

GUY DE MAUPASSANT

UNE VIE, A PIECE OF
STRING AND OTHER
STORIES

Guy de Maupassant
Une Vie, a Piece of
String and Other Stories

http://www.litres.ru/pages/biblio_book/?art=25292291

Une Vie, a Piece of String and Other Stories:

Содержание

GUY DE MAUPASSANT	4
UNE VIE	35
CHAPTER I	35
CHAPTER II	47
CHAPTER III	52
CHAPTER IV	68
CHAPTER V	83
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.	84

Guy de Maupassant

Une Vie, a Piece of

String and Other Stories

GUY DE MAUPASSANT
A Study by Pol. Neveux

"I entered literary life as a meteor, and I shall leave it like a thunderbolt." These words of Maupassant to José Maria de Heredia on the occasion of a memorable meeting are, in spite of their morbid solemnity, not an inexact summing up of the brief career during which, for ten years, the writer, by turns undaunted and sorrowful, with the fertility of a master hand produced poetry, novels, romances and travels, only to sink prematurely into the abyss of madness and death...

In the month of April, 1880, an article appeared in the "Le Gaulois" announcing the publication of the Soirées de Médan. It was signed by a name as yet unknown: Guy de Maupassant. After a juvenile diatribe against romanticism and a passionate attack on languorous literature, the writer extolled the study of real life, and announced the publication of the new work. It was picturesque and charming. In the quiet of evening, on an island

in the Seine, beneath poplars instead of the Neapolitan cypresses dear to the friends of Boccaccio, amid the continuous murmur of the valley, and no longer to the sound of the Pyrenean streams that murmured a faint accompaniment to the tales of Marguerite's cavaliers, the master and his disciples took turns in narrating some striking or pathetic episode of the war. And the issue, in collaboration, of these tales in one volume, in which the master jostled elbows with his pupils, took on the appearance of a manifesto, the tone of a challenge, or the utterance of a creed.

In fact, however, the beginnings had been much more simple, and they had confined themselves, beneath the trees of Médan, to deciding on a general title for the work. Zola had contributed the manuscript of the "Attaque du Moulin," and it was at Maupassant's house that the five young men gave in their contributions. Each one read his story, Maupassant being the last. When he had finished *Boule de Suif*, with a spontaneous impulse, with an emotion they never forgot, filled with enthusiasm at this revelation, they all rose and, without superfluous words, acclaimed him as a master.

He undertook to write the article for the *Gaulois* and, in coöperation with his friends, he worded it in the terms with which we are familiar, amplifying and embellishing it, yielding to an inborn taste for mystification which his youth rendered excusable. The essential point, he said, is to "unmoor" criticism.

It was unmoored. The following day Wolff wrote a polemical dissertation in the *Figaro* and carried away his colleagues. The

volume was a brilliant success, thanks to *Boule de Suif*. Despite the novelty, the honesty of effort, on the part of all, no mention was made of the other stories. Relegated to the second rank, they passed without notice. From his first battle, Maupassant was master of the field in literature.

At once the entire press took him up and said what was appropriate regarding the budding celebrity. Biographers and reporters sought information concerning his life. As it was very simple and perfectly straightforward, they resorted to invention. And thus it is that at the present day Maupassant appears to us like one of those ancient heroes whose origin and death are veiled in mystery.

I will not dwell on Guy de Maupassant's younger days. His relatives, his old friends, he himself, here and there in his works, have furnished us in their letters enough valuable revelations and touching remembrances of the years preceding his literary *début*. His worthy biographer, H. Édouard Maynial, after collecting intelligently all the writings, condensing and comparing them, has been able to give us some definite information regarding that early period.

I will simply recall that he was born on the 5th of August, 1850, near Dieppe, in the castle of Miromesnil which he describes in *Une Vie*...

Maupassant, like Flaubert, was a Norman, through his mother, and through his place of birth he belonged to that strange and adventurous race, whose heroic and long voyages on tramp

trading ships he liked to recall. And just as the author of "Éducation sentimentale" seems to have inherited in the paternal line the shrewd realism of Champagne, so de Maupassant appears to have inherited from his Lorraine ancestors their indestructible discipline and cold lucidity.

His childhood was passed at Étretat, his beautiful childhood; it was there that his instincts were awakened in the unfoldment of his prehistoric soul. Years went by in an ecstasy of physical happiness.

The delight of running at full speed through fields of gorse, the charm of voyages of discovery in hollows and ravines, games beneath the dark hedges, a passion for going to sea with the fishermen and, on nights when there was no moon, for dreaming on their boats of imaginary voyages.

Mme. de Maupassant, who had guided her son's early reading, and had gazed with him at the sublime spectacle of nature, put off as long as possible the hour of separation. One day, however, she had to take the child to the little seminary at Yvetot. Later, he became a student at the college at Rouen, and became a literary correspondent of Louis Bouilhet. It was at the latter's house on those Sundays in winter when the Norman rain drowned the sound of the bells and dashed against the window panes that the school boy learned to write poetry.

Vacation took the rhetorician back to the north of Normandy. Now it was shooting at Saint Julien-l'Hospitalier, across fields, bogs, and through the woods. From that time on he sealed

his pact with the earth, and those "deep and delicate roots" which attached him to his native soil began to grow. It was of Normandy, broad, fresh and virile, that he would presently demand his inspiration, fervent and eager as a boy's love; it was in her that he would take refuge when, weary of life, he would implore a truce, or when he simply wished to work and revive his energies in old-time joys. It was at this time that was born in him that voluptuous love of the sea, which in later days could alone withdraw him from the world, calm him, console him.

In 1870 he lived in the country, then he came to Paris to live; for, the family fortunes having dwindled, he had to look for a position.

For several years he was a clerk in the Ministry of Marine, where he turned over musty papers, in the uninteresting company of the clerks of the admiralty.

Then he went into the department of Public Instruction, where bureaucratic servility is less intolerable. The daily duties are certainly scarcely more onerous and he had as chiefs, or colleagues, Xavier Charmes and Leon Dierx, Henry Roujon and René Billotte, but his office looked out on a beautiful melancholy garden with immense plane trees around which black circles of crows gathered in winter.

Maupassant made two divisions of his spare hours, one for boating, and the other for literature. Every evening in spring, every free day, he ran down to the river whose mysterious current veiled in fog or sparkling in the sun called to him and bewitched

him. In the islands in the Seine between Chatou and Port-Marly, on the banks of Sartrouville and Triel he was long noted among the population of boatmen, who have now vanished, for his unwearying biceps, his cynical gaiety of goodfellowship, his unfailing practical jokes, his broad witticisms. Sometimes he would row with frantic speed, free and joyous, through the glowing sunlight on the stream; sometimes, he would wander along the coast, questioning the sailors, chatting with the ravageurs, or junk gatherers, or stretched at full length amid the irises and tansy he would lie for hours watching the frail insects that play on the surface of the stream, water spiders, or white butterflies, dragon flies, chasing each other amid the willow leaves, or frogs asleep on the lily-pads.

The rest of his life was taken up by his work. Without ever becoming despondent, silent and persistent, he accumulated manuscripts, poetry, criticisms, plays, romances and novels. Every week he docilely submitted his work to the great Flaubert, the childhood friend of his mother and his uncle Alfred Le Poittevin. The master had consented to assist the young man, to reveal to him the secrets that make chefs-d'oeuvre immortal. It was he who compelled him to make copious research and to use direct observation and who inculcated in him a horror of vulgarity and a contempt for facility.

Maupassant himself tells us of those severe initiations in the Rue Murillo, or in the tent at Croisset; he has recalled the implacable didactics of his old master, his tender brutality, the

paternal advice of his generous and candid heart. For seven years Flaubert slashed, pulverized, the awkward attempts of his pupil whose success remained uncertain.

Suddenly, in a flight of spontaneous perfection, he wrote *Boule de Suif*. His master's joy was great and overwhelming. He died two months later.

Until the end Maupassant remained illuminated by the reflection of the good, vanished giant, by that touching reflection that comes from the dead to those souls they have so profoundly stirred. The worship of Flaubert was a religion from which nothing could distract him, neither work, nor glory, nor slow moving waves, nor balmy nights.

At the end of his short life, while his mind was still clear, he wrote to a friend: "I am always thinking of my poor Flaubert, and I say to myself that I should like to die if I were sure that anyone would think of me in the same manner."

During these long years of his novitiate Maupassant had entered the social literary circles. He would remain silent, preoccupied; and if anyone, astonished at his silence, asked him about his plans he answered simply: "I am learning my trade." However, under the pseudonym of Guy de Valmont, he had sent some articles to the newspapers, and, later, with the approval and by the advice of Flaubert, he published, in the "*République des Lettres*," poems signed by his name.

These poems, overflowing with sensuality, where the hymn to the Earth describes the transports of physical possession,

where the impatience of love expresses itself in loud melancholy appeals like the calls of animals in the spring nights, are valuable chiefly inasmuch as they reveal the creature of instinct, the fawn escaped from his native forests, that Maupassant was in his early youth. But they add nothing to his glory. They are the "rhymes of a prose writer" as Jules Lemaitre said. To mould the expression of his thought according to the strictest laws, and to "narrow it down" to some extent, such was his aim. Following the example of one of his comrades of Médan, being readily carried away by precision of style and the rhythm of sentences, by the imperious rule of the ballad, of the pantoum or the chant royal, Maupassant also desired to write in metrical lines.

However, he never liked this collection that he often regretted having published. His encounters with prosody had left him with that monotonous weariness that the horseman and the fencer feel after a period in the riding school, or a bout with the foils.

Such, in very broad lines, is the story of Maupassant's literary apprenticeship.

The day following the publication of "Boule de Suif," his reputation began to grow rapidly. The quality of his story was unrivalled, but at the same time it must be acknowledged that there were some who, for the sake of discussion, desired to place a young reputation in opposition to the triumphant brutality of Zola.

From this time on, Maupassant, at the solicitation of the entire press, set to work and wrote story after story. His talent, free from

all influences, his individuality, are not disputed for a moment. With a quick step, steady and alert, he advanced to fame, a fame of which he himself was not aware, but which was so universal, that no contemporary author during his life ever experienced the same. The "meteor" sent out its light and its rays were prolonged without limit, in article after article, volume on volume.

He was now rich and famous... He is esteemed all the more as they believe him to be rich and happy. But they do not know that this young fellow with the sunburnt face, thick neck and salient muscles whom they invariably compare to a young bull at liberty, and whose love affairs they whisper, is ill, very ill. At the very moment that success came to him, the malady that never afterwards left him came also, and, seated motionless at his side, gazed at him with its threatening countenance. He suffered from terrible headaches, followed by nights of insomnia. He had nervous attacks, which he soothed with narcotics and anesthetics, which he used freely. His sight, which had troubled him at intervals, became affected, and a celebrated oculist spoke of abnormality, asymetry of the pupils. The famous young man trembled in secret and was haunted by all kinds of terrors.

The reader is charmed at the saneness of this revived art and yet, here and there, he is surprised to discover, amid descriptions of nature that are full of humanity, disquieting flights towards the supernatural, distressing conjurations, veiled at first, of the most commonplace, the most vertiginous shuddering fits of fear, as old as the world and as eternal as the unknown. But, instead

of being alarmed, he thinks that the author must be gifted with infallible intuition to follow out thus the taints in his characters, even through their most dangerous mazes. The reader does not know that these hallucinations which he describes so minutely were experienced by Maupassant himself; he does not know that the fear is in himself, the anguish of fear "which is not caused by the presence of danger, or of inevitable death, but by certain abnormal conditions, by certain mysterious influences in presence of vague dangers," the "fear of fear, the dread of that horrible sensation of incomprehensible terror."

