just out of school would discern the motive concealed behind the willows of these pretexts: but your wife is so well known to you, and you have so often playfully joked upon her moral and physical perfections, that you are harsh enough to give your opinion briefly and conscientiously: you thus force Caroline to put that decisive question, so cruel to women, even those who have been married twenty years:

"So I don't suit you then?"

Drawn upon the true ground by this inquiry, you bestow upon her such little compliments as you can spare and which are, as it were, the small change, the sous, the liards of your purse.

"The best gown you ever wore!" "I never saw you so well dressed." "Blue, pink, yellow, cherry [take your pick], becomes you charmingly." "Your head-dress is quite original." "As you go in, every one will admire you." "You will not only be the prettiest, but the best dressed." "They'll all be mad not to have your taste." "Beauty is a natural gift: taste is like intelligence, a thing that we

may be proud of."

"Do you think so? Are you in earnest, Adolphe?"

Your wife is coquetting with you. She chooses this moment to force from you your pretended opinion of one and another of her friends, and to insinuate the price of the articles of her dress you so much admire. Nothing is too dear to please you. She sends the cook out of the room.

"Let's go," you say.

She sends the chambermaid out after having dismissed the hair-dresser, and begins to turn round and round before her glass, showing off to you her most glorious beauties.

"Let's go," you say.

"You are in a hurry," she returns.

And she goes on exhibiting herself with all her little airs, setting herself off like a fine peach magnificently exhibited in a fruiterer's window. But since you have dined rather heartily, you kiss her upon the forehead merely, not feeling able to countersign your opinions. Caroline becomes serious.

The carriage waits. All the household looks at Caroline as she goes out: she is the masterpiece to which all have contributed, and everybody admires the common work.

Your wife departs highly satisfied with herself, but a good deal displeased with you. She proceeds loftily to the ball, just as a picture, caressed by the painter and minutely retouched in the studio, is sent to the annual exhibition in the vast bazaar of the Louvre. Your wife, alas! sees fifty women handsomer

than herself: they have invented dresses of the most extravagant price, and more or less original: and that which happens at the Louvre to the masterpiece, happens to the object of feminine labor: your wife's dress seems pale by the side of another very much like it, but the livelier color of which crushes it. Caroline is nobody, and is hardly noticed. When there are sixty handsome women in a room, the sentiment of beauty is lost, beauty is no longer appreciated. Your wife becomes a very ordinary affair. The petty stratagem of her smile, made perfect by practice, has no meaning in the midst of countenances of noble expression, of self-possessed women of lofty presence. She is completely put down, and no one asks her to dance. She tries to force an expression of pretended satisfaction, but, as she is not satisfied, she hears people say, "Madame Adolphe is looking very ill to-night." Women hypocritically ask her if she is indisposed and "Why don't you dance?" They have a whole catalogue of malicious remarks veneered with sympathy and electroplated with charity, enough to damn a saint, to make a monkey serious, and to give the devil the shudders.

You, who are innocently playing cards or walking backwards and forwards, and so have not seen one of the thousand pin-pricks with which your wife's self-love has been tattooed, you come and ask her in a whisper, "What is the matter?"

"Order *my* carriage!"

This *my* is the consummation of marriage. For two years she has said "*my husband's* carriage," "*the* carriage," "*our* carriage,"

and now she says "*my* carriage."

You are in the midst of a game, you say, somebody wants his revenge, or you must get your money back.

Here, Adolphe, we allow that you have sufficient strength of mind to say yes, to disappear, and *not* to order the carriage.

You have a friend, you send him to dance with your wife, for you have commenced a system of concessions which will ruin you. You already dimly perceive the advantage of a friend.

Finally, you order the carriage. You wife gets in with concentrated rage, she hurls herself into a corner, covers her face with her hood, crosses her arms under her pelisse, and says not a word.

O husbands! Learn this fact; you may, at this fatal moment, repair and redeem everything: and never does the impetuosity of lovers who have been caressing each other the whole evening with flaming gaze fail to do it! Yes, you can bring her home in triumph, she has now nobody but you, you have one more chance, that of taking your wife by storm! But no, idiot, stupid and indifferent that you are, you ask her, "What is the matter?"

