

GUY DE MAUPASSANT

BEL AMI

Ги д. Мопассан

Bel Ami

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Guy de Maupassant

Bel Ami (A Ladies' Man) / The

Works of Guy de Maupassant, Vol. 6

I

When the cashier had given him the change out of his five francpiece, George Duroy left the restaurant.

As he had a good carriage, both naturally and from his military training, he drew himself up, twirled his moustache, and threw upon the lingering customers a rapid and sweeping glance – one of those glances which take in everything within their range like a casting net.

The women looked up at him in turn – three little work-girls, a middle-aged music mistress, disheveled, untidy, and wearing a bonnet always dusty and a dress always awry; and two shopkeepers' wives dining with their husbands – all regular customers at this slap-bang establishment.

When he was on the pavement outside, he stood still for a moment, asking himself what he should do. It was the 28th of June, and he had just three francs forty centimes in his pocket to carry him to the end of the month. This meant the option of two dinners without lunch or two lunches without dinner. He reflected that as the earlier repasts cost twenty sous apiece, and the latter thirty, he would, if he were content with the lunches, be one franc twenty centimes to the good, which would further represent two snacks of bread and sausage and two bocks of beer on the boulevards. This latter item was his greatest extravagance and his chief pleasure of a night; and he began to descend the Rue Notre-Dame de Lorette.

He walked as in the days when he had worn a hussar uniform, his chest thrown out and his legs slightly apart, as if he had just left the saddle, pushing his way through the crowded street, and shouldering folk to avoid having to step aside. He wore his somewhat shabby hat on one side, and brought his heels smartly down on the pavement. He seemed ever ready to defy somebody or something, the passers-by, the houses, the whole city, retaining all the swagger of a dashing cavalryman in civil life.

Although wearing a sixty-franc suit, he was not devoid of a certain somewhat loud elegance. Tall, well-built, fair, with a curly moustache twisted up at the ends, bright blue eyes with small pupils, and reddish-brown hair curling naturally and parted in the middle, he bore a strong resemblance to the dare-devil of popular romances.

It was one of those summer evenings on which air seems to be lacking in Paris. The city, hot as an oven, seemed to swelter in the stifling night. The sewers breathed out their poisonous breath through their granite mouths, and the underground kitchens gave forth to the street through their windows the stench of dishwater and stale sauces.

The doorkeepers in their shirtsleeves sat astride straw-bottomed chairs within the carriage entrances to the houses, smoking their pipes, and the pedestrians walked with flagging steps, head bare, and hat in hand.

When George Duroy reached the boulevards he paused again, undecided as to what he should do. He now thought of going on to the Champs Elysées and the Avenue du Bois de Boulogne to seek a little fresh air under the trees, but another wish also assailed him, a desire for a love affair.

What shape would it take? He did not know, but he had been awaiting it for three months, night and day. Occasionally, thanks to his good looks and gallant bearing, he gleaned a few crumbs of love here and there, but he was always hoping for something further and better.

With empty pockets and hot blood, he kindled at the contact of the prowlers who murmur at street corners: "Will you come home with me, dear?" but he dared not follow them, not being able to pay them, and, besides, he was awaiting something else, less venally vulgar kisses.

He liked, however, the localities in which women of the town swarm – their balls, their cafés, and their streets. He liked to rub shoulders with them, speak to them, chaff them, inhale their strong perfumes, feel himself near them. They were women at any rate, women made for love. He did not despise them with the innate contempt of a well-born man.

He turned towards the Madeleine, following the flux of the crowd which flowed along overcome by the heat. The chief cafés, filled with customers, were overflowing on to the pavement, and displayed their drinking public under the dazzling glare of their lit-up facias. In front of them, on little tables, square or round, were glasses holding fluids of every shade, red, yellow, green, brown, and inside the decanters glittered the large transparent cylinders of ice, serving to cool the bright, clear water. Duroy had slackened his pace, a longing to drink parched his throat.

A hot thirst, a summer evening's thirst assailed him, and he fancied the delightful sensation of cool drinks flowing across his palate. But if he only drank two bocks of beer in the evening, farewell to the slender supper of the morrow, and he was only too well acquainted with the hours of short commons at the end of the month.

He said to himself: "I must hold out till ten o'clock, and then I'll have my bock at the American café. Confound it, how thirsty I am though." And he scanned the men seated at the tables drinking, all the people who could quench their thirst as much as they pleased. He went on, passing in front of the cafés with a sprightly swaggering air, and guessing at a glance from their dress and bearing how much money each customer ought to have about him. Wrath against these men quietly sitting there rose up within him. If their pockets were rummaged, gold, silver, and coppers would be found in them. On an average each one must have at least two louis. There were certainly a hundred to a café, a hundred times two louis is four thousand francs. He murmured "the swine," as he walked gracefully past them. If he could have had hold of one of them at a nice dark corner he would have twisted his neck without scruple, as he used to do the country-folk's fowls on field-days.

And he recalled his two years in Africa and the way in which he used to pillage the Arabs when stationed at little out-posts in the south. A bright and cruel smile flitted across his lips at the recollection of an escapade which had cost the lives of three men of the Ouled-Alane tribe, and had furnished him and his comrades with a score of fowls, a couple of sheep, some gold, and food for laughter for six months.

The culprits had never been found, and, what is more, they had hardly been looked for, the Arab being looked upon as somewhat in the light of the natural prey of the soldier.

In Paris it was another thing. One could not plunder prettily, sword by side and revolver in hand, far from civil authority. He felt in his heart all the instincts of a sub-officer let loose in a conquered country. He certainly regretted his two years in the desert. What a pity he had not stopped there. But, then, he had hoped something better in returning home. And now – ah! yes, it was very nice now, was it not?

He clicked his tongue as if to verify the parched state of his palate.

The crowd swept past him slowly, and he kept thinking. "Set of hogs – all these idiots have money in their waistcoat pockets." He pushed against people and softly whistled a lively tune. Gentlemen whom he thus elbowed turned grumbling, and women murmured: "What a brute!"

He passed the Vaudeville Theater and stopped before the American café, asking himself whether he should not take his bock, so greatly did thirst torture him. Before making up his mind, he glanced at the illuminated clock. It was a quarter past nine. He knew himself that as soon as the glassful of beer was before him he would gulp it down. What would he do then up to eleven o'clock?

He passed on. "I will go as far as the Madeleine," he said, "and walk back slowly."