How can one explain these physical sufferings and this morbid distress that were known for some time to his intimates alone? Alas! the explanation is only too simple. All his life, consciously or unconsciously, Maupassant fought this malady, hidden as yet, which was latent in him.

Those who first saw Maupassant when the *Contes de la Bécasse* and *Bel Ami* were published were somewhat astonished at his appearance. He was solidly built, rather short and had a resolute, determined air, rather unpolished and without those distinguishing marks of intellect and social position. But his hands were delicate and supple, and beautiful shadows encircled his eyes.

He received visitors with the graciousness of the courteous head of a department, who resigns himself to listen to demands, allowing them to talk as he smiled faintly, and nonplussing them by his calmness.

How chilling was this first interview to young enthusiasts who had listened to Zola unfolding in lyric formula audacious methods, or to the soothing words of Daudet, who scattered with prodigality striking, thrilling ideas, picturesque outlines and brilliant synopses.

Maupassant's remarks, in têtes-à-têtes, as in general conversation, were usually current commonplaces and on ordinary time-worn topics.

Convinced of the superfluousness of words, perhaps he confounded them all in the same category, placing the same estimate on a thought nobly expressed as on a sally of coarse wit. One would have thought so, to see the indifference with which he treated alike the chatter of the most decided mediocrities and the conversation of the noblest minds of the day. Not an avowal, not a confidence, that shed light on his life work. Parsimonious of all he observed, he never related a typical anecdote, or offered a suggestive remark. Praise, even, did not move him, and if by chance he became animated it was to tell some practical joke, some atelier hoaxes, as if he had given himself up to the pleasure of hoaxing and mystifying people.

He appeared besides to look upon art as a pastime, literature as an occupation useless at best, while he willingly relegated love to the performance of a function, and suspected the motives of the most meritorious actions.

Some say that this was the inborn basis of his personal psychology. I do not believe it. That he may have had a

low estimate of humanity, that he may have mistrusted its disinterestedness, contested the quality of its virtue, is possible, even certain. But that he was not personally superior to his heroes I am unwilling to admit. And if I see in his attitude, as in his language, an evidence of his inveterate pessimism, I see in it also a method of protecting his secret thoughts from the curiosity of the vulgar.

Perhaps he overshot the mark. By dint of hearing morality, art and literature depreciated, and seeing him preoccupied with boating, and listening to his own accounts of love affairs which he did not always carry on in the highest class, many ended by seeing in him one of those terrible Normans who, all through his novels and stories, carouse and commit social crimes with such commanding assurance and such calm unmorality.

He was undoubtedly a Norman, and, according to those who knew him best, many of his traits of character show that atavism is not always an idle word...

To identify Maupassant with his characters is a gross error, but is not without precedent. We always like to trace the author in the hero of a romance, and to seek the actor beneath the disguise. No doubt, as Taine has said, "the works of an intelligence have not the intelligence alone for father and mother, but the whole personality of the man helps to produce them..."

That is why Maupassant himself says to us, "No, I have not the soul of a decadent, I cannot look within myself, and the effort I make to understand unknown souls is incessant, involuntary and

dominant. It is not an effort; I experience a sort of overpowering sense of insight into all that surrounds me. I am impregnated with it, I yield to it, I submerge myself in these surrounding influences."

That is, properly speaking, the peculiarity of all great novelists.

Who experiences this insight, this influence more than Balzac, or Flaubert, in *Madame Bovary*? And so with Maupassant, who, pen in hand, is the character he describes, with his passions, his hatreds, his vices and his virtues. He so incorporates himself in him that the author disappears, and we ask ourselves in vain what his own opinion is of what he has just told us. He has none possibly, or if he has he does not tell it.

This agrees admirably with the theory of impassivity in literature, so much in vogue when Maupassant became known. But despite that theory he is, if one understands him, quite other than "A being without pity who contemplated suffering."

He has the deepest sympathy for the weak, for the victims of the deceptions of society, for the sufferings of the obscure. If the successful adventurer, Lesable, and the handsome Maze are the objects of his veiled irony, he maintains, or feels a sorrowful, though somewhat disdainful tenderness, for poor old Savon, the old copying clerk of the Ministry of Marine, who is the drudge of the office and whose colleagues laugh at him because his wife deceived him, *sans espoir d'"heritage."*

Why did Maupassant at the start win universal favor? It is

because he had direct genius, the clear vision of a "primitive" (an artist of the pre-Renaissance). His materials were just those of a graduate who, having left college, has satisfied his curiosity. Grasping the simple and ingenious, but strong and appropriate tools that he himself has forged, he starts out in the forest of romance, and instead of being overcome by the enchantment of its mystery, he walks through it unflinchingly with a joyful step...

He was a minstrel. Offspring of a race, and not the inheritor of a formula, he narrated to his contemporaries, bewildered by the lyrical deformities of romanticism, stories of human beings, simple and logical, like those which formerly delighted our parents.

The French reader who wished to be amused was at once at home, on the same footing with him... More spontaneous than the first troubadours, he banished from his writings abstract and general types, "romanticized" life itself, and not myths, those eternal legends that stray through the highways of the world.

Study closely these minstrels in recent works; read M. Joseph Bédier's beautiful work, *Les Fabliaux*, and you will see how, in Maupassant's prose, ancestors, whom he doubtless never knew, are brought to life.

The Minstrel feels neither anger nor sympathy; he neither censures, nor moralizes; for the self-satisfied Middle Ages cannot conceive the possibility of a different world. Brief, quick, he despises aims and methods, his only object is to entertain his auditors. Amusing and witty, he cares only for laughter and

ridicule...

But Maupassant's stories are singularly different in character. In the nineteenth century the Gallic intellect had long since foundered amid vileness and debauchery. In the provinces the ancient humor had disappeared; one chattered still about nothing, but without point, without wit; "trifling" was over, as they call it in Champagne. The nauseating pabulum of the newspapers and low political intrigue had withered the French intellect, that delicate, rare intellect, the last traces of which fade away in the Alsatian stories of Erckman-Chatrion, in the Provençal tales of Alphonse Daudet, in the novels of Emile Pouillon. Maupassant is not one of them. He knows nothing about humor, for he never found it in Life...

His ambition was not to make one laugh; he writes for the pleasure of recalling, without bias, what, to him, seems a halfway and dangerous truth... In his pessimism, Maupassant despises the race, society, civilization and the world...

If Maupassant draws from anyone it is Schopenhauer and Herbert Spencer, of whom he often speaks, although one does not know if he studied them very deeply. In all his books, excepting, of course, in the case of lines from the great tragic poets, one finds only one credited reference, which in to Sir John Lubbock's work on ants, an extract from which is introduced into Yvette.

No one was less bookish than himself. He was a designer, and one of the greatest in literature. His heroes, little folk, artisans

or rustics, bureaucrats or shopkeepers, prostitutes or rakes, he places them in faintly colored, but well-defined surroundings. And, immediately, the simplified landscape gives the keynote of the story.

In his descriptions he resists the temptation of asserting his personal view. He will not allow himself to see more of his landscape than his characters themselves see. He is also careful to avoid all refined terms and expressions, to introduce no element superior to the characters of his heroes.

He never makes inanimate nature intervene directly in human tribulations; she laughs at our joys and our sorrows... Once, only, in one of his works, the trees join in the universal mourning—the great, sad beeches weep in autumn for the soul, the little soul, of *la petite Roque*.

And yet Maupassant adores this nature, the one thing that moves him... But, in spite of this, he can control himself; the artist is aware of the danger to his narration should he indulge in the transports of a lover.

With an inborn perception, Maupassant at once seizes on the principal detail, the essential peculiarity that distinguishes a character and builds round it. He also, in the presentation of his character, assumes an authority that no writer, not even Balzac, ever equalled...

He traces what he sees with rapid strokes. His work is a vast collection of powerful sketches, synthetic draftings. Like all great artists, he was a simplifier; he knew how to "sacrifice" like the

Egyptians and Greeks...

Thanks to his rapid methods the master "cinematographed," if I may use the word, inexhaustible stories. Among them, each person may find himself represented, the artist, the clerk, the thinker, and the non-commissioned officer.

Maupassant was always impatient to "realize" his observations. He might forget, and above all, the flower of the sensation might lose its perfume. In *Une Vie* he hastens to sum up his childhood's recollections. As for *Bel Ami*, he wrote it from day to day as he haunted the offices of Editors.

As for his style, it is limpid, accurate, easy and strongly marked, with a sound framework and having the suppleness of a living organism.

Very industrious and very careful at first, Maupassant, in the fever of production, became less careful. He early accustomed himself to composing in his mind. "Composition amuses me," he said, "when I am thinking it out, and not when I am writing it." ... Once he had thought out his novels or romances, he transcribed them hurriedly, almost mechanically. In his manuscripts, long pages follow each other without an erasure.

His language appears natural, easy, and at first sight seems spontaneous. But at the price of what effort was it not acquired!

...

In reality, in the writer, his sense of sight and smell were perfected, to the detriment of the sense of hearing which is not very musical. Repetitions, assonances, do not always shock

Maupassant, who is sometimes insensible to quantity as he is to harmony. He does not "orchestrate," he has not inherited the "organ pipes" of Flaubert.

In his vocabulary there is no research; he never even requires a rare word...

Those whom Flaubert's great organ tones delighted, those whom Theophile Gautier's frescoes enchanted, were not satisfied, and accused Maupassant, somewhat harshly, of not being a "writer" in the highest sense of the term. The reproach is unmerited, for there is but one style.

But, on the other hand, it is difficult to admit, with an eminent academician that Maupassant must be a great writer, a classical writer, in fact, simply because he "had no style," a condition of perfection "in that form of literary art in which the personality of the author should not appear, in the romance, the story, and the drama."

A classic, Maupassant undoubtedly is, as the critic to whom I alluded has said, "through the simple aptness of his terms and his contempt for frivolous ornamentation."

He remains a great writer because, like Molière, La Bruyère, and La Fontaine, he is always close to nature, disdaining all studied rhetorical effect and all literary verbosity.

For applause and fame Maupassant cared nothing, and his proud contempt for Orders and Academies is well known.

In a letter to Marie Bashkirtseff he writes as follows:

"Everything in life is almost alike to me, men, women, events.

This is my true confession of faith, and I may add what you may not believe, which is that I do not care any more for myself than I do for the rest. All is divided into ennui, comedy and misery. I am indifferent to everything. I pass two-thirds of my time in being terribly bored. I pass the third portion in writing sentences which I sell as dear as I can, regretting that I have to ply this abominable trade."

And in a later letter:

"I have no taste that I cannot get rid of at my pleasure, not a desire that I do not scoff at, not a hope that does not make me smile or laugh. I ask myself why I stir, why I go hither or thither, why I give myself the odious trouble of earning money, since it does not amuse me to spend it."

And again:

"As for me, I am incapable of really loving my art. I am too critical, I analyze it too much. I feel strongly how relative is the value of ideas, words, and even of the loftiest intelligences. I cannot help despising thought, it is so weak; and form, it is so imperfect. I really have, in an acute, incurable form, the sense of human impotence, and of effort which results in wretched approximations."

For nature, Maupassant had an ardent passion... His whole being quivered when she bathed his forehead with her light ocean breeze.