Axiom. – A husband should always know what is the matter with his wife, for she always knows what is not.

"I'm cold," she says.

"The ball was splendid."

"Pooh! nobody of distinction! People have the mania, nowadays, to invite all Paris into a hole. There were women even on the stairs: their gowns were horribly smashed, and mine is

ruined."

"We had a good time."

"Ah, you men, you play and that's the whole of it. Once married, you care about as much for your wives as a lion does for the fine arts."

"How changed you are; you were so gay, so happy, so charming when we arrived."

"Oh, you never understand us women. I begged you to go home, and you left me there, as if a woman ever did anything without a reason. You are not without intelligence, but now and then you are so queer I don't know what you are thinking about."

Once upon this footing, the quarrel becomes more bitter. When you give your wife your hand to lift her from the carriage, you grasp a woman of wood: she gives you a "thank you" which puts you in the same rank as her servant. You understood your wife no better before than you do after the ball: you find it difficult to follow her, for instead of going up stairs, she flies up. The rupture is complete.

The chambermaid is involved in your disgrace: she is received with blunt No's and Yes's, as dry as Brussells rusks, which she swallows with a slanting glance at you. "Monsieur's always doing these things," she mutters.

You alone might have changed Madame's temper. She goes to bed; she has her revenge to take: you did not comprehend her. Now she does not comprehend you. She deposits herself on her side of the bed in the most hostile and offensive posture: she is

wrapped up in her chemise, in her sack, in her night-cap, like a bale of clocks packed for the East Indies. She says neither good-night, nor good-day, nor dear, nor Adolphe: you don't exist, you are a bag of wheat.

Your Caroline, so enticing five hours before in this very chamber where she frisked about like an eel, is now a junk of lead. Were you the Tropical Zone in person, astride of the Equator, you could not melt the ice of this little personified Switzerland that pretends to be asleep, and who could freeze you from head to foot, if she liked. Ask her one hundred times what is the matter with her, Switzerland replies by an ultimatum, like the Diet or the Conference of London.

Nothing is the matter with her: she is tired: she is going to sleep.

The more you insist, the more she erects bastions of ignorance, the more she isolates herself by chevaux-de-frise. If you get impatient, Caroline begins to dream! You grumble, you are lost.

Axiom. – Inasmuch as women are always willing and able to explain their strong points, they leave us to guess at their weak ones.

Caroline will perhaps also condescend to assure you that she does not feel well. But she laughs in her night-cap when you have fallen asleep, and hurls imprecations upon your slumbering body.

WOMEN'S LOGIC

You imagine you have married a creature endowed with reason: you are woefully mistaken, my friend.

Axiom. – Sensitive beings are not sensible beings.

Sentiment is not argument, reason is not pleasure, and pleasure is certainly not a reason.

"Oh! sir!" she says.

Reply "Ah! yes! Ah!" You must bring forth this "ah!" from the very depths of your thoracic cavern, as you rush in a rage from the house, or return, confounded, to your study.

Why? Now? Who has conquered, killed, overthrown you! Your wife's logic, which is not the logic of Aristotle, nor that of Ramus, nor that of Kant, nor that of Condillac, nor that of Robespierre, nor that of Napoleon: but which partakes of the character of all these logics, and which we must call the universal logic of women, the logic of English women as it is that of Italian women, of the women of Normandy and Brittany (ah, these last are unsurpassed!), of the women of Paris, in short, that of the women in the moon, if there are women in that nocturnal land, with which the women of the earth have an evident understanding, angels that they are!

The discussion began after breakfast. Discussions can never take place in a household save at this hour. A man could hardly have a discussion with his wife in bed, even if he wanted to: she

has too many advantages over him, and can too easily reduce him to silence. On leaving the nuptial chamber with a pretty woman in it, a man is apt to be hungry, if he is young. Breakfast is usually a cheerful meal, and cheerfulness is not given to argument. In short, you do not open the business till you have had your tea or your coffee.