As he reached the corner of the Palace de l'Opera, he passed a stout young fellow, whose face he vaguely recollected having seen somewhere. He began to follow him, turning over his recollections and repeating to himself half-aloud: "Where the deuce did I know that joker?"

He searched without being able to recollect, and then all at once, by a strange phenomenon of memory, the same man appeared to him thinner, younger, and clad in a hussar uniform. He exclaimed aloud: "What, Forestier!" and stepping out he tapped the other on the shoulder. The promenader turned round and looked at him, and then said: "What is it, sir?"

Duroy broke into a laugh. "Don't you know me?" said he.

"No."

"George Duroy, of the 6th Hussars."

Forestier held out his hands, exclaiming: "What, old fellow! How are you?"

"Very well, and you?"

"Oh, not very brilliant! Just fancy, I have a chest in brown paper now. I cough six months out of twelve, through a cold I caught at Bougival the year of my return to Paris, four years ago."

And Forestier, taking his old comrade's arm, spoke to him of his illness, related the consultations, opinions, and advice of the doctors, and the difficulty of following this advice in his position. He was told to spend the winter in the South, but how could he? He was married, and a journalist in a good position.

"I am political editor of the *Vie Francaise*. I write the proceedings in the Senate for the *Salut*, and from time to time literary criticisms for the *Planète*. That is so. I have made my way."

Duroy looked at him with surprise. He was greatly changed, matured. He had now the manner, bearing, and dress of a man in a good position and sure of himself, and the stomach of a man who dines well. Formerly he had been thin, slight, supple, heedless, brawling, noisy, and always ready for a spree. In three years Paris had turned him into someone quite different, stout and serious, and with some white hairs about his temples, though he was not more than twenty-seven.

Forestier asked: "Where are you going?"

Duroy answered: "Nowhere; I am just taking a stroll before turning in."

"Well, will you come with me to the *Vie Francaise*, where I have some proofs to correct, and then we will take a bock together?"

"All right."

They began to walk on, arm-in-arm, with that easy familiarity existing between school-fellows and men in the same regiment.

"What are you doing in Paris?" asked Forestier.

Duroy shrugged his shoulders. "Simply starving. As soon as I finished my term of service I came here – to make a fortune, or rather for the sake of living in Paris; and for six months I have been a clerk in the offices of the Northern Railway at fifteen hundred francs a year, nothing more."

Forestier murmured: "Hang it, that's not much!"

"I should think not. But how can I get out of it? I am alone; I don't know anyone; I can get no one to recommend me. It is not goodwill that is lacking, but means."

His comrade scanned him from head to foot, like a practical man examining a subject, and then said, in a tone of conviction: "You see, my boy, everything depends upon assurance here. A clever fellow can more easily become a minister than an under-secretary. One must obtrude one's self on people; not ask things of them. But how the deuce is it that you could not get hold of anything better than a clerk's berth on the Northern Railway?"

Duroy replied: "I looked about everywhere, but could not find anything. But I have something in view just now; I have been offered a riding-master's place at Pellerin's. There I shall get three thousand francs at the lowest."

Forestier stopped short. "Don't do that; it is stupid, when you ought to be earning ten thousand francs. You would nip your future in the bud. In your office, at any rate, you are hidden; no one

knows you; you can emerge from it if you are strong enough to make your way. But once a riding-master, and it is all over. It is as if you were head-waiter at a place where all Paris goes to dine. When once you have given riding lessons to people in society or to their children, they will never be able to look upon you as an equal."

He remained silent for a few moments, evidently reflecting, and then asked:

"Have you a bachelor's degree?"

"No; I failed to pass twice."

"That is no matter, as long as you studied for it. If anyone mentions Cicero or Tiberius, you know pretty well what they are talking about?"

"Yes; pretty well."

"Good; no one knows any more, with the exception of a score of idiots who have taken the trouble. It is not difficult to pass for being well informed; the great thing is not to be caught in some blunder. You can maneuver, avoid the difficulty, turn the obstacle, and floor others by means of a dictionary. Men are all as stupid as geese and ignorant as donkeys."

He spoke like a self-possessed blade who knows what life is, and smiled as he watched the crowd go by. But all at once he began to cough, and stopped again until the fit was over, adding, in a tone of discouragement: "Isn't it aggravating not to be able to get rid of this cough? And we are in the middle of summer. Oh! this winter I shall go and get cured at Mentone. Health before everything."

They halted on the Boulevard Poissonnière before a large glass door, on the inner side of which an open newspaper was pasted. Three passers-by had stopped and were reading it.

Above the door, stretched in large letters of flame, outlined by gas jets, the inscription *La Vie Francaise*. The pedestrians passing into the light shed by these three dazzling words suddenly appeared as visible as in broad daylight, then disappeared again into darkness.

Forestier pushed the door open, saying, "Come in." Duroy entered, ascended an ornate yet dirty staircase, visible from the street, passed through an ante-room where two messengers bowed to his companion, and reached a kind of waiting-room, shabby and dusty, upholstered in dirty green Utrecht velvet, covered with spots and stains, and worn in places as if mice had been gnawing it.

"Sit down," said Forestier. "I will be back in five minutes."

And he disappeared through one of the three doors opening into the room.

A strange, special, indescribable odor, the odor of a newspaper office, floated in the air of the room. Duroy remained motionless, slightly intimidated, above all surprised. From time to time folk passed hurriedly before him, coming in at one door and going out at another before he had time to look at them.

They were now young lads, with an appearance of haste, holding in their hand a sheet of paper which fluttered from the hurry of their progress; now compositors, whose white blouses, spotted with ink, revealed a clean shirt collar and cloth trousers like those of men of fashion, and who carefully carried strips of printed paper, fresh proofs damp from the press. Sometimes a gentleman entered rather too elegantly attired, his waist too tightly pinched by his frock-coat, his leg too well set off by the cut of his trousers, his foot squeezed into a shoe too pointed at the toe, some fashionable reporter bringing in the echoes of the evening.

Others, too, arrived, serious, important-looking men, wearing tall hats with flat brims, as if this shape distinguished them from the rest of mankind.

Forestier reappeared holding the arm of a tall, thin fellow, between thirty and forty years of age, in evening dress, very dark, with his moustache ends stiffened in sharp points, and an insolent and self-satisfied bearing.

Forestier said to him: "Good night, dear master."

The other shook hands with him, saying: "Good night, my dear fellow," and went downstairs whistling, with his cane under his arm.

Duroy asked: "Who is that?"