She, alone, knew how to rock and soothe him with her waves. Never satisfied, he wished to see her under all aspects,

and travelled incessantly, first in his native province, amid the meadows and waters of Normandy, then on the banks of the Seine along which he coasted, bending to the oar. Then Brittany with its beaches, where high waves rolled in beneath low and dreary skies, then Auvergne, with its scattered huts amid the sour grass, beneath rocks of basalt; and, finally, Corsica, Italy, Sicily, not with artistic enthusiasm, but simply to enjoy the delight of grand, pure outlines. Africa, the country of Salammbô, the desert, finally call him, and he breathes those distant odors borne on the slow winds; the sunlight inundates his body, "laves the dark corners of his soul." And he retains a troubled memory of the evenings in those warm climes, where the fragrance of plants and trees seems to take the place of air.

Maupassant's philosophy is as little complicated as his vision of humanity. His pessimism exceeds in its simplicity and depth that of all other realistic writers.

Still there are contradictions and not unimportant ones in him. The most striking is certainly his fear of Death. He sees it everywhere, it haunts him. He sees it on the horizon of landscapes, and it crosses his path on lonely roads. When it is not hovering over his head, it is circling round him as around Gustave Moreau's pale youth... Can he, the determined materialist, really fear the stupor of eternal sleep, or the dispersion of the transient individuality? ...

Another contradiction. He who says that contact with the crowd "tortures his nerves," and who professes such contempt for

mankind, yet considers solitude as one of the bitterest torments of existence.

And he bewails the fact that he cannot live just for himself, "keep within himself that secret place of the ego, where none can enter."

"Alas!" said his master, "we are all in a desert." Nobody understands anyone else and "whatever we attempt, whatever be the impulse of our heart and the appeal of our lips, we shall always be alone!"

In this gehenna of death, in these nostalgias of the past, in these trances of eternal isolation, may we not find some relinquishing of his philosophy? Certainly not, for these contradictions accentuate all the more the pain of existence and become a new source of suffering.

In any case, Maupassant's pessimism becomes logical in terminating in pity, like that of Schopenhauer. I know that I am running foul of certain admirers of the author who do not see any pity in his work, and it is understood that he is pitiless. But examine his stories more closely and you will find it revealed in every page, provided you go to the very bottom of the subject. That is where it exists naturally, almost against the desire of the writer, who does not arouse pity, nor teach it.

And, again, if it remains concealed from so many readers, it is because it has nothing to do with the humanitarian pity retailed by rhetoricians. It is philosophical and haughty, detached from any "anthropocentric" characteristics. It is universal suffering

that it covers. And to tell the truth, it is man, the hypocritical and cunning biped who has the least share in it. Maupassant is helpful to all those of his fellows who are tortured by physical suffering, social cruelty and the criminal dangers of life, but he pities them without caring for them, and his kindness makes distinctions.

On the other hand, the pessimist has all the tenderness of a Buddhist for animals, whom the gospels despise. When he pities the animals, who are worth more than ourselves, their executioners, when he pities the elementary existences, the plants and trees, those exquisite creations, he unbends and pours out his heart. The humbler the victim, the more generously does he espouse its suffering. His compassion is unbounded for all that lives in misery, that is buffeted about without understanding why, that "suffers and dies without a word." And if he mourned Miss Harriet, in this unaccustomed outburst of enthusiasm, it is because, like himself, the poor outcast cherished a similar love for "all things, all living beings."

Such appears to me to be Maupassant, the novelist, a storyteller, a writer, and a philosopher by turns. I will add one more trait; he was devoid of all spirit of criticism. When he essays to demolish a theory, one is amazed to find in this great, clear writer such lack of precision of thought, and such weak argument. He wrote the least eloquent and the most diffuse study of Flaubert, of "that old, dead master who had won his heart in a manner he could not explain." And, later, he shows the same weakness in setting forth, as in proving his theory, in his essay on the

"Evolution of the Novel," in the introduction to *Pierre et Jean*.

On the other hand, he possesses, above many others, a power of creating, hidden and inborn, which he exercises almost unconsciously.

Living, spontaneous and yet impassive he is the glorious agent of a mysterious function, through which he dominated literature and will continue to dominate it until the day when he desires to become literary.

He is as big as a tree. The author of "*Contemporains*" has written that Maupassant produced novels as an apple-tree yields apples. Never was a criticism more irrefutable.

On various occasions he was pleased with himself at the fertility that had developed in him amid those rich soils where a frenzy mounts to your brain through the senses of smell and sight. He even feels the influence of the seasons, and writes from Provence: "The sap is rising in me, it is true. The spring that I find just awakening here stirs all my plant nature, and causes me to produce those literary fruits that ripen in me, I know not how."

The "meteor" is at its apogee. All admire and glorify him. It is the period when Alexandre Dumas, fils, wrote to him thrice: "You are the only author whose books I await with impatience."

The day came, however, when this dominant impassivity became stirred, when the marble became flesh by contact with life and suffering. And the work of the romancer, begun by the novelist, became warm with a tenderness that is found for the first time in Mont Oriol...

But this sentimental outburst that astonished his admirers quickly dies down, for the following year, there appeared the sober *Pierre et Jean*, that admirable masterpiece of typical reality constructed with "human leaven," without any admixture of literary seasoning, or romantic combinations. The reader finds once more in his splendid integrity the master of yore.

But his heart has been touched, nevertheless. In the books that follow, his impassivity gives way like an edifice that has been slowly undermined. With an ever-growing emotion he relates under slight disguises all his physical distress, all the terrors of his mind and heart.

What is the secret of this evolution? The perusal of his works gives us a sufficient insight into it.

The Minstrel has been received in country houses; has been admitted to "the ladies' apartments." He has given up composing those hurried tales which made his fame, in order to construct beautiful romances of love and death... The story teller has forsaken rustics and peasants, the comrades of the "*Repues franches*," for the nobility and the wealthy. He who formerly frequented *Mme. Tellier's* establishment now praises *Michèle de Burne*.

Ysolde replaces *Macette*. In "*l'Ostel de Courtoisie*," *Maupassant* cultivates the usual abstractions of the modern Round Table:

Distinction and Moderation; Fervor and Delicacy. We see him inditing love sonnets and becoming a knight of chivalry. The

apologist of brutal pleasures has become a devotee of the "culte de la Dame."

Everywhere he was sought after, fêted, petted... But Maupassant never let himself be carried away by the tinsel of his prestige, nor the puerility of his enchantment. He despised at heart the puppets that moved about him as he had formerly despised his short stories and his petit bourgeois. "Ah," he cries, "I see them, their heads, their types, their hearts and their souls! What a clinic for a maker of books! The disgust with which this humanity inspires me makes me regret still more that I could not become what I should most have preferred—an Aristophanes, or a Rabelais." And he adds: "The world makes failures of all scientists, all artists, all intelligences that it monopolizes. It aborts all sincere sentiment by its manner of scattering our taste, our curiosity, our desire, the little spark of genius that burns in us."

Maupassant had to bend to the conditions of his new life. Being well bred, he respected, outwardly at least, the laws of artificiality and conventionality, and bowed before the idols of the cave he had entered...

If Maupassant never became the slave of worldly ideas, the creature of instinct that was part of his being acquired the refined tastes of the salons, and the manners of the highest civilization.

The novelist lived for some time in these enchanted and artificial surroundings, when, suddenly, his malady became aggravated. He was tortured by neuralgia, and by new mysterious darting pains. His suffering was so great that he longed to

scream. At the same time, his unhappy heart became softened and he became singularly emotional. His early faculties were intensified and refined, and in the overtension of his nerves through suffering his perceptions broadened, and he gained new ideas of things. This nobler personality Maupassant owes to those sufferings dear to great souls of whom Daudet speaks. This is what he says:

"If I could ever tell all, I should utter all the unexplored, repressed and sad thoughts that I feel in the depths of my being. I feel them swelling and poisoning me as bile does some people. But if I could one day give them utterance they would perhaps evaporate, and I might no longer have anything but a light, joyful heart. Who can say?

Thinking becomes an abominable torture when the brain is an open wound. I have so many wounds in my head that my ideas cannot stir without making me long to cry out. Why is it? Why is it? Dumas would say that my stomach is out of order. I believe, rather, that I have a poor, proud, shameful heart, that old human heart that people laugh at, but which is touched, and causes me suffering, and in my head as well; I have the mind of the Latin race, which is very worn out. And, again, there are days when I do not think thus, but when I suffer just the same; for I belong to the family of the thin-skinned. But then I do not tell it, I do not show it; I conceal it very well, I think.

Without any doubt, I am thought to be one of the most indifferent men in the world. I am sceptical, which is not the

same thing, sceptical because I am clear-sighted. And my eyes say to my heart, Hide yourself, old fellow, you are grotesque, and it hides itself."

This describes, in spite of reservation, the struggle between two conflicting minds, that of yesterday, and that of to-day. But this sensitiveness that Maupassant seeks to hide, is plain to all clear-seeing people.

He soon begins to be filled with regrets and forebodings. He has a desire to look into the unknown, and to search for the inexplicable.

He feels in himself that something is undergoing destruction; he is at times haunted by the idea of a double. He divines that his malady is on guard, ready to pounce on him. He seeks to escape it, but on the mountains, as beside the sea, nature, formerly his refuge, now terrifies him.

Then his heart expands. All the sentiments that he once reviled, he now desires to experience. He now exalts in his books the passion of love, the passion of sacrifice, the passion of suffering; he extols self-sacrifice, devotion, the irresistible joy of ever giving oneself up more and more. The hour is late, the night is at hand; weary of suffering any longer, he hurriedly begs for tenderness and remembrance.

Occasionally, the Maupassant of former days protests against the bondage of his new personality; he complains that he no longer feels absolutely as formerly that he has no contact with anything in the world, that sweet, strong sensation that gives

one strength. "How sensible I was," he says, "to wall myself round with indifference! If one did not feel, but only understand, without giving fragments of oneself to other beings! ... It is strange to suffer from the emptiness, the nothingness, of this life, when one is resigned, as I am, to nothingness. But, there, I cannot live without recollections, and recollections sadden me. I can have no hope, I know, but I feel obscurely and unceasingly the harm of this statement, and the regret that it should be so. And the attachments that I have in life act on my sensibility, which is too human, and not literary enough."

Maupassant's pity now takes a pathetic turn. He no longer despises, but holds out his hand to those unfortunates who, like himself, are tormented on the pathway without hope. The tears that he sees flow make him sad, and his heart bleeds at all the wounds he discovers. He does not inquire into the quality or origin of the misfortune. He sympathizes with all suffering; physical suffering, moral suffering, the suffering caused by treachery, the bitter twilight of wasted lives...

His mind has also become active. He desires to dabble in science. One day he studies the Arab mystics, Oriental legends, and the next, he studies the marine fauna, etc. His perceptions have never been so clear. His brain is in continual activity. "It is strange," he acknowledges, "what a different man I am becoming mentally from what I was formerly. I can see it as I watch myself thinking, discovering, and developing stories, weighing and analyzing the imaginary beings that float through

my imagination. I take the same enjoyment in certain dreams, certain exaltations of mind, as I formerly took in rowing like mad in the sunlight."

For the first time, his assurance as a writer wavers. As his last volumes show, he is endeavoring to transform, to renew himself. He acquires a desire to learn the secrets of obscure and precious hearts, to visit unknown races. He has lost his magnificent serenity...

As his malady began to take a more definite form, he turned his steps towards the south, only visiting Paris to see his physicians and publishers. In the old port of Antibes beyond the causeway of Cannes, his yacht, *Bel Ami*, which he cherished as a brother, lay at anchor and awaited him. He took it to the white cities of the Genoese Gulf, towards the palm trees of Hyères, or the red bay trees of Anthéor.