You have taken it into your head, for instance, to send your son to school. All fathers are hypocrites and are never willing to confess that their own flesh and blood is very troublesome when it walks about on two legs, lays its dare-devil hands on everything, and is everywhere at once like a frisky pollywog. Your son barks, mews, and sings; he breaks, smashes and soils the furniture, and furniture is dear; he makes toys of everything, he scatters your papers, and he cuts paper dolls out of the morning's newspaper before you have read it.

His mother says to him, referring to anything of yours: "Take it!" but in reference to anything of hers she says: "Take care!"

She cunningly lets him have your things that she may be left in peace. Her bad faith as a good mother seeks shelter behind her child, your son is her accomplice. Both are leagued against you like Robert Macaire and Bertrand against the subscribers to their joint stock company. The boy is an axe with which foraging excursions are performed in your domains. He goes either boldly or slyly to maraud in your wardrobe: he reappears caparisoned in the drawers you laid aside that morning, and brings to the light of day many articles condemned to solitary confinement. He

brings the elegant Madame Fischtaminel, a friend whose good graces you cultivate, your girdle for checking corpulency, bits of cosmetic for dyeing your moustache, old waistcoats discolored at the arm-holes, stockings slightly soiled at the heels and somewhat yellow at the toes. It is quite impossible to remark that these stains are caused by the leather!

Your wife looks at your friend and laughs; you dare not be angry, so you laugh too, but what a laugh! The unfortunate all know that laugh.

Your son, moreover, gives you a cold sweat, if your razors happen to be out of their place. If you are angry, the little rebel laughs and shows his two rows of pearls: if you scold him, he cries. His mother rushes in! And what a mother she is! A mother who will detest you if you don't give him the razor! With women there is no middle ground; a man is either a monster or a model.

At certain times you perfectly understand Herod and his famous decrees relative to the Massacre of the Innocents, which have only been surpassed by those of the good Charles X!

Your wife has returned to her sofa, you walk up and down, and stop, and you boldly introduce the subject by this interjectional remark:

"Caroline, we must send Charles to boarding school."

"Charles cannot go to boarding school," she returns in a mild tone.

"Charles is six years old, the age at which a boy's education begins."

"In the first place," she replies, "it begins at seven. The royal princes are handed over to their governor by their governess when they are seven. That's the law and the prophets. I don't see why you shouldn't apply to the children of private people the rule laid down for the children of princes. Is your son more forward than theirs? The king of Rome – "

"The king of Rome is not a case in point."

"What! Is not the king of Rome the son of the Emperor? [Here she changes the subject.] Well, I declare, you accuse the Empress, do you? Why, Doctor Dubois himself was present, besides – "

"I said nothing of the kind."

"How you do interrupt, Adolphe."

"I say that the king of Rome [here you begin to raise your voice], the king of Rome, who was hardly four years old when he left France, is no example for us."

"That doesn't prevent the fact of the Duke de Bordeaux's having been placed in the hands of the Duke de Riviere, his tutor, at seven years." [Logic.]

"The case of the young Duke of Bordeaux is different."

"Then you confess that a boy can't be sent to school before he is seven years old?" she says with emphasis. [More logic.]

"No, my dear, I don't confess that at all. There is a great deal of difference between private and public education."

"That's precisely why I don't want to send Charles to school yet. He ought to be much stronger than he is, to go there."

"Charles is very strong for his age."

"Charles? That's the way with men! Why, Charles has a very weak constitution; he takes after you. [Here she changes from *tu* to *vous*.] But if you are determined to get rid of your son, why put him out to board, of course. I have noticed for some time that the dear child annoys you."

"Annoys me? The idea! But we are answerable for our children, are we not? It is time Charles' education was began: he is getting very bad habits here, he obeys no one, he thinks himself perfectly free to do as he likes, he hits everybody and nobody dares to hit him back. He ought to be placed in the midst of his equals, or he will grow up with the most detestable temper."

"Thank you: so I am bringing Charles up badly!"

"I did not say that: but you will always have excellent reasons for keeping him at home."

Here the *vous* becomes reciprocal and the discussion takes a bitter turn on both sides. Your wife is very willing to wound you by saying *vous*, but she feels cross when it becomes mutual.