"Jacques Rival, you know, the celebrated descriptive writer, the duellist. He has just been correcting his proofs. Garin, Montel, and he are the three best descriptive writers, for facts and points, we have in Paris. He gets thirty thousand francs a year here for two articles a week."

As they were leaving they met a short, stout man, with long hair and untidy appearance, who was puffing as he came up the stairs.

Forestier bowed low to him. "Norbert de Varenne," said he, "the poet; the author of '*Les Soleils Morts*'; another who gets long prices. Every tale he writes for us costs three hundred francs, and the longest do not run to two hundred lines. But let us turn into the Neapolitan *café*, I am beginning to choke with thirst."

As soon as they were seated at a table in the *café*, Forestier called for two bocks, and drank off his own at a single draught, while Duroy sipped his beer in slow mouthfuls, tasting it and relishing it like something rare and precious.

His companion was silent, and seemed to be reflecting. Suddenly he exclaimed: "Why don't you try journalism?"

The other looked at him in surprise, and then said: "But, you know, I have never written anything."

"Bah! everyone must begin. I could give you a job to hunt up information for me – to make calls and inquiries. You would have to start with two hundred and fifty francs a month and your cab hire. Shall I speak to the manager about it?"

"Certainly!"

"Very well, then, come and dine with me to-morrow. I shall only have five or six people – the governor, Monsieur Walter and his wife, Jacques Rival, and Norbert de Varenne, whom you have just seen, and a lady, a friend of my wife. Is it settled?"

Duroy hesitated, blushing and perplexed. At length he murmured: "You see, I have no clothes."

Forestier was astounded. "You have no dress clothes? Hang it all, they are indispensable, though. In Paris one would be better off without a bed than without a dress suit."

Then, suddenly feeling in his waistcoat pocket, he drew out some gold, took two louis, placed them in front of his old comrade, and said in a cordial and familiar tone: "You will pay me back when you can. Hire or arrange to pay by installments for the clothes you want, whichever you like, but come and dine with me to-morrow, half-past seven, number seventeen Rue Fontaine."

Duroy, confused, picked up the money, stammering: "You are too good; I am very much obliged to you; you may be sure I shall not forget."

The other interrupted him. "All right. Another bock, eh? Waiter, two bocks."

Then, when they had drunk them, the journalist said: "Will you stroll about a bit for an hour?"

"Certainly."

And they set out again in the direction of the Madeleine.

"What shall we, do?" said Forestier. "They say that in Paris a lounge can always find something to amuse him, but it is not true. I, when I want to lounge about of an evening, never know where to go. A drive round the Bois de Boulogne is only amusing with a woman, and one has not always one to hand; the *café* concerts may please my chemist and his wife, but not me. Then what is there to do? Nothing. There ought to be a summer garden like the Parc Monceau, open at night, where one would hear very good music while sipping cool drinks under the trees. It should not be a pleasure resort, but a lounging place, with a high price for entrance in order to attract the fine ladies. One ought to be able to stroll along well-graveled walks lit up by electric light, and to sit down when one wished to hear the music near or at a distance. We had about the sort of thing formerly at Musard's, but with a smack of the low-class dancing-room, and too much dance music, not enough space, not enough shade, not enough gloom. It would want a very fine garden and a very extensive one. It would be delightful. Where shall we go?"

Duroy, rather perplexed, did not know what to say; at length he made up his mind. "I have never been in the Folies Bergère. I should not mind taking a look round there," he said.

"The Folies Bergère," exclaimed his companion, "the deuce; we shall roast there as in an oven. But, very well, then, it is always funny there."

And they turned on their heels to make their way to the Rue du Faubourg Montmartre.

The lit-up front of the establishment threw a bright light into the four streets which met in front of it. A string of cabs were waiting for the close of the performance.

Forestier was walking in when Duroy checked him.

"You are passing the pay-box," said he.

"I never pay," was the reply, in a tone of importance.

When he approached the check-takers they bowed, and one of them held out his hand. The journalist asked: "Have you a good box?"

"Certainly, Monsieur Forestier."

He took the ticket held out to him, pushed the padded door with its leather borders, and they found themselves in the auditorium.

Tobacco smoke slightly veiled like a faint mist the stage and the further side of the theater. Rising incessantly in thin white spirals from the cigars and pipes, this light fog ascended to the ceiling, and there, accumulating, formed under the dome above the crowded gallery a cloudy sky.

In the broad corridor leading to the circular promenade a group of women were awaiting newcomers in front of one of the bars, at which sat enthroned three painted and faded vendors of love and liquor.

The tall mirrors behind them reflected their backs and the faces of passers-by.

Forestier pushed his way through the groups, advancing quickly with the air of a man entitled to consideration.

He went up to a box-keeper. "Box seventeen," said he.

"This way, sir."

And they were shut up in a little open box draped with red, and holding four chairs of the same color, so near to one another that one could scarcely slip between them. The two friends sat down. To the right, as to the left, following a long curved line, the two ends of which joined the proscenium, a row of similar cribs held people seated in like fashion, with only their heads and chests visible.

On the stage, three young fellows in fleshings, one tall, one of middle size, and one small, were executing feats in turn upon a trapeze.

The tall one first advanced with short, quick steps, smiling and waving his hand as though wafting a kiss.

The muscles of his arms and legs stood out under his tights. He expanded his chest to take off the effect of his too prominent stomach, and his face resembled that of a barber's block, for a careful parting divided his locks equally on the center of the skull. He gained the trapeze by a graceful bound, and, hanging by the hands, whirled round it like a wheel at full speed, or, with stiff arms and straightened body, held himself out horizontally in space.

Then he jumped down, saluted the audience again with a smile amidst the applause of the stalls, and went and leaned against the scenery, showing off the muscles of his legs at every step.

The second, shorter and more squarely built, advanced in turn, and went through the same performance, which the third also recommenced amidst most marked expressions of approval from the public.

But Duroy scarcely noticed the performance, and, with head averted, kept his eyes on the promenade behind him, full of men and prostitutes.