It was during one of these idle cruises on the open sea, outside of Agay and Saint-Raphael that he wrote "*Sur l'Eau*."

It was on the sacred sea of the old poets and philosophers, on the sea whose voice has rocked the thought of the world, that he cast into the shadow that long lament, so heartrending and sublime, that posterity will long shudder at the remembrance of it. The bitter strophes of this lament seem to be cadenced by the Mediterranean itself and to be in rhythm, like its melopoeia.

"*Sur l'Eau*" is the last Will and Testament, the general confession of Maupassant. To those who come after him he leaves the legacy of his highest thought; then he says farewell to

all that he loved, to dreams, to starlit nights, and to the breath of roses. "Sur l'Eau" is the book of modern disenchantment, the faithful mirror of the latest pessimism. The journal written on board ship, disconnected and hasty, but so noble in its disorder, has taken a place forever beside Werther and René, Manfred and Oberman.

He had for a long time, to his sorrow, seen his health failing under the attacks of an obscure malady which left him with a sense of the diminution of his powers and a gradual clouding of his intellect.

Symptoms of general paralysis set in, at first mistaken for neurotic disturbances. He changed greatly. Those who met him as I did, thin and shivering, on that rainy Sunday when they were celebrating the inauguration of Flaubert's monument at Rouen would scarcely have recognized him. I shall never forget, as long as I live, his face wasted by suffering, his large eyes with a distressed expression, which emitted dying gleams of protest against a cruel fate...

Maupassant retired to Cannes not far from his mother. He read medical books and, in spite of what they taught, persisted in attributing his sufferings to "rheumatism localized in the brain," contracted amid the fogs on the Seine...

Vainly he endeavored to work, he became gloomy and the idea of suicide impressed him more and more...

The months passed, however, and in June he was able to go to Divonne to take a cure. After a very characteristic attack

of optimism, he suddenly appeared at Champel and astonished everyone by his frightful eccentricities. One evening, however, he felt better, and read to the poet Dorchain the beginning of his novel "The Angelus," which he declared would be his masterpiece. When he had finished, he wept. "And we wept also," writes Dorchain, "at seeing all that now remained of genius, of tenderness and pity in this soul that would never again be capable of expressing itself so as to impress other minds... In his accent, in his language, in his tears, Maupassant had, I know not what, of a religious character, which exceeded his horror of life, and his sombre terror of annihilation."

At the end of September he again visited Cannes, but the fatal day predicted by the physician was at hand.

After several tragic weeks in which, from instinct, he made a desperate fight, on the 1st of January, 1892, he felt he was hopelessly vanquished, and in a moment of supreme clearness of intellect, like Gerard de Nerval, he attempted suicide. Less fortunate than the author of Sylvia, he was unsuccessful. But his mind, henceforth "indifferent to all unhappiness," had entered into eternal darkness.

He was taken back to Paris and placed in Dr. Meuriot's sanatorium, where, after eighteen months of mechanical existence, the "meteor" quietly passed away.

UNE VIE OR, THE HISTORY OF A HEART

CHAPTER I

THE HOME BY THE SEA

The weather was most distressing. It had rained all night. The roaring of the overflowing gutters filled the deserted streets, in which the houses, like sponges, absorbed the humidity, which penetrating to the interior, made the walls sweat from cellar to garret. Jeanne had left the convent the day before, free for all time, ready to seize all the joys of life, of which she had dreamed so long. She was afraid her father would not set out for the new home in bad weather, and for the hundredth time since daybreak she examined the horizon. Then she noticed that she had omitted to put her calendar in her travelling bag. She took from the wall the little card which bore in golden figures the date of the current year, 1819. Then she marked with a pencil the first four columns, drawing a line through the name of each saint up to the 2d of May, the day that she left the convent. A voice outside the door called "Jeannette." Jeanne replied, "Come in, papa."

And her father entered. Baron Simon-Jacques Le Perthuis des Vauds was a gentleman of the last century, eccentric and good. An enthusiastic disciple of Jean Jacques Rousseau, he had the tenderness of a lover for nature, in the fields, in the woods and in the animals. Of aristocratic birth, he hated instinctively the year 1793, but being a philosopher by temperament and liberal by education, he execrated tyranny with an inoffensive and declamatory hatred. His great strength and his great weakness was his kind-heartedness, which had not arms enough to caress, to give, to embrace; the benevolence of a god, that gave freely, without questioning; in a word, a kindness of inertia that became almost a vice. A man of theory, he thought out a plan of education for his daughter, to the end that she might become happy, good, upright and gentle. She had lived at home until the age of twelve, when, despite the tears of her mother, she was placed in the Convent of the Sacred Heart. He had kept her severely secluded, cloistered, in ignorance of the secrets of life. He wished the Sisters to restore her to him pure at seventeen years of age, so that he might imbue her mind with a sort of rational poetry, and by means of the fields, in the midst of the fruitful earth, unfold her soul, enlighten her ignorance through the aspect of love in nature, through the simple tenderness of the animals, through the placid laws of existence. She was leaving the convent radiant, full of the joy of life, ready for all the happiness, all the charming incidents which her mind had pictured in her idle hours and in the long, quiet nights. She was like a portrait

by Veronese with her fair, glossy hair, which seemed to cast a radiance on her skin, a skin with the faintest tinge of pink, softened by a light velvety down which could be perceived when the sun kissed her cheek. Her eyes were an opaque blue, like those of Dutch porcelain figures. She had a tiny mole on her left nostril and another on the right of her chin. She was tall, well developed, with willowy figure. Her clear voice sounded at times a little too sharp, but her frank, sincere laugh spread joy around her. Often, with a familiar gesture, she would raise her hands to her temples as if to arrange her hair.

She ran to her father and embraced him warmly. "Well, are we going to start?" she said. He smiled, shook his head and said, pointing toward the window, "How can we travel in such weather?" But she implored in a cajoling and tender manner, "Oh, papa, do let us start. It will clear up in the afternoon." "But your mother will never consent to it."

"Yes, I promise you that she will, I will arrange that." "If you succeed in persuading your mother, I am perfectly willing." In a few moments she returned from her mother's room, shouting in a voice that could be heard all through the house, "Papa, papa, mamma is willing.

Have the horses harnessed." The rain was not abating; one might almost have said that it was raining harder when the carriage drove up to the door. Jeanne was ready to step in when the baroness came downstairs, supported on one side by her husband and on the other by a tall housemaid, strong and

strapping as a boy. She was a Norman woman of the country of Caux, who looked at least twenty, although she was but eighteen at the most. She was treated by the family as a second daughter, for she was Jeanne's foster sister. Her name was Rosalie, and her chief duty lay in guiding the steps of her mistress, who had grown enormous in the last few years and also had an affection of the heart, which kept her complaining continually. The baroness, gasping from over-exertion, finally reached the doorstep of the old residence, looked at the court where the water was streaming and remarked: "It really is not wise." Her husband, always pleasant, replied: "It was you who desired it, Madame Adelaide." He always preceded her pompous name of Adelaide with the title madame with an air of half respectful mockery. Madame mounted with difficulty into the carriage, causing all the springs to bend. The baron sat beside her, while Jeanne and Rosalie were seated opposite, with their backs to the horses.

Ludivine, the cook, brought a heap of wraps to put over their knees and two baskets, which were placed under the seats; then she climbed on the box beside Father Simon, wrapping herself in a great rug which covered her completely. The porter and his wife came to bid them good-by as they closed the carriage door, taking the last orders about the trunks, which were to follow in a wagon. So they started. Father Simon, the coachman, with head bowed and back bent in the pouring rain, was completely covered by his box coat with its triple cape. The howling storm beat upon the carriage windows and inundated the highway.

They drove rapidly to the wharf and continued alongside the line of tall-masted vessels until they reached the boulevard of Mont Riboudet.

Then they crossed the meadows, where from time to time a drowned willow, its branches drooping limply, could be faintly distinguished through the mist of rain. No one spoke. Their minds themselves seemed to be saturated with moisture like the earth.

The baroness leaned her head against the cushions and closed her eyes.

The baron looked out with mournful eyes at the monotonous and drenched landscape. Rosalie, with a parcel on her knee, was dreaming in the dull reverie of a peasant. But Jeanne, under this downpour, felt herself revive like a plant that has been shut up and has just been restored to the air, and so great was her joy that, like foliage, it sheltered her heart from sadness. Although she did not speak, she longed to burst out singing, to reach out her hands to catch the rain that she might drink it. She enjoyed to the full being carried along rapidly by the horses, enjoyed gazing at the desolate landscape and feeling herself under shelter amid this general inundation. Beneath the pelting rain the gleaming backs of the two horses emitted a warm steam.

Little by little the baroness fell asleep, and presently began to snore sonorously. Her husband leaned over and placed in her hands a little leather pocketbook.

This awakened her, and she looked at the pocket-book with

the stupid, sleepy look of one suddenly aroused. It fell off her lap and sprang open and gold and bank bills were scattered on the floor of the carriage. This roused her completely, and Jeanne gave vent to her mirth in a merry peal of girlish laughter.

The baron picked up the money and placed it on her knees. "This, my dear," he said, "is all that is left of my farm at Eletot. I have sold it-so as to be able to repair the 'Poplars,' where we shall often live in the future."

She counted six thousand four hundred francs and quietly put them in her pocket. This was the ninth of thirty-one farms that they had inherited which they had sold in this way. Nevertheless they still possessed about twenty thousand livres income annually in land rentals, which, with proper care, would have yielded about thirty thousand francs a year.

Living simply as they did, this income would have sufficed had there not been a bottomless hole always open in their house-kind-hearted generosity. It dried up the money in their hands as the sun dries the water in marshes. It flowed, fled, disappeared. How? No one knew.

Frequently one would say to the other, "I don't know how it happens, but I have spent one hundred francs to-day, and I have bought nothing of any consequence." This faculty of giving was, however, one of the greatest pleasures of their life, and they all agreed on this point in a superb and touching manner.

Jeanne asked her father, "Is it beautiful now, my castle?" The baron replied, "You shall see, my little girl."

The storm began to abate. The vault of clouds seemed to rise and heighten and suddenly, through a rift, a long ray of sunshine fell upon the fields, and presently the clouds separated, showing the blue firmament, and then, like the tearing of a veil, the opening grew larger and the beautiful azure sky, clear and fathomless, spread over the world. A fresh and gentle breeze passed over the earth like a happy sigh, and as they passed beside gardens or woods they heard occasionally the bright chirp of a bird as he dried his wings.

Evening was approaching. Everyone in the carriage was asleep except Jeanne. They stopped to rest and feed the horses. The sun had set. In the distance bells were heard. They passed a little village as the inhabitants were lighting their lamps, and the sky became also illuminated by myriads of stars. Suddenly they saw behind a hill, through the branches of the fir trees, the moon rising, red and full as if it were torpid with sleep.

The air was so soft that the windows were not closed. Jeanne, exhausted with dreams and happy visions, was now asleep. Finally they stopped. Some men and women were standing before the carriage door with lanterns in their hands. They had arrived. Jeanne, suddenly awakened, was the first to jump out. Her father and Rosalie had practically to carry the baroness, who was groaning and continually repeating in a weak little voice, "Oh, my God, my poor children!" She refused all offers of refreshment, but went to bed and immediately fell asleep.

Jeanne and her father, the baron, took supper together. They

were in perfect sympathy with each other. Later, seized with a childish joy, they started on a tour of inspection through the restored manor. It was one of those high and vast Norman residences that comprise both farmhouse and castle, built of white stone which had turned gray, large enough to contain a whole race of people.