"The long and the short of it is that you want to get my child away, you find that he is between us, you are jealous of your son, you want to tyrannize over me at your ease, and you sacrifice your boy! Oh, I am smart enough to see through you!"

"You make me out like Abraham with his knife! One would think there were no such things as schools! So the schools are empty; nobody sends their children to school!"

"You are trying to make me appear ridiculous," she retorts. "I know that there are schools well enough, but people don't send

boys of six there, and Charles shall not start now."

"Don't get angry, my dear."

"As if I ever get angry! I am a woman and know how to suffer in silence."

"Come, let us reason together."

"You have talked nonsense enough."

"It is time that Charles should learn to read and write; later in life, he will find difficulties sufficient to disgust him."

Here, you talk for ten minutes without interruption, and you close with an appealing "Well?" armed with an intonation which suggests an interrogation point of the most crooked kind.

"Well!" she replies, "it is not yet time for Charles to go to school."

You have gained nothing at all.

"But, my dear, Monsieur Deschars certainly sent his little Julius to school at six years. Go and examine the schools and you will find lots of little boys of six there."

You talk for ten minutes more without the slightest interruption, and then you ejaculate another "Well?"

"Little Julius Deschars came home with chilblains," she says.

"But Charles has chilblains here."

"Never," she replies, proudly.

In a quarter of an hour, the main question is blocked by a side discussion on this point: "Has Charles had chilblains or not?"

You bandy contradictory allegations; you no longer believe each other; you must appeal to a third party.

Axiom. – Every household has its Court of Appeals which takes no notice of the merits, but judges matters of form only.

The nurse is sent for. She comes, and decides in favor of your wife. It is fully decided that Charles has never had chilblains.

Caroline glances triumphantly at you and utters these monstrous words: "There, you see Charles can't possibly go to school!"

You go out breathless with rage. There is no earthly means of convincing your wife that there is not the slightest reason for your son's not going to school in the fact that he has never had chilblains.

That evening, after dinner, you hear this atrocious creature finishing a long conversation with a woman with these words: "He wanted to send Charles to school, but I made him see that he would have to wait."

Some husbands, at a conjuncture like this, burst out before everybody; their wives take their revenge six weeks later, but the husbands gain this by it, that Charles is sent to school the very day he gets into any mischief. Other husbands break the crockery, and keep their rage to themselves. The knowing ones say nothing and bide their time.

A woman's logic is exhibited in this way upon the slightest occasion, about a promenade or the proper place to put a sofa. This logic is extremely simple, inasmuch as it consists in never expressing but one idea, that which contains the expression of their will. Like everything pertaining to female nature, this

system may be resolved into two algebraic terms – Yes: no. There are also certain little movements of the head which mean so much that they may take the place of either.

THE JESUITISM OF WOMEN

The most jesuitical Jesuit of Jesuits is yet a thousand times less jesuitical than the least jesuitical woman, – so you may judge what Jesuits women are! They are so jesuitical that the cunningest Jesuit himself could never guess to what extent of jesuitism a woman may go, for there are a thousand ways of being jesuitical, and a woman is such an adroit Jesuit, that she has the knack of being a Jesuit without having a jesuitical look. You can rarely, though you can sometimes, prove to a Jesuit that he is one: but try once to demonstrate to a woman that she acts or talks like a Jesuit. She would be cut to pieces rather than confess herself one.

She, a Jesuit! The very soul of honor and loyalty! She a Jesuit! What do you mean by "Jesuit?" She does not know what a Jesuit is: what is a Jesuit? She has never seen or heard of a Jesuit! It's you who are a Jesuit! And she proves with jesuitical demonstration that you are a subtle Jesuit.

Here is one of the thousand examples of a woman's jesuitism, and this example constitutes the most terrible of the petty troubles of married life; it is perhaps the most serious.