Said Forestier to him: "Look at the stalls; nothing but middle-class folk with their wives and children, good noodlepaters who come to see the show. In the boxes, men about town, some artistes, some girls, good second-raters; and behind us, the strangest mixture in Paris. Who are

these men? Watch them. There is something of everything, of every profession, and every caste; but blackguardism predominates. There are clerks of all kinds – bankers' clerks, government clerks, shopmen, reporters, ponces, officers in plain clothes, swells in evening dress, who have dined out, and have dropped in here on their way from the Opera to the Théâtre des Italiens; and then again, too, quite a crowd of suspicious folk who defy analysis. As to the women, only one type, the girl who sups at the American *café*, the girl at one or two louis who looks out for foreigners at five louis, and lets her regular customers know when she is disengaged. We have known them for the last ten years; we see them every evening all the year round in the same places, except when they are making a hygienic sojourn at Saint Lazare or at Lourcine."

Duroy no longer heard him. One of these women was leaning against their box and looking at him. She was a stout brunette, her skin whitened with paint, her black eyes lengthened at the corners with pencil and shaded by enormous and artificial eyebrows. Her too exuberant bosom stretched the dark silk of her dress almost to bursting; and her painted lips, red as a fresh wound, gave her an aspect bestial, ardent, unnatural, but which, nevertheless, aroused desire.

She beckoned with her head one of the friends who was passing, a blonde with red hair, and stout, like herself, and said to her, in a voice loud enough to be heard: "There is a pretty fellow; if he would like to have me for ten louis I should not say no."

Forestier turned and tapped Duroy on the knee, with a smile. "That is meant for you; you are a success, my dear fellow. I congratulate you."

The ex-sub-officer blushed, and mechanically fingered the two pieces of gold in his waistcoat pocket.

The curtain had dropped, and the orchestra was now playing a waltz.

Duroy said: "Suppose we take a turn round the promenade."

"Just as you like."

They left their box, and were at once swept away by the throng of promenaders. Pushed, pressed, squeezed, shaken, they went on, having before their eyes a crowd of hats. The girls, in pairs, passed amidst this crowd of men, traversing it with facility, gliding between elbows, chests, and backs as if quite at home, perfectly at their ease, like fish in water, amidst this masculine flood.

Duroy, charmed, let himself be swept along, drinking in with intoxication the air vitiated by tobacco, the odor of humanity, and the perfumes of the hussies. But Forestier sweated, puffed, and coughed.

"Let us go into the garden," said he.

And turning to the left, they entered a kind of covered garden, cooled by two large and ugly fountains. Men and women were drinking at zinc tables placed beneath evergreen trees growing in boxes.

"Another bock, eh?" said Forestier.

"Willingly."

They sat down and watched the passing throng.

From time to time a woman would stop and ask, with stereotyped smile: "Are you going to stand me anything?"

And as Forestier answered: "A glass of water from the fountain," she would turn away, muttering: "Go on, you duffer."

But the stout brunette, who had been leaning, just before, against the box occupied by the two comrades, reappeared, walking proudly arm-in-arm with the stout blonde. They were really a fine pair of women, well matched.

She smiled on perceiving Duroy, as though their eyes had already told secrets, and, taking a chair, sat down quietly in face of him, and making her friend sit down, too, gave the order in a clear voice: "Waiter, two grenadines!"

Forestier, rather surprised, said: "You make yourself at home."

She replied: "It is your friend that captivates me. He is really a pretty fellow. I believe that I could make a fool of myself for his sake."

Duroy, intimidated, could find nothing to say. He twisted his curly moustache, smiling in a silly fashion. The waiter brought the drinks, which the women drank off at a draught; then they rose, and the brunette, with a friendly nod of the head, and a tap on the arm with her fan, said to Duroy: "Thanks, dear, you are not very talkative."

And they went off swaying their trains.

Forestier laughed. "I say, old fellow, you are very successful with the women. You must look after it. It may lead to something." He was silent for a moment, and then continued in the dreamy tone of men who think aloud: "It is through them, too, that one gets on quickest."

And as Duroy still smiled without replying, he asked: "Are you going to stop any longer? I have had enough of it. I am going home."

The other murmured: "Yes, I shall stay a little longer. It is not late."

Forestier rose. "Well, good-night, then. Till to-morrow. Don't forget. Seventeen Rue Fontaine, at half-past seven."

"That is settled. Till to-morrow. Thanks."

They shook hands, and the journalist walked away.

As soon as he had disappeared Duroy felt himself free, and again he joyfully felt the two pieces of gold in his pocket; then rising, he began to traverse the crowd, which he followed with his eyes.

He soon caught sight of the two women, the blonde and the brunette, who were still making their way, with their proud bearing of beggars, through the throng of men.

He went straight up to them, and when he was quite close he no longer dared to do anything.

The brunette said: "Have you found your tongue again?"

He stammered "By Jove!" without being able to say anything else.

The three stood together, checking the movement, the current of which swept round them.

All at once she asked: "Will you come home with me?"

And he, quivering with desire, answered roughly: "Yes, but I have only a louis in my pocket."

She smiled indifferently. "It is all the same to me," and took his arm in token of possession.

As they went out he thought that with the other louis he could easily hire a suit of dress clothes for the next evening.

II

"Monsieur Forestier, if you please?"

"Third floor, the door on the left," the concierge had replied, in a voice the amiable tone of which betokened a certain consideration for the tenant, and George Duroy ascended the stairs.

He felt somewhat abashed, awkward, and ill at ease. He was wearing a dress suit for the first time in his life, and was uneasy about the general effect of his toilet. He felt it was altogether defective, from his boots, which were not of patent leather, though neat, for he was naturally smart about his foot-gear, to his shirt, which he had bought that very morning for four franc fifty centimes at the Masgasin du Louvre, and the limp front of which was already rumpled. His everyday shirts were all more or less damaged, so that he had not been able to make use of even the least worn of them.

His trousers, rather too loose, set off his leg badly, seeming to flap about the calf with that creased appearance which second-hand clothes present. The coat alone did not look bad, being by chance almost a perfect fit.

He was slowly ascending the stairs with beating heart and anxious mind, tortured above all by the fear of appearing ridiculous, when suddenly he saw in front of him a gentleman in full dress looking at him. They were so close to one another that Duroy took a step back and then remained stupefied; it was himself, reflected by a tall mirror on the first-floor landing. A thrill of pleasure shot through him to find himself so much more presentable than he had imagined.

Only having a small shaving-glass in his room, he had not been able to see himself all at once, and as he had only an imperfect glimpse of the various items of his improvised toilet, he had mentally exaggerated its imperfections, and harped to himself on the idea of appearing grotesque.

But on suddenly coming upon his reflection in the mirror, he had not even recognized himself; he had taken himself for someone else, for a gentleman whom at the first glance he had thought very well dressed and fashionable looking. And now, looking at himself carefully, he recognized that really the general effect was satisfactory.