An immense hall divided the house from front to rear and a staircase went up at either side of the entrance, meeting in a bridge on the first floor. The huge drawing-room was on the ground floor to the right and was hung with tapestries representing birds and foliage. All the furniture was covered with fine needlework tapestry illustrating La Fontaine's fables, and Jeanne was delighted at finding a chair she had loved as a child, which pictured the story of "The Fox and the Stork."

Beside the drawing-room were the library, full of old books, and two unused rooms; at the left was the dining-room, the laundry, the kitchen, etc.

A corridor divided the whole first floor, the doors of ten rooms opening into it. At the end, on the right, was Jeanne's room. She and her father went in. He had had it all newly done over, using the furniture and draperies that had been in the storeroom.

There were some very old Flemish tapestries, with their peculiar looking figures. At sight of her bed, the young girl uttered a scream of joy. Four large birds carved in oak, black from age and highly polished, bore up the bed and seemed to

be its protectors. On the sides were carved two wide garlands of flowers and fruit, and four finely fluted columns, terminating in Corinthian capitals, supported a cornice of cupids with roses intertwined. The tester and the coverlet were of antique blue silk, embroidered in gold fleur de lys. When Jeanne had sufficiently admired it, she lifted up the candle to examine the tapestries and the allegories they represented. They were mostly conventional subjects, but the last hanging represented a drama. Near a rabbit, which was still nibbling, a young man lay stretched out, apparently dead. A young girl, gazing at him, was plunging a sword into her bosom, and the fruit of the tree had turned black. Jeanne gave up trying to divine the meaning underlying this picture, when she saw in the corner a tiny little animal which the rabbit, had he lived, could have swallowed like a blade of grass; and yet it was a lion. Then she recognized the story of "Pyramus and Thisbe," and though she smiled at the simplicity of the design, she felt happy to have in her room this love adventure which would continually speak to her of her cherished hopes, and every night this legendary love would hover about her dreams.

It struck eleven and the baron kissed Jeanne goodnight and retired to his room. Before retiring, Jeanne cast a last glance round her room and then regretfully extinguished the candle. Through her window she could see the bright moonlight bathing the trees and the wonderful landscape. Presently she arose, opened a window and looked out. The night was so clear that one could see as plainly as by daylight. She looked across the park

with its two long avenues of very tall poplars that gave its name to the château and separated it from the two farms that belonged to it, one occupied by the Couillard family, the other by the Martins. Beyond the enclosure stretched a long, uncultivated plain, thickly overgrown with rushes, where the breeze whistled day and night. The land ended abruptly in a steep white cliff three hundred feet high, with its base in the ocean waves.

Jeanne looked out over the long, undulating surface that seemed to slumber beneath the heavens. All the fragrance of the earth was in the night air. The odor of jasmine rose from the lower windows, and light whiffs of briny air and of seaweed were wafted from the ocean.

Merely to breathe was enough for Jeanne, and the restful calm of the country was like a soothing bath. She felt as though her heart was expanding and she began dreaming of love. What was it? She did not know. She only knew that she would adore *him* with all her soul and that he would cherish her with all his strength. They would walk hand in hand on nights like this, hearing the beating of their hearts, mingling their love with the sweet simplicity of the summer nights in such close communion of thought that by the sole power of their tenderness they would easily penetrate each other's most secret thoughts. This would continue forever in the calm of an enduring affection. It seemed to her that she felt *him* there beside her.

And an unusual sensation came over her. She remained long musing thus, when suddenly she thought she heard a footstep

behind the house. "If it were *he*." But it passed on and she felt as if she had been deceived. The air became cooler. The day broke. Slowly bursting aside the gleaming clouds, touching with fire the trees, the plains, the ocean, all the horizon, the great flaming orb of the sun appeared.

Jeanne felt herself becoming mad with happiness. A delirious joy, an infinite tenderness at the splendor of nature overcame her fluttering heart. It was *her* sun, *her* dawn! The beginning of *her* life! Thoroughly fatigued at last, she flung herself down and slept till her father called her at eight o'clock. He walked into the room and proposed to show her the improvements of the castle, of *her* castle. The road, called the parish road, connecting the farms, joined the high road between Havre and Fécamp, a mile and a half further on.

Jeanne and the baron inspected everything and returned home for breakfast. When the meal was over, as the baroness had decided that she would rest, the baron proposed to Jeanne that they should go down to Yport. They started, and passing through the hamlet of Etouvent, where the poplars were, and going through the wooded slope by a winding valley leading down to the sea, they presently perceived the village of Yport. Women sat in their doorways mending linen; brown fish-nets were hanging against the doors of the huts, where an entire family lived in one room. It was a typical little French fishing village, with all its concomitant odors. To Jeanne it was all like a scene in a play. On turning a corner they saw before them the limitless blue ocean.

They bought a brill from a fisherman and another sailor offered to take them out sailing, repeating his name, "Lastique, Joséphin Lastique," several times, that they might not forget it, and the baron promised to remember. They walked home, chattering like two children, carrying the big fish between them, Jeanne having pushed her father's walking cane through its gills.

CHAPTER II

HAPPY DAYS

A delightful life commenced for Jeanne, a life in the open air. She wandered along the roads, or into the little winding valleys, their sides covered with a fleece of gorse blossoms, the strong sweet odor of which intoxicated her like the bouquet of wine, while the distant sound of the waves rolling on the beach seemed like a billow rocking her spirit.

A love of solitude came upon her in the sweet freshness of this landscape and in the calm of the rounded horizon, and she would remain sitting so long on the hill tops that the wild rabbits would bound by her feet.

She planted memories everywhere, as seeds are cast upon the earth, memories whose roots hold till death. It seemed to Jeanne that she was casting a little of her heart into every fold of these valleys. She became infatuated with sea bathing. When she was well out from shore, she would float on her back, her arms crossed, her eyes lost in the profound blue of the sky which was cleft by the flight of a swallow, or the white silhouette of a seabird.

After these excursions she invariably came back to the castle pale with hunger, but light, alert, a smile on her lips and her eyes

sparkling with happiness.

The baron on his part was planning great agricultural enterprises.

Occasionally, also, he went out to sea with the sailors of Yport. On several occasions he went fishing for mackerel and, again, by moonlight, he would haul in the nets laid the night before. He loved to hear the masts creak, to breathe in the fresh and whistling gusts of wind that arose during the night; and after having tacked a long time to find the buoys, guiding himself by a peak of rocks, the roof of a belfry or the Fécamp lighthouse, he delighted to remain motionless beneath the first gleams of the rising sun which made the slimy backs of the large fan-shaped rays and the fat bellies of the turbot's glisten on the deck of the boat.

At each meal he gave an enthusiastic account of his expeditions, and the baroness in her turn told how many times she had walked down the main avenue of poplars.

As she had been advised to take exercise she made a business of walking, beginning as soon as the air grew warm. Leaning upon Rosalie's arm and dragging her left foot, which was rather heavier than the right, she wandered interminably up and down from the house to the edge of the wood, sitting down for five minutes at either end.

The walking was resumed in the afternoon. A physician, consulted ten years before, had spoken of hypertrophy because she had suffered from suffocation. Ever since, this word had been

used to describe the ailment of the baroness. The baron would say "my wife's hypertrophy" and Jeanne "mamma's hypertrophy" as they would have spoken of her hat, her dress, or her umbrella. She had been very pretty in her youth and slim as a reed. Now she had grown older, stouter, but she still remained poetical, having always retained the impression of "Corinne," which she had read as a girl. She read all the sentimental love stories it was possible to collect, and her thoughts wandered among tender adventures in which she always figured as the heroine. Her new home was infinitely pleasing to her because it formed such a beautiful framework for the romance of her soul, the surrounding woods, the waste land, and the proximity of the ocean recalling to her mind the novels of Sir Walter Scott, which she had been devouring for some months. On rainy days she remained shut up in her room, sending Rosalie in a special manner for the drawer containing her "souvenirs," which meant to the baroness all her old private and family letters.

Occasionally, Jeanne replaced Rosalie in the walks with her mother, and she listened eagerly to the tales of the latter's childhood. The young girl saw herself in all these romantic stories, and was astonished at the similarity of ideas and desires; each heart imagines itself to have been the first to tremble at those very sensations that awakened the hearts of the first beings, and that will awaken the hearts of the last.

One afternoon as the baroness and Jeanne were resting on the beach at the end of the walk, a stout priest who was moving

in their direction greeted them with a bow, while still at a distance. He bowed when within three feet and, assuming a smiling air, cried: "Well, Madame la Baronne, how are you?" It was the village priest. The baroness seldom went to church, though she liked priests, from a sort of religious instinct peculiar to women. She had, in fact, entirely forgotten the Abbé Picot, her priest, and blushed as she saw him. She made apologies for not having prepared for his visit, but the good man was not at all embarrassed. He looked at Jeanne, complimented her on her appearance and sat down, placing his three-cornered hat on his knees. He was very stout, very red, and perspired profusely. He drew from his pocket every moment an enormous checked handkerchief and passed it over his face and neck, but hardly was the task completed when necessity forced him to repeat the process. He was a typical country priest, talkative and kindly.

Presently the baron appeared. He was very friendly to the abbé and invited him to dinner. The priest was well versed in the art of being pleasant, thanks to the unconscious astuteness which the guiding of souls gives to the most mediocre of men who are called by the chance of events to exercise a power over their fellows. Toward dessert he became quite merry, with the gaiety that follows a pleasant meal, and as if struck by an idea he said: "I have a new parishioner whom I must present to you, Monsieur le Vicomte de Lamare." The baroness, who was at home in heraldry, inquired if he was of the family of Lamares of Eure. The priest answered, "Yes, madame, he is

the son of Vicomte Jean de Lamare, who died last year." After this, the baroness, who loved the nobility above all other things, inquired the history of the young vicomte. He had paid his father's debts, sold the family castle, made his home on one of the three farms which he owned in the town of Etouvent. These estates brought him in an income of five or six thousand livres. The vicomte was economical and lived in this modest manner for two or three years, so that he might save enough to cut a figure in society, and to marry advantageously, without contracting debts or mortgaging his farms. The priest added, "He is a very charming young man, so steady and quiet, though there is very little to amuse him in the country." The baron said, "Bring him in to see us, Monsieur l'Abbé, it will be a distraction for him occasionally." After the coffee the baron and the priest took a turn about the grounds and then returned to say good-night to the ladies.

CHAPTER III

M. DE LAMARE

The following Sunday the baroness and Jeanne went to mass, prompted by a feeling of respect for their pastor, and after service waited to see the priest and invite him to luncheon the following Thursday. He came out of the sacristy leaning familiarly on the arm of a tall young man.

As soon as he perceived the ladies, he exclaimed:

"How fortunate! Allow me, baroness and Mlle. Jeanne, to present to you your neighbor, M. le Vicomte de Lamare."

The vicomte said he had long desired to make their acquaintance, and began to converse in a well-bred manner. He had a face of which women dream and that men dislike. His black, wavy hair shaded a smooth, sunburnt forehead, and two large straight eyebrows, that looked almost artificial, cast a deep and tender shadow over his dark eyes, the whites of which had a bluish tinge.

His long, thick eyelashes accentuated the passionate eloquence of his expression which wrought havoc in the drawing-rooms of society, and made peasant girls carrying baskets turn round to look at him. The languorous fascination of his glance impressed one with the depth of his thoughts and lent weight

to his slightest words. His beard, fine and glossy, concealed a somewhat heavy jaw.