Induced by a desire the thousandth time expressed by Caroline, who complained that she had to go on foot or that she could not buy a new hat, a new parasol, a new dress, or any other article of dress, often enough:

That she could not dress her baby as a sailor, as a lancer, as an artilleryman of the National Guard, as a Highlander with naked legs and a cap and feather, in a jacket, in a roundabout, in a velvet sack, in boots, in trousers: that she could not buy him toys enough, nor mechanical moving mice and Noah's Arks enough:

That she could not return Madame Deschars or Madame de Fischtaminel their civilities, a ball, a party, a dinner: nor take a private box at the theatre, thus avoiding the necessity of sitting cheek by jowl with men who are either too polite or not enough so, and of calling a cab at the close of the performance; apropos of which she thus discourses:

"You think it cheaper, but you are mistaken: men are all the same! I soil my shoes, I spoil my hat, my shawl gets wet and my silk stockings get muddy. You economize twenty francs by not having a carriage, – no not twenty, sixteen, for your pay four for the cab – and you lose fifty francs' worth of dress, besides being wounded in your pride on seeing a faded bonnet on my head: you don't see why it's faded, but it's those horrid cabs. I say nothing of the annoyance of being tumbled and jostled by a crowd of men, for it seems you don't care for that!"

That she could not buy a piano instead of hiring one, nor keep up with the fashions; (there are some women, she says, who have all the new styles, but just think what they give in return! She would rather throw herself out of the window than imitate them! She loves you too much. Here she sheds tears. She does not understand such women). That she could not ride in the Champs

Elysees, stretched out in her own carriage, like Madame de Fischtaminel. (There's a woman who understands life: and who has a well-taught, well-disciplined and very contented husband: his wife would go through fire and water for him!)

Finally, beaten in a thousand conjugal scenes, beaten by the most logical arguments (the late logicians Tripier and Merlin were nothing to her, as the preceding chapter has sufficiently shown you), beaten by the most tender caresses, by tears, by your own words turned against you, for under circumstances like these, a woman lies in wait in her house like a jaguar in the jungle; she does not appear to listen to you, or to heed you; but if a single word, a wish, a gesture, escapes you, she arms herself with it, she whets it to an edge, she brings it to bear upon you a hundred times over; beaten by such graceful tricks as "If you will do so and so, I will do this and that;" for women, in these cases, become greater bargainers than the Jews and Greeks (those, I mean, who sell perfumes and little girls), than the Arabs (those, I mean, who sell little boys and horses), greater higglers than the Swiss and the Genevese, than bankers, and, what is worse than all, than the Genoese!

Finally, beaten in a manner which may be called beaten, you determine to risk a certain portion of your capital in a business undertaking. One evening, at twilight, seated side by side, or some morning on awakening, while Caroline, half asleep, a pink bud in her white linen, her face smiling in her lace, is beside you, you say to her, "You want this, you say, or you want that: you told

me this or you told me that:" in short, you hastily enumerate the numberless fancies by which she has over and over again broken your heart, for there is nothing more dreadful than to be unable to satisfy the desires of a beloved wife, and you close with these words:

"Well, my dear, an opportunity offers of quintupling a hundred thousand francs, and I have decided to make the venture."

She is wide awake now, she sits up in bed, and gives you a kiss, ah! this time, a real good one!

"You are a dear boy!" is her first word.

We will not mention her last, for it is an enormous and unpronounceable onomatope.

"Now," she says, "tell me all about it."

You try to explain the nature of the affair. But in the first place, women do not understand business, and in the next they do not wish to seem to understand it. Your dear, delighted Caroline says you were wrong to take her desires, her groans, her sighs for new dresses, in earnest. She is afraid of your venture, she is frightened at the directors, the shares, and above all at the running expenses, and doesn't exactly see where the dividend comes in.

Axiom. – Women are always afraid of things that have to be divided.

In short, Caroline suspects a trap: but she is delighted to know that she can have her carriage, her box, the numerous styles of dress for her baby, and the rest. While dissuading you

from engaging in the speculation, she is visibly glad to see you investing your money in it.

FIRST PERIOD. – "Oh, I am the happiest woman on the face of the earth! Adolphe has just gone into the most splendid venture. I am going to have a carriage, oh! ever so much handsomer than Madame de Fischtaminel's; hers is out of fashion. Mine will have curtains with fringes. My horses will be mouse-colored, hers are bay, – they are as common as coppers."