He studied himself as actors do when learning their parts. He smiled, held out his hand, made gestures, expressed sentiments of astonishment, pleasure, and approbation, and essayed smiles and glances, with a view of displaying his gallantry towards the ladies, and making them understand that they were admired and desired.

A door opened somewhere. He was afraid of being caught, and hurried upstairs, filled with the fear of having been seen grimacing thus by one of his friend's guests.

On reaching the second story he noticed another mirror, and slackened his pace to view himself in it as he went by. His bearing seemed to him really graceful. He walked well. And now he was filled with an unbounded confidence in himself. Certainly he must be successful with such an appearance, his wish to succeed, his native resolution, and his independence of mind. He wanted to run, to jump, as he ascended the last flight of stairs. He stopped in front of the third mirror, twirled his moustache as he had a trick of doing, took off his hat to run his fingers through his hair, and muttered half-aloud as he often did: "What a capital notion." Then raising his hand to the bell handle, he rang.

The door opened almost at once, and he found himself face to face with a man-servant out of livery, serious, clean-shaven, and so perfect in his get-up that Duroy became uneasy again without understanding the reason of his vague emotion, due, perhaps, to an unwitting comparison of the cut of their respective garments. The man-servant, who had patent-leather shoes, asked, as he took the overcoat which Duroy had carried on his arm, to avoid exposing the stains on it: "Whom shall I announce?"

And he announced the name through a door with a looped-back draping leading into a drawing-room.

But Duroy, suddenly losing his assurance, felt himself breathless and paralyzed by terror. He was about to take his first step in the world he had looked forward to and longed for. He advanced, nevertheless. A fair young woman, quite alone, was standing awaiting him in a large room, well lit up and full of plants as a greenhouse.

He stopped short, quite disconcerted. Who was this lady who was smiling at him? Then he remembered that Forestier was married, and the thought that this pretty and elegant blonde must be his friend's wife completed his alarm.

He stammered: "Madame, I am – "

She held out her hand, saying: "I know, sir; Charles has told me of your meeting last evening, and I am very pleased that he had the idea of asking you to dine with us to-day."

He blushed up to his ears, not knowing what to say, and felt himself examined from head to foot, reckoned up, and judged.

He longed to excuse himself, to invent some pretext for explaining the deficiencies of his toilet, but he could not think of one, and did not dare touch on this difficult subject.

He sat down on an armchair she pointed out to him, and as he felt the soft and springy velvet-covered seat yield beneath his weight, as he felt himself, as it were, supported and clasped by the padded back and arms, it seemed to him that he was entering upon a new and enchanting life, that he was taking possession of something delightful, that he was becoming somebody, that he was saved, and he looked at Madame Forestier, whose eyes had not quitted him.

She was attired in a dress of pale blue cashmere, which set off the outline of her slender waist and full bust. Her arms and neck issued from a cloud of white lace, with which the bodice and short sleeves were trimmed, and her fair hair, dressed high, left a fringe of tiny curls at the nape of her neck.

Duroy recovered his assurance beneath her glance, which reminded him, without his knowing why, of that of the girl met overnight at the Folies Bergère. She had gray eyes, of a bluish gray, which imparted to them a strange expression; a thin nose, full lips, a rather fleshy chin, and irregular but inviting features, full of archness and charm. It was one of those faces, every trait of which reveals a special grace, and seems to have its meaning – every movement to say or to hide something. After a brief silence she asked: "Have you been long in Paris?"

He replied slowly, recovering his self-possession: "A few months only, Madame. I have a berth in one of the railway companies, but Forestier holds out the hope that I may, thanks to him, enter journalism."

She smiled more plainly and kindly, and murmured, lowering her voice: "Yes, I know."

The bell had rung again. The servant announced "Madame de Marelle."

This was a little brunette, who entered briskly, and seemed to be outlined – modeled, as it were – from head to foot in a dark dress made quite plainly. A red rose placed in her black hair caught the eye at once, and seemed to stamp her physiognomy, accentuate her character, and strike the sharp and lively note needed.

A little girl in short frocks followed her.

Madame Forestier darted forward, exclaiming: "Good evening, Clotilde."

"Good evening, Madeleine." They kissed one another, and then the child offered her forehead, with the assurance of a grown-up person, saying: "Good evening, cousin."

Madame Forestier kissed her, and then introduced them, saying: "Monsieur George Duroy, an old friend of Charles; Madame de Marelle, my friend, and in some degree my relation." She added: "You know we have no ceremonious affectation here. You quite understand, eh?"

The young man bowed.

The door opened again, and a short, stout gentleman appeared, having on his arm a tall, handsome woman, much younger than himself, and of distinguished appearance and grave bearing. They were Monsieur Walter, a Jew from the South of France, deputy, financier, capitalist, and manager of the *Vie Française*, and his wife, the daughter of Monsieur Basile-Ravalau, the banker.

Then came, one immediately after the other, Jacques Rival, very elegantly got up, and Norbert de Varenne, whose coat collar shone somewhat from the friction of the long locks falling on his shoulders and scattering over them a few specks of white scurf. His badly-tied cravat looked as if it had already done duty. He advanced with the air and graces of an old beau, and taking Madame Forestier's hand, printed a kiss on her wrist. As he bent forward his long hair spread like water over her bare arm.

Forestier entered in his turn, offering excuses for being late. He had been detained at the office of the paper by the Morel affair. Monsieur Morel, a Radical deputy, had just addressed a question to the Ministry respecting a vote of credit for the colonization of Algeria.

The servant announced: "Dinner is served, Madame," and they passed into the dining-room.

Duroy found himself seated between Madame de Marelle and her daughter. He again felt ill at ease, being afraid of making some mistake in the conventional handling of forks, spoons, and glasses. There were four of these, one of a faint blue tint. What could be meant to be drunk out of that?

Nothing was said while the soup was being consumed, and then Norbert de Varenne asked: "Have you read the Gauthier case? What a funny business it is."

After a discussion on this case of adultery, complicated with blackmailing, followed. They did not speak of it as the events recorded in newspapers are spoken of in private families, but as a disease is spoken of among doctors, or vegetables among market gardeners. They were neither shocked nor astonished at the facts, but sought out their hidden and secret motives with professional curiosity, and an utter indifference for the crime itself. They sought to clearly explain the origin of certain acts, to determine all the cerebral phenomena which had given birth to the drama, the scientific result due to an especial condition of mind. The women, too, were interested in this investigation. And other recent events were examined, commented upon, turned so as to show every side of them, and weighed correctly, with the practical glance, and from the especial standpoint of dealers in news, and vendors of the drama of life at so much a line, just as articles destined for sale are examined, turned over, and weighed by tradesmen.