Two days later, M. de Lamare made his first call, just as they were discussing the best place for a new rustic bench. The vicomte was consulted and agreed with the baroness, who differed from her husband.

M. de Lamare expatiated on the picturesqueness of the country and from time to time, as if by chance, his eyes met those of Jeanne, and she felt a strange sensation at the quickly averted glance which betrayed tender admiration and an awakened sympathy.

M. de Lamare's father, who had died the preceding year, had known an intimate friend of the baroness's father, M. Cultaux, and this fact led to an endless conversation about family, relations, dates, etc., and names heard in her childhood were recalled, and led to reminiscences.

The baron, whose nature was rather uncultivated, and whose beliefs and prejudices were not those of his class, knew little about the neighboring families, and inquired about them from the vicomte, who responded:

"Oh, there are very few of the nobility in the district," just as he might have said, "there are very few rabbits on the hills," and he began to particularize: There was the Marquis de Coutelier, a sort of leader of Norman aristocracy, Vicomte and Vicomtesse de Briseville, people of excellent stock, but living to themselves, and the Comte de Fourville, a kind of ogre, who was said to have

made his wife die of sorrow, and who lived as a huntsman in his château of La Vrillette, built on a pond. There were a few parvenus among them who had bought properties here and there, but the vicomte did not know them.

As he left, his last glance was for Jeanne, as if it were a special tender and cordial farewell. The baroness was delighted with him, and the baron said: "Yes, indeed, he is a gentleman." And he was invited to dinner the following week, and from that time came regularly.

He generally arrived about four o'clock in the afternoon, went to join the baroness in "her avenue," and offered her his arm while she took her "exercise," as she called her daily walks. When Jeanne was at home she would walk on the other side of her mother, supporting her, and all three would walk slowly back and forth from one end of the avenue to the other. He seldom addressed Jeanne directly, but his eye frequently met hers.

He went to Yport several times with Jeanne and the baron. One evening, when they were on the beach, Père Lastique accosted him, and without removing his pipe, the absence of which would possibly have been more remarkable than the loss of his nose, he said:

"With this wind, m'sieu le baron, we could easily go to Étretat and back to-morrow."

Jeanne clasped her hands imploringly:

"Oh, papa, let us do it!"

The baron turned to M. de Lamare:

"Will you join us, vicomte? We can take breakfast down there."

And the matter was decided at once. From daybreak Jeanne was up and waiting for her father, who dressed more slowly. They walked in the dew across the level and then through the wood vibrant with the singing of birds. The vicomte and Père Lastique were seated on a capstan.

Two other sailors helped to shove off the boat from shore, which was not easy on the shingly beach. Once the boat was afloat, they all took their seats, and the two sailors who remained on shore shoved it off.

A light, steady breeze was blowing from the ocean and they hoisted the sail, veered a little, and then sailed along smoothly with scarcely any motion. To landward the high cliff at the right cast a shadow on the water at its base, and patches of sunlit grass here and there varied its monotonous whiteness. Yonder, behind them, brown sails were coming out of the white harbor of Fécamp, and ahead of them they saw a rock of curious shape, rounded, with gaps in it looking something like an immense elephant with its trunk in the water; it was the little port of Étretat.

Jeanne, a little dizzy from the motion of the waves, held the side of the boat with one hand as she looked out into the distance. It seemed to her as if only three things in the world were really beautiful:

light, space, water.

No one spoke. Père Lastique, who was at the tiller, took a pull

every now and then from a bottle hidden under the seat; and he smoked a short pipe which seemed inextinguishable, although he never seemed to relight it or refill it.

The baron, seated in the bow looked after the sail. Jeanne and the vicomte seemed a little embarrassed at being seated side by side. Some unknown power seemed to make their glances meet whenever they raised their eyes; between them there existed already that subtle and vague sympathy which arises so rapidly between two young people when the young man is good looking and the girl is pretty. They were happy in each other's society, perhaps because they were thinking of each other. The rising sun was beginning to pierce through the slight mist, and as its beams grew stronger, they were reflected on the smooth surface of the sea as in a mirror.

"How beautiful!" murmured Jeanne, with emotion.

"Beautiful indeed!" answered the vicomte. The serene beauty of the morning awakened an echo in their hearts.

And all at once they saw the great arches of Étretat, like two supports of a cliff standing in the sea high enough for vessels to pass under them; while a sharp-pointed white rock rose in front of the first arch. They reached shore, and the baron got out first to make fast the boat, while the vicomte lifted Jeanne ashore so that she should not wet her feet. Then they walked up the shingly beach side by side, and they overheard Père Lastique say to the baron, "My! but they would make a pretty couple!"

They took breakfast in a little inn near the beach, and while

the ocean had lulled their thoughts and made them silent, the breakfast table had the opposite effect, and they chattered like children on a vacation. The slightest thing gave rise to laughter.

Père Lastique, on taking his place at table, carefully hid his lighted pipe in his cap. That made them laugh. A fly, attracted no doubt by his red nose, persistently alighted on it, and each time it did so they burst into laughter. Finally the old man could stand it no longer, and murmured: "It is devilishly persistent!" whereupon Jeanne and the vicomte laughed till they cried.

After breakfast Jeanne suggested that they should take a walk. The vicomte rose, but the baron preferred to bask in the sun on the beach.

"Go on, my children, you will find me here in an hour."

They walked straight ahead of them, passing by several cottages and finally by a small château resembling a large farm, and found themselves in an open valley that extended for some distance. They now had a wild longing to run at large in the fields. Jeanne seemed to have a humming in her ears from all the new and rapidly changing sensations she had experienced. The burning rays of the sun fell on them. On both sides of the road the crops were bending over from the heat. The grasshoppers, as numerous as the blades of grass, were uttering their thin, shrill cry.

Perceiving a wood a little further on to the right, they walked over to it. They saw a narrow path between two hedges shaded by tall trees which shut out the sun. A sort of moist freshness in the

air was perceptible, giving them a sensation of chilliness. There was no grass, owing to the lack of sunlight, but the ground was covered with a carpet of moss.

"See, we can sit down there a little while," she said.

They sat down and looked about them at the numerous forms of life that were in the air and on the ground at their feet, for a ray of sunlight penetrating the dense foliage brought them into its light.

"How beautiful it is here! How lovely it is in the country! There are moments when I should like to be a fly or a butterfly and hide in the flowers," said Jeanne with emotion.

They spoke in low tones as one does in exchanging confidences, telling of their daily lives and of their tastes, and declaring that they were already disgusted with the world, tired of its useless monotony; it was always the same thing; there was no truth, no sincerity in it.

The world! She would gladly have made its acquaintance; but she felt convinced beforehand that it was not equal to a country life, and the more their hearts seemed to be in sympathy, the more ceremonious they became, the more frequently their glances met and blended smiling; and it seemed that a new feeling of benevolence was awakened in them, a wider affection, an interest in a thousand things of which they had never hitherto thought.

They wended their way back, but the baron had already set off on foot for the *Chambre aux Demoiselles*, a grotto in a cleft

at the summit of one of the cliffs, and they waited for him at the inn. He did not return until five in the evening after a long walk along the cliffs.

They got into the boat, started off smoothly with the wind at their backs, scarcely seeming to make any headway. The breeze was irregular, at one moment filling the sail and then letting it flap idly along the mast. The sea seemed opaque and lifeless, and the sun was slowly approaching the horizon. The lulling motion of the sea had made them silent again. Presently Jeanne said, "How I should love to travel!"

"Yes, but it is tiresome to travel alone; there should be at least two, to exchange ideas," answered the vicomte. She reflected a moment.

"That is true-I like to walk alone, however-how pleasant it is to dream all alone-" He gazed at her intently.

"Two can dream as well as one."

She lowered her eyes. Was it a hint? Possibly. She looked out at the horizon as if to discover something beyond it, and then said slowly:

"I should like to go to Italy-and Greece-ah, yes, Greece-and to Corsica-it must be so wild and so beautiful!"

He preferred Switzerland on account of its chalets and its lakes.

"No," said she, "I like new countries like Corsica, or very old countries full of souvenirs, like Greece. It must be delightful to find the traces of those peoples whose history we have

known since childhood, to see places where great deeds were accomplished."

The vicomte, less enthusiastic, exclaimed: "As for me, England attracts me very much; there is so much to be learned there."

Then they talked about the world in general, discussing the attractions of each country from the poles to the equator, enthusing over imaginary scenes and the peculiar manners of certain peoples like the Chinese and the Lapps; but they arrived at the conclusion that the most beautiful country in the world was France, with its temperate climate, cool in summer, mild in winter, its rich soil, its green forests, its worship of the fine arts which existed nowhere else since the glorious centuries of Athens. Then they were silent. The setting sun left a wide dazzling train of light which extended from the horizon to the edge of their boat. The wind subsided, the ripples disappeared, and the motionless sail was red in the light of the dying day. A limitless calm seemed to settle down on space and make a silence amid this conjunction of elements; and by degrees the sun slowly sank into the ocean.

Then a fresh breeze seemed to arise, a little shiver went over the surface of the water, as if the engulfed orb cast a sigh of satisfaction across the world. The twilight was short, night fell with its myriad stars. Père Lastique took the oars, and they saw that the sea was phosphorescent. Jeanne and the vicomte, side by side, watched the fitful gleams in the wake of the boat. They

were hardly thinking, but simply gazing vaguely, breathing in the beauty of the evening in a state of delicious contentment; Jeanne had one hand on the seat and her neighbor's finger touched it as if by accident; she did not move;

she was surprised, happy, though embarrassed at this slight contact.

When she reached home that evening and went to her room, she felt strangely disturbed, and so affected that the slightest thing impelled her to weep. She looked at her clock, imagining that the little bee on the pendulum was beating like a heart, the heart of a friend; that it was aware of her whole life, that with its quick, regular tickings it would accompany her whole life; and she stopped the golden fly to press a kiss on its wings. She would have kissed anything, no matter what. She remembered having hidden one of her old dolls of former days at the bottom of a drawer; she looked for it, took it out, and was delighted to see it again, as people are to see loved friends; and pressing it to her heart, she covered its painted cheeks and curly wig with kisses. And as she held it in her arms, she thought:

Can *he* be the husband promised through a thousand secret voices, whom a superlatively good Providence had thus thrown across her path? Was he, indeed, the being created for her—the being to whom she would devote her existence? Were they the two predestined beings whose affection, blending in one, would beget love?

She did not as yet feel that tumultuous emotion, that mad

enchantment, those deep stirrings which she thought were essential to the tender passion; but it seemed to her she was beginning to fall in love, for she sometimes felt a sudden faintness when she thought of him, and she thought of him incessantly. His presence stirred her heart; she blushed and grew pale when their eyes met, and trembled at the sound of his voice.

From day to day the longing for love increased. She consulted the marguerites, the clouds, and coins which she tossed in the air.

One day her father said to her:

"Make yourself look pretty to-morrow morning."

"Why, papa?"

"That is a secret," he replied.

And when she came downstairs the following morning, looking fresh and sweet in a pretty light dress, she found the drawing-room table covered with boxes of bonbons, and on a chair an immense bouquet.

A covered wagon drove into the courtyard bearing the inscription, "Lerat, Confectioner, Fécamp; Wedding Breakfasts," and from the back of the wagon Ludivine and a kitchen helper were taking out large flat baskets which emitted an appetizing odor.

The Vicomte de Lamare appeared on the scene, his trousers were strapped down under his dainty boots of patent leather, which made his feet appear smaller. His long frock coat, tight at the waist line, was open at the bosom showing the lace of his ruffle, and a fine neckcloth wound several times round his neck

obliged him to hold erect his handsome brown head, with its air of serious distinction. Jeanne, in astonishment, looked at him as though she had never seen him before.