"What is this venture, madame?"

"Oh, it's splendid – the stock is going up; he explained it to me before he went into it, for Adolphe never does anything without consulting me."

"You are very fortunate."

"Marriage would be intolerable without entire confidence, and Adolphe tells me everything."

Thus, Adolphe, you are the best husband in Paris, you are adorable, you are a man of genius, you are all heart, an angel. You are petted to an uncomfortable degree. You bless the marriage tie. Caroline extols men, calling them "kings of creation," women were made for them, man is naturally generous, and matrimony is a delightful institution.

For three, sometimes six, months, Caroline executes the most brilliant concertos and solos upon this delicious theme: "I shall be rich! I shall have a thousand a month for my dress: I am going to keep my carriage!"

If your son is alluded to, it is merely to ask about the school

to which he shall be sent.

SECOND PERIOD. – "Well, dear, how is your business getting on? – What has become of it? – How about that speculation which was to give me a carriage, and other things? – It is high time that affair should come to something. – It is a good while cooking. – When *will* it begin to pay? Is the stock going up? – There's nobody like you for hitting upon ventures that never amount to anything."

One day she says to you, "Is there really an affair?"

If you mention it eight or ten months after, she returns:

"Ah! Then there really *is* an affair!"

This woman, whom you thought dull, begins to show signs of extraordinary wit, when her object is to make fun of you. During this period, Caroline maintains a compromising silence when people speak of you, or else she speaks disparagingly of men in general: "Men are not what they seem: to find them out you must try them." "Marriage has its good and its bad points." "Men never can finish anything."

THIRD PERIOD. —*Catastrophe*. – This magnificent affair which was to yield five hundred per cent, in which the most cautious, the best informed persons took part – peers, deputies, bankers – all of them Knights of the Legion of Honor – this venture has been obliged to liquidate! The most sanguine expect to get ten per cent of their capital back. You are discouraged.

Caroline has often said to you, "Adolphe, what is the matter? Adolphe, there is something wrong."

Finally, you acquaint Caroline with the fatal result: she begins by consoling you.

"One hundred thousand francs lost! We shall have to practice the strictest economy," you imprudently add.

The jesuitism of woman bursts out at this word "economy." It sets fire to the magazine.

"Ah! that's what comes of speculating! How is it that *you, ordinarily so prudent*, could go and risk a hundred thousand francs! *You know I was against it from the beginning!* BUT YOU WOULD NOT LISTEN TO ME!"

Upon this, the discussion grows bitter.

You are good for nothing – you have no business capacity; women alone take clear views of things. You have risked your children's bread, though she tried to dissuade you from it. – You cannot say it was for her. Thank God, she has nothing to reproach herself with. A hundred times a month she alludes to your disaster: "If my husband had not thrown away his money in such and such a scheme, I could have had this and that." "The next time you want to go into an affair, perhaps you'll consult me!" Adolphe is accused and convicted of having foolishly lost one hundred thousand francs, without an object in view, like a dolt, and without having consulted his wife. Caroline advises her friends not to marry. She complains of the incapacity of men who squander the fortunes of their wives. Caroline is vindictive, she makes herself generally disagreeable. Pity Adolphe! Lament, ye husbands! O bachelors, rejoice and be exceeding glad!

MEMORIES AND REGRETS

After several years of wedded life, your love has become so placid, that Caroline sometimes tries, in the evening, to wake you up by various little coquettish phrases. There is about you a certain calmness and tranquillity which always exasperates a lawful wife. Women see in it a sort of insolence: they look upon the indifference of happiness as the fatuity of confidence, for of course they never imagine their inestimable equalities can be regarded with disdain: their virtue is therefore enraged at being so cordially trusted in.

In this situation, which is what every couple must come to, and which both husband and wife must expect, no husband dares confess that the constant repetition of the same dish has become wearisome; but his appetite certainly requires the condiments of dress, the ideas excited by absence, the stimulus of an imaginary rivalry.