Then it was a question of a duel, and Jacques Rival spoke. This was his business; no one else could handle it.

Duroy dared not put in a word. He glanced from time to time at his neighbor, whose full bosom captivated him. A diamond, suspended by a thread of gold, dangled from her ear like a drop of water that had rolled down it. From time to time she made an observation which always brought a smile to her hearers' lips. She had a quaint, pleasant wit, that of an experienced tomboy who views things with indifference and judges them with frivolous and benevolent skepticism.

Duroy sought in vain for some compliment to pay her, and, not finding one, occupied himself with her daughter, filling her glass, holding her plate, and helping her. The child, graver than her mother, thanked him in a serious tone and with a slight bow, saying: "You are very good, sir," and listened to her elders with an air of reflection.

The dinner was very good, and everyone was enraptured. Monsieur Walter ate like an ogre, hardly spoke, and glanced obliquely under his glasses at the dishes offered to him. Norbert de Varenne kept him company, and from time to time let drops of gravy fall on his shirt front. Forestier, silent and serious, watched everything, exchanging glances of intelligence with his wife, like confederates engaged together on a difficult task which is going on swimmingly.

Faces grew red, and voices rose, as from time to time the man-servant murmured in the guests' ears: "Corton or Chateau-Laroze."

Duroy had found the Corton to his liking, and let his glass be filled every time. A delicious liveliness stole over him, a warm cheerfulness, that mounted from the stomach to the head, flowed through his limbs and penetrated him throughout. He felt himself wrapped in perfect comfort of life and thought, body and soul.

A longing to speak assailed him, to bring himself into notice, to be appreciated like these men, whose slightest words were relished.

But the conversation, which had been going on unchecked, linking ideas one to another, jumping from one topic to another at a chance word, a mere trifle, and skimming over a thousand matters, turned again on the great question put by Monsieur Morel in the Chamber respecting the colonization of Algeria.

Monsieur Walter, between two courses, made a few jests, for his wit was skeptical and broad. Forestier recited his next day's leader. Jacques Rival insisted on a military government with land grants to all officers after thirty years of colonial service.

"By this plan," he said, "you will create an energetic class of colonists, who will have already learned to love and understand the country, and will be acquainted with its language, and with all those grave local questions against which new-comers invariably run their heads."

Norbert de Varenne interrupted him with: "Yes; they will be acquainted with everything except agriculture. They will speak Arabic, but they will be ignorant how beet-root is planted out and wheat sown. They will be good at fencing, but very shaky as regards manures. On the contrary, this new land should be thrown entirely open to everyone. Intelligent men will achieve a position there; the others will go under. It is the social law."

A brief silence followed, and the listeners smiled at one another.

George Duroy opened his mouth, and said, feeling as much surprised at the sound of his own voice as if he had never heard himself speak: "What is most lacking there is good land. The really fertile estates cost as much as in France, and are bought up as investments by rich Parisians. The real colonists, the poor fellows who leave home for lack of bread, are forced into the desert, where nothing will grow for want of water."

Everyone looked at him, and he felt himself blushing.

Monsieur Walter asked: "Do you know Algeria, sir?"

George replied: "Yes, sir; I was there nearly two years and a half, and I was quartered in all three provinces."

Suddenly unmindful of the Morel question, Norbert de Varenne interrogated him respecting a detail of manners and customs of which he had been informed by an officer. It was with respect to the Mزاب, that strange little Arab republic sprung up in the midst of the Sahara, in the driest part of that burning region.

Duroy had twice visited the Mزاب, and he narrated some of the customs of this singular country, where drops of water are valued as gold; where every inhabitant is bound to discharge all public duties; and where commercial honesty is carried further than among civilized nations.

He spoke with a certain raciness excited by the wine and the desire to please, and told regimental yarns, incidents of Arab life and military adventure. He even hit on some telling phrases to depict these bare and yellow lands, eternally laid waste by the devouring fire of the sun.

All the women had their eyes turned upon him, and Madame Walter said, in her deliberate tones: "You could make a charming series of articles out of your recollections."

Then Walter looked at the young fellow over the glasses of his spectacles, as was his custom when he wanted to see anyone's face distinctly. He looked at the dishes underneath them.

Forestier seized the opportunity. "My dear sir, I had already spoken to you about Monsieur George Duroy, asking you to let me have him for my assistant in gleaning political topics. Since Marambot left us, I have no one to send in quest of urgent and confidential information, and the paper suffers from it."

Daddy Walter became serious, and pushed his spectacles upon his forehead, in order to look Duroy well in the face. Then he said: "It is true that Monsieur Duroy has evidently an original turn of thought. If he will come and have a chat with us to-morrow at three o'clock, we will settle the matter." Then, after a short silence, turning right round towards George, he added: "But write us a

little fancy series of articles on Algeria at once. Relate your experiences, and mix up the colonization question with them as you did just now. They are facts, genuine facts, and I am sure they will greatly please our readers. But be quick. I must have the first article to-morrow or the day after, while the subject is being discussed in the Chamber, in order to catch the public."

Madame Walter added, with that serious grace which characterized everything she did, and which lent an air of favor to her words: "And you have a charming title, 'Recollections of a Chasseur d'Afrique.' Is it not so, Monsieur Norbert?"

The old poet, who had worn renown late in life, feared and hated new-comers. He replied dryly: "Yes, excellent, provided that the keynote be followed, for that is the great difficulty; the exact note, what in music is called the pitch."

Madame Forestier cast on Duroy a smiling and protective glance, the glance of a connoisseur, which seemed to say: "Yes, you will get on." Madame de Marelle had turned towards him several times, and the diamond in her ear quivered incessantly as though the drop of water was about to fall.

The little girl remained quiet and serious, her head bent over her plate.

But the servant passed round the table, filling the blue glasses with Johannisberg, and Forestier proposed a toast, drinking with a bow to Monsieur Walter: "Prosperity to the *Vie Francaise*."