She thought he looked the grand seigneur from his head to his feet.

He bowed and said, smiling:

"Well, comrade, are you ready?"

"But what is it? What is going on?" she stammered.

"You will know presently," said the baron.

The carriage drove up to the door, and Madame Adelaide, in festal array, descended the staircase, leaning on the arm of Rosalie, who was so much affected at the sight of M. de Lamare's elegant appearance that the baron whispered:

"I say, vicomte, I think our maid admires you."

The vicomte blushed up to his ears, pretended not to have heard and, taking up the enormous bouquet, handed it to Jeanne. She accepted it, more astonished than ever. They all four got into the carriage, and Ludivine, who brought a cup of bouillon to the baroness to sustain her strength, said: "Truly, madame, one would say it was a wedding!"

They alighted as soon as they entered Yport, and as they walked through the village the sailors, in their new clothes, still showing the creases, came out of their homes, and shaking hands with the baron, followed the party as if it were a procession. The vicomte, who had offered his arm to Jeanne, walked with her at the head.

When they reached the church they stopped, and an acolyte appeared holding upright the large silver crucifix, followed by another boy in red and white, who bore a chalice containing holy water.

Then came three old cantors, one of them limping; then the trumpet ("serpent"), and last, the curé with his gold embroidered stole. He smiled and nodded a greeting; then, with his eyes half closed, his lips moving in prayer, his beretta well over his forehead, he followed his surpliced bodyguard, walking in the direction of the sea.

On the beach a crowd was standing around a new boat wreathed with flowers. Its mast, sail and ropes were covered with long streamers of ribbon that floated in the breeze, and the name, "Jeanne," was painted in gold letters on the stern.

Père Lastique, the proprietor of this boat, built with the baron's money, advanced to meet the procession. All the men, simultaneously, took off their hats, and a row of pious persons wearing long black cloaks falling in large folds from their shoulders, knelt down in a circle at sight of the crucifix.

The curé walked, with an acolyte on either side of him, to one end of the boat, while at the other end, the three old cantors, in their white surplices, with a serious air and their eyes fixed on the psalter, sang at the top of their voices in the clear morning air.

Each time they stopped to take breath, the "serpent" continued its bellowing alone, and as he puffed out his cheeks the musician's little gray eyes disappeared, and the skin of his forehead and neck

seemed to distend.

The motionless, transparent sea seemed to be taking part meditatively in the baptism of this boat, rolling its tiny waves, no higher than a finger, with the faint sound of a rake on the shingle. And the big white gulls, with their wings unfurled, circled about in the blue heavens, flying off and then coming back in a curve above the heads of the kneeling crowd, as if to see what they were doing.

The singing ceased after an Amen that lasted five minutes; and the priest, in an unctuous voice, murmured some Latin words, of which one could hear only the sonorous endings. He then walked round the boat, sprinkling it with holy water, and next began to murmur the "Oremus," standing alongside the boat opposite the sponsors, who remained motionless, hand in hand.

The vicomte had the usual grave expression on his handsome face, but Jeanne, choking with a sudden emotion, and on the verge of fainting, began to tremble so violently that her teeth chattered. The dream that had haunted her for some time was suddenly beginning, as if in a kind of hallucination, to take the appearance of reality. They had spoken of a wedding, a priest was present, blessing them; men in surplices were singing psalms; was it not she whom they were giving in marriage?

Did her fingers send out an electric shock, did the emotion of her heart follow the course of her veins until it reached the heart of her companion? Did he understand, did he guess, was he, like herself, pervaded by a sort of intoxication of love? Or else, did he

know by experience, alone, that no woman could resist him? She suddenly noticed that he was squeezing her hand, gently at first, and then tighter, tighter, till he almost crushed it. And without moving a muscle of his face, without anyone perceiving it, he said-yes, he certainly said:

"Oh, Jeanne, if you would consent, this would be our betrothal."

She lowered her head very slowly, perhaps meaning it for "yes." And the priest, who was still sprinkling the holy water, sprinkled some on their fingers.

The ceremony was over. The women rose. The return was unceremonious.

The crucifix had lost its dignity in the hands of the acolyte, who walked rapidly, the crucifix swaying to right and left, or bending forward as though it would fall. The priest, who was not praying now, walked hurriedly behind them; the cantors and the musician with the "serpent" had disappeared by a narrow street, so as to get off their surplices without delay; and the sailors hurried along in groups. One thought prompted their haste, and made their mouths water.

A good breakfast was awaiting them at "The Poplars."

The large table was set in the courtyard, under the apple trees.

Sixty people sat down to table, sailors and peasants. The baroness in the middle, with a priest at either side of her, one from Yport, and the other belonging to "The Poplars." The baron seated opposite her on the other side of the table, the mayor on

one side of him, and his wife, a thin peasant woman, already aging, who kept smiling and bowing to all around her, on the other.

Jeanne, seated beside her co-sponsor, was in a sea of happiness. She saw nothing, knew nothing, and remained silent, her mind bewildered with joy. Presently she said:

"What is your Christian name?"

"Julien," he replied. "Did you not know?"

But she made no reply, thinking to herself:

"How often I shall repeat that name!"

When the feast was over, the courtyard was given up to the sailors, and the others went over to the other side of the château. The baroness began to take her exercise, leaning on the arm of the baron and accompanied by the two priests. Jeanne and Julien went toward the wood and walked along one of the mossy paths. Suddenly seizing her hands, the vicomte said:

"Tell me, will you be my wife?"

She lowered her head, and as he stammered: "Answer me, I implore you!"

she raised her eyes to his timidly, and he read his answer there.

CHAPTER IV

MARRIAGE AND DISILLUSION

The baron, one morning, entered Jeanne's room before she was up, and sitting down at the foot of her bed, said:

"M. le Vicomte de Lamare has asked us for your hand in marriage."

She wanted to hide her face under the sheets.

Her father continued:

"We have postponed our answer for the present."

She gasped, choking with emotion. At the end of a minute the baron, smiling, added:

"We did not wish to do anything without consulting you. Your mother and I are not opposed to this marriage, but we would not seek to influence you. You are much richer than he is; but, when it is a question of the happiness of a life, one should not think too much about money. He has no relations left. If you marry him, then, it would be as if a son should come into our family; if it were anyone else, it would be you, our daughter, who would go among strangers. The young fellow pleases us. Would he please you?"

She stammered, blushing up to the roots of her hair:

"I am willing, papa."

And the father, looking into her eyes and still smiling, murmured:

"I half suspected it, young lady."

She lived till evening in a condition of exhilaration, not knowing what she was doing, mechanically thinking of one thing by mistake for another, and with a feeling of weariness, although she had not walked at all.

Toward six o'clock, as she was sitting with her mother under the plane tree, the vicomte appeared.

Jeanne's heart began to throb wildly. The young man approached them apparently without any emotion. When he was close beside them, he took the baroness' hand and kissed her fingers, then raising to his lips the trembling hand of the young girl, he imprinted upon it a long, tender and grateful kiss.

And the radiant season of betrothal commenced. They would chat together alone in the corner of the parlor, or else seated on the moss at the end of the wood overlooking the plain. Sometimes they walked in Little Mother's Avenue; he, talking of the future, she, with her eyes cast down, looking at the dusty footprints of the baroness.

Once the matter was decided, they desired to waste no time in preliminaries. It was, therefore, decided that the ceremony should take place in six weeks, on the fifteenth of August; and that the bride and groom should set out immediately on their wedding journey.

Jeanne, on being consulted as to which country she would like

to visit, decided on Corsica where they could be more alone than in the cities of Italy.

They awaited the moment appointed for their marriage without too great impatience, but enfolded, lost in a delicious affection, expressed in the exquisite charm of insignificant caresses, pressure of hands, long passionate glances in which their souls seemed to blend; and, vaguely tortured by an uncertain longing for they knew not what.

They decided to invite no one to the wedding except Aunt Lison, the baron's sister, who boarded in a convent at Versailles. After the death of their father, the baroness wished to keep her sister with her. But the old maid, possessed by the idea that she was in every one's way, was useless, and a nuisance, retired into one of those religious houses that rent apartments to people that live a sad and lonely existence. She came from time to time to pass a month or two with her family.

She was a little woman of few words, who always kept in the background, appeared only at mealtimes, and then retired to her room where she remained shut in.

She looked like a kind old lady, though she was only forty-two, and had a sad, gentle expression. She was never made much of by her family as a child, being neither pretty nor boisterous, she was never petted, and she would stay quietly and gently in a corner. She had been neglected ever since. As a young girl nobody paid any attention to her. She was something like a shadow, or a familiar object, a living piece of furniture that one is accustomed

to see every day, but about which one does not trouble oneself.

Her sister, from long habit, looked upon her as a failure, an altogether insignificant being. They treated her with careless familiarity which concealed a sort of contemptuous kindness. She called herself Lise, and seemed embarrassed at this frivolous youthful name. When they saw that she probably would not marry, they changed it from Lise to Lison, and since Jeanne's birth, she had become "Aunt Lison," a poor relation, very neat, frightfully timid, even with her sister and her brother-in-law, who loved her, but with an uncertain affection verging on indifference, with an unconscious compassion and a natural benevolence.

Sometimes, when the baroness talked of far away things that happened in her youth, she would say, in order to fix a date: "It was the time that Lison had that attack."

They never said more than that; and this "attack" remained shrouded, as in a mist.

One evening, Lise, who was then twenty, had thrown herself into the water, no one knew why. Nothing in her life, her manner, gave any intimation of this seizure. They fished her out half dead, and her parents, raising their hands in horror, instead of seeking the mysterious cause of this action, had contented themselves with calling it "that attack," as if they were talking of the accident that happened to the horse "Coco," who had broken his leg a short time before in a ditch, and whom they had been obliged to kill.

From that time Lise, presently Lison, was considered feeble-minded.

The gentle contempt which she inspired in her relations gradually made its way into the minds of all those who surrounded her. Little Jeanne herself, with the natural instinct of children, took no notice of her, never went up to kiss her good-night, never went into her room. Good Rosalie, alone, who gave the room all the necessary attention, seemed to know where it was situated.

When Aunt Lison entered the dining-room for breakfast, the little one would go up to her from habit and hold up her forehead to be kissed;

that was all.

If anyone wished to speak to her, they sent a servant to call her, and if she was not there, they did not bother about her, never thought of her, never thought of troubling themselves so much as to say: "Why, I have not seen Aunt Lison this morning!"

When they said "Aunt Lison," these two words awakened no feeling of affection in anyone's mind. It was as if one had said: "The coffee pot, or the sugar bowl."

She always walked with little, quick, silent steps, never made a noise, never knocking up against anything; and seemed to communicate to surrounding objects the faculty of not making any sound. Her hands seemed to be made of a kind of wadding, she handled everything so lightly and delicately.

She arrived about the middle of July, all upset at the idea of

this marriage. She brought a quantity of presents which, as they came from her, remained almost unnoticed. On the following day they had forgotten she was there at all.

But an unusual emotion was seething in her mind, and she never took her eyes off the engaged couple. She interested herself in Jeanne's trousseau with a singular eagerness, a feverish activity, working like a simple seamstress in her room, where no one came to visit her.

She was continually presenting the baroness with handkerchiefs she had hemmed herself, towels on which she had embroidered a monogram, saying as she did so: "Is that all right, Adelaide?" And little mother, as she carelessly examined the objects, would reply: "Do not give yourself so much trouble, my poor Lison."