In short, at this period, you walk very comfortably with your wife on your arm, without pressing hers against your heart with the solicitous and watchful cohesion of a miser grasping his treasure. You gaze carelessly round upon the curiosities in the street, leading your wife in a loose and distracted way, as if you were towing a Norman scow. Come now, be frank! If, on passing your wife, an admirer were gently to press her, accidentally or purposely, would you have the slightest desire to discover his

motives? Besides, you say, no woman would seek to bring about a quarrel for such a trifle. Confess this, too, that the expression "such a trifle" is exceedingly flattering to both of you.

You are in this position, but you have as yet proceeded no farther. Still, you have a horrible thought which you bury in the depths of your heart and conscience: Caroline has not come up to your expectations. Caroline has imperfections, which, during the high tides of the honey-moon, were concealed under the water, but which the ebb of the gall-moon has laid bare. You have several times run against these breakers, your hopes have been often shipwrecked upon them, more than once your desires – those of a young marrying man – (where, alas, is that time!) have seen their richly laden gondolas go to pieces there: the flower of the cargo went to the bottom, the ballast of the marriage remained. In short, to make use of a colloquial expression, as you talk over your marriage with yourself you say, as you look at Caroline, "*She is not what I took her to be!*"

Some evening, at a ball, in society, at a friend's house, no matter where, you meet a sublime young woman, beautiful, intellectual and kind: with a soul, oh! a soul of celestial purity, and of miraculous beauty! Yes, there is that unchangeable oval cut of face, those features which time will never impair, that graceful and thoughtful brow. The unknown is rich, well-educated, of noble birth: she will always be what she should be, she knows when to shine, when to remain in the background: she appears in all her glory and power, the being you have dreamed

of, your wife that should have been, she whom you feel you could love forever. She would always have flattered your little vanities, she would understand and admirably serve your interests. She is tender and gay, too, this young lady who reawakens all your better feelings, who rekindles your slumbering desires.

You look at Caroline with gloomy despair, and here are the phantom-like thoughts which tap, with wings of a bat, the beak of a vulture, the body of a death's-head moth, upon the walls of the palace in which, enkindled by desire, glows your brain like a lamp of gold:

FIRST STANZA. Ah, dear me, why did I get married? Fatal idea! I allowed myself to be caught by a small amount of cash. And is it really over? Cannot I have another wife? Ah, the Turks manage things better! It is plain enough that the author of the Koran lived in the desert!

SECOND STANZA. My wife is sick, she sometimes coughs in the morning. If it is the design of Providence to remove her from the world, let it be speedily done for her sake and for mine. The angel has lived long enough.

THIRD STANZA. I am a monster! Caroline is the mother of my children!

You go home, that night, in a carriage with your wife: you think her perfectly horrible: she speaks to you, but you answer in monosyllables. She says, "What is the matter?" and you answer, "Nothing." She coughs, you advise her to see the doctor in the morning. Medicine has its hazards.

FOURTH STANZA. I have been told that a physician, poorly paid by the heirs of his deceased patient, imprudently exclaimed, "What! they cut down my bill, when they owe me forty thousand a year." *I* would not haggle over fees!

"Caroline," you say to her aloud, "you must take care of yourself; cross your shawl, be prudent, my darling angel."

Your wife is delighted with you since you seem to take such an interest in her. While she is preparing to retire, you lie stretched out upon the sofa. You contemplate the divine apparition which opens to you the ivory portals of your castles in the air. Delicious ecstasy! 'Tis the sublime young woman that you see before you! She is as white as the sail of the treasure-laden galleon as it enters the harbor of Cadiz. Your wife, happy in your admiration, now understands your former taciturnity. You still see, with closed eyes, the sublime young woman; she is the burden of your thoughts, and you say aloud:

FIFTH AND LAST STANZA. Divine! Adorable! Can there be another woman like her? Rose of Night! Column of ivory! Celestial maiden! Morning and Evening Star!

Everyone says his prayers; you have said four.

The next morning, your wife is delightful, she coughs no more, she has no need of a doctor; if she dies, it will be of good health; you launched four maledictions upon her, in the name of your sublime young woman, and four times she blessed you for it. Caroline does not know that in the depths of your heart there wriggles a little red fish like a crocodile, concealed beneath

conjugal love like the other would be hid in a basin.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.