Everyone bowed towards the proprietor, who smiled, and Duroy, intoxicated with success, emptied his glass at a draught. He would have emptied a whole barrel after the same fashion; it seemed to him that he could have eaten a bullock or strangled a lion. He felt a superhuman strength in his limbs, unconquerable resolution and unbounded hope in his mind. He was now at home among these people; he had just taken his position, won his place. His glance rested on their faces with a new-born assurance, and he ventured for the first time to address his neighbor. "You have the prettiest earrings I have ever seen, Madame."

She turned towards him with a smile. "It was an idea of my own to have the diamonds hung like that, just at the end of a thread. They really look like dew-drops, do they not?"

He murmured, ashamed of his own daring, and afraid of making a fool of himself:

"It is charming; but the ear, too, helps to set it off."

She thanked him with a look, one of those woman's looks that go straight to the heart. And as he turned his head he again met Madame Forestier's eye, always kindly, but now he thought sparkling with a livelier mirth, an archness, an encouragement.

All the men were now talking at once with gesticulations and raised voices. They were discussing the great project of the metropolitan railway. The subject was not exhausted till dessert was finished, everyone having a deal to say about the slowness of the methods of communication in Paris, the inconvenience of the tramway, the delays of omnibus traveling, and the rudeness of cabmen.

Then they left the dining-room to take coffee. Duroy, in jest, offered his arm to the little girl. She gravely thanked him, and rose on tiptoe in order to rest her hand on it.

On returning to the drawing-room he again experienced the sensation of entering a greenhouse. In each of the four corners of the room tall palms unfolded their elegantly shaped leaves, rising to the ceiling, and there spreading fountain-wise.

On each side of the fireplace were india-rubber plants like round columns, with their dark green leaves tapering one above the other; and on the piano two unknown shrubs covered with flowers, those of one all crimson and those of the other all white, had the appearance of artificial plants, looking too beautiful to be real.

The air was cool, and laden with a soft, vague perfume that could scarcely be defined. The young fellow, now more himself, considered the room more attentively. It was not large; nothing attracted attention with the exception of the shrubs, no bright color struck one, but one felt at one's ease in it; one felt soothed and refreshed, and, as it were, caressed by one's surroundings. The walls were covered with an old-fashioned stuff of faded violet, spotted with little flowers in yellow silk about the size of flies. Hangings of grayish-blue cloth, embroidered here and there with crimson poppies,

draped the doorways, and the chairs of all shapes and sizes, scattered about the room, lounging chairs, easy chairs, ottomans, and stools, were upholstered in Louise Seize silk or Utrecht velvet, with a crimson pattern on a cream-colored ground.

"Do you take coffee, Monsieur Duroy?" and Madame Forestier held out a cup towards him with that smile which never left her lips.

"Thank you, Madame." He took the cup, and as he bent forward to take a lump of sugar from the sugar-basin carried by the little girl, Madame Forestier said to him in a low voice: "Pay attention to Madame Walter."

Then she drew back before he had time to answer a word.

He first drank off his coffee, which he was afraid of dropping onto the carpet; then, his mind more at ease, he sought for some excuse to approach the wife of his new governor, and begin a conversation. All at once he noticed that she was holding an empty cup in her hand, and as she was at some distance from a table, did not know where to put it. He darted forward with, "Allow me, Madame?"

"Thank you, sir."

He took away the cup and then returned.

"If you knew, Madame," he began, "the happy hours the *Vie Francaise* helped me to pass when I was away in the desert. It is really the only paper that is readable out of France, for it is more literary, wittier, and less monotonous than the others. There is something of everything in it."

She smiled with amiable indifference, and answered, seriously:

"Monsieur Walter has had a great deal of trouble to create a type of newspaper supplying the want of the day."

And they began to chat. He had an easy flow of commonplace conversation, a charm in his voice and look, and an irresistible seductiveness about his moustache. It curled coquettishly about his lips, reddish brown, with a paler tint about the ends. They chatted about Paris, its suburbs, the banks of the Seine, watering places, summer amusements, all the current topics on which one can prate to infinity without wearying oneself.

Then as Monsieur Norbert de Varenne approached with a liqueur glass in his hand, Duroy discreetly withdrew.

Madame de Marelle, who had been speaking with Madame Forestier, summoned him.

"Well, sir," she said, abruptly, "so you want to try your hand at journalism?"

He spoke vaguely of his prospects, and there recommenced with her the conversation he had just had with Madame Walter, but as he was now a better master of his subject, he showed his superiority in it, repeating as his own the things he had just heard. And he continually looked his companion in the eyes, as though to give deep meaning to what he was saying.

She, in her turn, related anecdotes with the easy flow of spirits of a woman who knows she is witty, and is always seeking to appear so, and becoming familiar, she laid her hand from time to time on his arm, and lowered her voice to make trifling remarks which thus assumed a character of intimacy. He was inwardly excited by her contact. He would have liked to have shown his devotion for her on the spot, to have defended her, shown her what he was worth, and his delay in his replies to her showed the preoccupation of his mind.

But suddenly, without any reason, Madame de Marelle called, "Laurine!" and the little girl came.

"Sit down here, child; you will catch cold near the window."

Duroy was seized with a wild longing to kiss the child. It was as though some part of the kiss would reach the mother.

He asked in a gallant, and at the same time fatherly, tone: "Will you allow me to kiss you, Mademoiselle?"

The child looked up at him in surprise.

"Answer, my dear," said Madame de Marelle, laughingly.

"Yes, sir, this time; but it will not do always."

Duroy, sitting down, lifted Laurine onto his knees and brushed the fine curly hair above her forehead with his lips.

Her mother was surprised. "What! she has not run away; it is astounding. Usually she will only let ladies kiss her. You are irresistible, Monsieur Duroy."

He blushed without answering, and gently jogged the little girl on his knee.

Madame Forestier drew near, and exclaimed, with astonishment: "What, Laurine tamed! What a miracle!"

Jacques Rival also came up, cigar in mouth, and Duroy rose to take leave, afraid of spoiling, by some unlucky remark, the work done, his task of conquest begun.

He bowed, softly pressed the little outstretched hands of the women, and then heartily shook those of the men. He noted that the hand of Jacques Rival, warm and dry, answered cordially to his grip; that of Norbert de Varenne, damp and cold, slipped through his fingers; that of Daddy Walter, cold and flabby, was without expression or energy; and that of Forestier was plump and moist. His friend said to him in a low tone, "To-morrow, at three o'clock; do not forget."

"Oh! no; don't be afraid of that."