One evening, toward the end of the month, after an oppressively warm day, the moon rose on one of those clear, mild nights which seem to move, stir and affect one, apparently awakening all the secret poetry of one's soul. The gentle breath of the fields was wafted into the quiet drawing-room. The baroness and her husband were playing cards by the light of a lamp, and Aunt Lison was sitting beside them knitting;

while the young people, leaning on the window sill, were gazing out at the moonlit garden.

The linden and the plane tree cast their shadows on the lawn which extended beyond it in the moonlight, as far as the dark wood.

Attracted by the tender charm of the night, and by this misty illumination that lighted up the trees and the bushes, Jeanne turned toward her parents and said: "Little father, we are going to take a short stroll on the grass in front of the house."

The baron replied, without looking up: "Go, my children," and continued his game.

They went out and began to walk slowly along the moonlit lawn as far as the little wood at the end. The hour grew late and they did not think of going in. The baroness grew tired, and wishing to retire, she said:

"We must call the lovers in."

The baron cast a glance across the spacious garden where the two forms were wandering slowly.

"Let them alone," he said; "it is so delicious outside! Lison will wait for them, will you not, Lison?"

The old maid raised her troubled eyes and replied in her timid voice:

"Certainly, I will wait for them."

Little father gave his hand to the baroness, weary himself from the heat of the day.

"I am going to bed, too," he said, and went up with his wife.

Then Aunt Lison rose in her turn, and leaving on the arm of the chair her canvas with the wool and the knitting needles, she went over and leaned on the window sill and gazed out at the night.

The two lovers kept on walking back and forth between the

house and the wood. They squeezed each other's fingers without speaking, as though they had left their bodies and formed part of this visible poetry that exhaled from the earth.

All at once Jeanne perceived, framed in the window, the silhouette of the aunt, outlined by the light of the lamp behind her.

"See," she said, "there is Aunt Lison looking at us."

The vicomte raised his head, and said in an indifferent tone without thinking:

"Yes, Aunt Lison is looking at us."

And they continued to dream, to walk slowly, and to love each other.

But the dew was falling fast, and the dampness made them shiver a little.

"Let us go in now," said Jeanne. And they went into the house.

When they entered the drawing-room, Aunt Lison had gone back to her work. Her head was bent over her work, and her fingers were trembling as if she were very tired.

"It is time to go to bed, aunt," said Jeanne, approaching her.

Her aunt turned her head, and her eyes were red as if she had been crying. The young people did not notice it; but suddenly M. de Lamare perceived that Jeanne's thin shoes were covered with dew. He was worried, and asked tenderly:

"Are not your dear little feet cold?"

All at once the old lady's hands shook so violently that she let fall her knitting, and hiding her face in her hands, she began to

sob convulsively.

The engaged couple looked at her in amazement, without moving.

Suddenly Jeanne fell on her knees, and taking her aunt's hands away from her face, said in perplexity:

"Why, what is the matter, Aunt Lison?"

Then the poor woman, her voice full of tears, and her whole body shaking with sorrow, replied:

"It was when he asked you-are not your-your-dear little feet cold? – no one ever said such things to me-to me-never-never-"

Jeanne, surprised and compassionate, could still hardly help laughing at the idea of an admirer showing tender solicitude for Lison; and the vicomte had turned away to conceal his mirth.

But the aunt suddenly rose, laying her ball of wool on the floor and her knitting in the chair, and fled to her room, feeling her way up the dark staircase.

Left alone, the young people looked at one another, amused and saddened. Jeanne murmured:

"Poor aunt!" Julien replied. "She must be a little crazy this evening."

They held each other's hands and presently, gently, very gently, they exchanged their first kiss, and by the following day had forgotten all about Aunt Lison's tears.

The two weeks preceding the wedding found Jeanne very calm, as though she were weary of tender emotions. She had no time for reflection on the morning of the eventful day. She was

only conscious of a feeling as if her flesh, her bones and her blood had all melted beneath her skin, and on taking hold of anything, she noticed that her fingers trembled.

She did not regain her self-possession until she was in the chancel of the church during the marriage ceremony.

Married! So she was married! All that had occurred since daybreak seemed to her a dream, a waking dream. There are such moments, when all appears changed around us; even our motions seem to have a new meaning; even the hours of the day, which seem to be out of their usual time. She felt bewildered, above all else, bewildered. Last evening nothing had as yet been changed in her life; the constant hope of her life seemed only nearer, almost within reach. She had gone to rest a young girl; she was now a married woman. She had crossed that boundary that seems to conceal the future with all its joys, its dreams of happiness. She felt as though a door had opened in front of her; she was about to enter into the fulfillment of her expectations.

When they appeared on the threshold of the church after the ceremony, a terrific noise caused the bride to start in terror, and the baroness to scream; it was a rifle salute given by the peasants, and the firing did not cease until they reached "The Poplars."

After a collation served for the family, the family chaplain, and the priest from Yport, the mayor and the witnesses, who were some of the large farmers of the district, they all walked in the garden. On the other side of the château one could hear the boisterous mirth of the peasants, who were drinking cider

beneath the apple trees. The whole countryside, dressed in their best, filled the courtyard.

Jeanne and Julien walked through the copse and then up the slope and, without speaking, gazed out at the sea. The air was cool, although it was the middle of August; the wind was from the north, and the sun blazed down unpityingly from the blue sky. The young people sought a more sheltered spot, and crossing the plain, they turned to the right, toward the rolling and wooded valley that leads to Yport. As soon as they reached the trees the air was still, and they left the road and took a narrow path beneath the trees, where they could scarcely walk abreast.

Jeanne felt an arm passed gently round her waist. She said nothing, her breath came quick, her heart beat fast. Some low branches caressed their hair, as they bent to pass under them. She picked a leaf; two ladybirds were concealed beneath it, like two delicate red shells.

"Look, a little family," she said innocently, and feeling a little more confidence.

Julien placed his mouth to her ear, and whispered: "This evening you will be my wife."

Although she had learned many things during her sojourn in the country, she dreamed of nothing as yet but the poetry of love, and was surprised. His wife? Was she not that already?

Then he began to kiss her temples and neck, little light kisses. Startled each time afresh by these masculine kisses to which she was not accustomed, she instinctively turned away her head

to avoid them, though they delighted her. But they had come to the edge of the wood.

She stopped, embarrassed at being so far from home. What would they think?

"Let us go home," she said.

He withdrew his arm from her waist, and as they turned round they stood face to face, so close that they could feel each other's breath on their faces. They gazed deep into one another's eyes with that gaze in which two souls seem to blend. They sought the impenetrable unknown of each other's being. They sought to fathom one another, mutely and persistently. What would they be to one another? What would this life be that they were about to begin together? What joys, what happiness, or what disillusion were they preparing in this long, indissoluble tête-à-tête of marriage? And it seemed to them as if they had never yet seen each other.

Suddenly, Julien, placing his two hands on his wife's shoulders, kissed her full on the lips as she had never before been kissed. The kiss, penetrating as it did her very blood and marrow, gave her such a mysterious shock that she pushed Julien wildly away with her two arms, almost falling backward as she did so.

"Let us go away, let us go away," she faltered.

He did not reply, but took both her hands and held them in his. They walked home in silence, and the rest of the afternoon seemed long. The dinner was simple and did not last long, contrary to the usual Norman custom. A sort of embarrassment

seemed to paralyze the guests. The two priests, the mayor, and the four farmers invited, alone betrayed a little of that broad mirth that is supposed to accompany weddings.

They had apparently forgotten how to laugh, when a remark of the mayor's woke them up. It was about nine o'clock; coffee was about to be served. Outside, under the apple-trees of the first court, the bal champêtre was beginning, and through the open window one could see all that was going on. Lanterns, hung from the branches, gave the leaves a grayish green tint. Rustics and their partners danced in a circle shouting a wild dance tune to the feeble accompaniment of two violins and a clarinet, the players seated on a large table as a platform. The boisterous singing of the peasants at times completely drowned the instruments, and the feeble strains torn to tatters by the unrestrained voices seemed to fall from the air in shreds, in little fragments of scattered notes.

Two large barrels surrounded by flaming torches were tapped, and two servant maids were kept busy rinsing glasses and bowls in order to refill them at the tap whence flowed the red wine, or at the tap of the cider barrel. On the table were bread, sausages and cheese. Every one swallowed a mouthful from time to time, and beneath the roof of illuminated foliage this wholesome and boisterous fête made the melancholy watchers in the dining-room long to dance also, and to drink from one of those large barrels, while they munched a slice of bread and butter and a raw onion.

The mayor, who was beating time with his knife, cried: "By

Jove, that is all right; it is like the wedding of Ganache."

A suppressed giggle was heard, but Abbé Picot, the natural enemy of civil authority, cried: "You mean of Cana." The other did not accept the correction. "No, monsieur le curé, I know what I am talking about;

when I say Ganache, I mean Ganache."

They rose from table and went into the drawing-room, and then outside to mix with the merrymakers. The guests soon left.

They went into the house. They were surprised to see Madame Adelaide sobbing on Julien's shoulder. Her tears, noisy tears, as if blown out by a pair of bellows, seemed to come from her nose, her mouth and her eyes at the same time; and the young man, dumfounded, awkward, was supporting the heavy woman who had sunk into his arms to commend to his care her darling, her little one, her adored daughter.

The baron rushed toward them, saying: "Oh, no scenes, no tears, I beg of you," and, taking his wife to a chair, he made her sit down, while she wiped away her tears. Then, turning to Jeanne: "Come, little one, kiss your mother and go to bed."

What happened then? She could hardly have told, for she seemed to have lost her head, but she felt a shower of little grateful kisses on her lips.

Day dawned. Julien awoke, yawned, stretched, looked at his wife, smiled and asked: "Did you sleep well, darling?"

She noticed that he now said "thou," and she replied, bewildered, "Why, yes. And you?" "Oh, very well," he answered.

And turning toward her, he kissed her and then began to chat quietly. He set before her plans of living, with the idea of economy, and this word occurring several times, astonished Jeanne. She listened without grasping the meaning of his words, looked at him, but was thinking of a thousand things that passed rapidly through her mind hardly leaving a trace.

The clock struck eight. "Come, we must get up," he said. "It would look ridiculous for us to be late." When he was dressed he assisted his wife with all the little details of her toilet, not allowing her to call Rosalie. As they left the room he stopped. "You know, when we are alone, we can now use 'thou,' but before your parents it is better to wait a while. It will be quite natural when we come back from our wedding journey."

She did not go down till luncheon was ready. The day passed like any ordinary day, as if nothing new had occurred. There was one man more in the house, that was all.

CHAPTER V

CORSICA AND A NEW LIFE

Four days later the travelling carriage arrived that was to take them to Marseilles.

After the first night Jeanne had become accustomed to Julien's kisses and caresses, although her repugnance to a closer intimacy had not diminished. She thought him handsome, she loved him. She again felt happy and cheerful.

The farewells were short and without sadness. The baroness alone seemed tearful. As the carriage was just starting she placed a purse, heavy as lead, in her daughter's hand, saying, "That is for your little expenses as a bride."

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

Текст предоставлен ООО «ЛитРес».

Прочитайте эту книгу целиком, [купив полную легальную версию](#) на ЛитРес.

Безопасно оплатить книгу можно банковской картой Visa, MasterCard, Maestro, со счета мобильного телефона, с платежного терминала, в салоне МТС или Связной, через PayPal, WebMoney, Яндекс.Деньги, QIWI Кошелек, бонусными картами или другим удобным Вам способом.