When he found himself once more on the stairs he felt a longing to run down them, so great was his joy, and he darted forward, going down two steps at a time, but suddenly he caught sight in a large mirror on the second-floor landing of a gentleman in a hurry, who was advancing briskly to meet him, and he stopped short, ashamed, as if he had been caught tripping. Then he looked at himself in the glass for some time, astonished at being really such a handsome fellow, smiled complacently, and taking leave of his reflection, bowed low to it as one bows to a personage of importance.

III

When George Duroy found himself in the street he hesitated as to what he should do. He wanted to run, to dream, to walk about thinking of the future as he breathed the soft night air, but the thought of the series of articles asked for by Daddy Walter haunted him, and he decided to go home at once and set to work.

He walked along quickly, reached the outer boulevards, and followed their line as far as the Rue Boursault, where he dwelt. The house, six stories high, was inhabited by a score of small households, trades-people or workmen, and he experienced a sickening sensation of disgust, a longing to leave the place and live like well-to-do people in a clean dwelling, as he ascended the stairs, lighting himself with wax matches on his way up the dirty steps, littered with bits of paper, cigarette ends, and scraps of kitchen refuse. A stagnant stench of cooking, cesspools and humanity, a close smell of dirt and old walls, which no rush of air could have driven out of the building, filled it from top to bottom.

The young fellow's room, on the fifth floor, looked into a kind of abyss, the huge cutting of the Western Railway just above the outlet by the tunnel of the Batignolles station. Duroy opened his window and leaned against the rusty iron cross-bar.

Below him, at the bottom of the dark hole, three motionless red lights resembled the eyes of huge wild animals, and further on a glimpse could be caught of others, and others again still further. Every moment whistles, prolonged or brief, pierced the silence of the night, some near at hand, others scarcely discernible, coming from a distance from the direction of Asnières. Their modulations were akin to those of the human voice. One of them came nearer and nearer, with its plaintive appeal growing louder and louder every moment, and soon a big yellow light appeared advancing with a loud noise, and Duroy watched the string of railway carriages swallowed up by the tunnel.

Then he said to himself: "Come, let's go to work."

He placed his light upon the table, but at the moment of commencing he found that he had only a quire of letter paper in the place. More the pity, but he would make use of it by opening out each sheet to its full extent. He dipped his pen in ink, and wrote at the head of the page, in his best hand, "Recollections of a Chasseur d'Afrique."

Then he tried to frame the opening sentence. He remained with his head on his hands and his eyes fixed on the white sheet spread out before him. What should he say? He could no longer recall anything of what he had been relating a little while back; not an anecdote, not a fact, nothing.

All at once the thought struck him: "I must begin with my departure."

And he wrote: "It was in 1874, about the middle of May, when France, in her exhaustion, was reposing after the catastrophe of the terrible year."

He stopped short, not knowing how to lead up to what should follow – his embarkation, his voyage, his first impressions.

After ten minutes' reflection, he resolved to put off the introductory slip till to-morrow, and to set to work at once to describe Algiers.

And he traced on his paper the words: "Algiers is a white city," without being able to state anything further. He recalled in his mind the pretty white city flowing down in a cascade of flat-roofed dwellings from the summit of its hills to the sea, but he could no longer find a word to express what he had seen and felt.

After a violent effort, he added: "It is partly inhabited by Arabs."

Then he threw down his pen and rose from his chair.

On his little iron bedstead, hollowed in the center by the pressure of his body, he saw his everyday garments cast down there, empty, worn, limp, ugly as the clothing at the morgue. On a straw-bottomed chair his tall hat, his only one, brim uppermost, seemed to be awaiting an alms.

The wall paper, gray with blue bouquets, showed as many stains as flowers, old suspicious-looking stains, the origin of which could not be defined; crushed insects or drops of oil; finger tips smeared with pomatum or soapy water scattered while washing. It smacked of shabby, genteel poverty, the poverty of a Paris lodging-house. Anger rose within him at the wretchedness of his mode of living. He said to himself that he must get out of it at once; that he must finish with this irksome existence the very next day.

A frantic desire of working having suddenly seized on him again, he sat down once more at the table, and began anew to seek for phrases to describe the strange and charming physiognomy of Algiers, that ante-room of vast and mysterious Africa; the Africa of wandering Arabs and unknown tribes of negroes; that unexplored Africa of which we are sometimes shown in public gardens the improbable-looking animals seemingly made to figure in fairy tales; the ostriches, those exaggerated fowls; the gazelles, those divine goats; the surprising and grotesque giraffes; the grave-looking camels, the monstrous hippopotomi, the shapeless rhinosceri, and the gorillas, those frightful-looking brothers of mankind.

He vaguely felt ideas occurring to him; he might perhaps have uttered them, but he could not put them into writing. And his impotence exasperated him, he got up again, his hands damp with perspiration, and his temples throbbing.

His eyes falling on his washing bill, brought up that evening by the concierge, he was suddenly seized with wild despair. All his joy vanishing in a twinkling, with his confidence in himself and his faith in the future. It was all up; he could not do anything, he would never be anybody; he felt played out, incapable, good for nothing, damned.

And he went and leaned out of the window again, just as a train issued from the tunnel with a loud and violent noise. It was going away, afar off, across the fields and plains towards the sea. And the recollection of his parents stirred in Duroy's breast. It would pass near them, that train, within a few leagues of their house. He saw it again, the little house at the entrance to the village of Canteleu, on the summit of the slope overlooking Rouen and the immense valley of the Seine.

His father and mother kept a little inn, a place where the tradesfolk of the suburbs of Rouen came out to lunch on Sunday at the sign of the Belle Vue. They had wanted to make a gentleman of their son, and had sent him to college. Having finished his studies, and been plowed for his bachelor's degree, he had entered on his military service with the intention of becoming an officer, a colonel, a general. But, disgusted with military life long before the completion of his five years' term of service, he had dreamed of making a fortune at Paris.

He came there at the expiration of his term of service, despite the entreaties of his father and mother, whose visions having evaporated, wanted now to have him at home with them. In his turn he hoped to achieve a future; he foresaw a triumph by means as yet vaguely defined in his mind, but which he felt sure he could scheme out and further.

He had had some successful love affairs in the regiment, some easy conquests, and even some adventures in a better class of society, having seduced a tax collector's daughter, who wanted to leave her home for his sake, and a lawyer's wife, who had tried to drown herself in despair at being abandoned.

His comrades used to say of him: "He is a sharp fellow, a deep one to get out of a scrape, a chap who knows which side his bread is buttered," and he had promised himself to act up to this character.

His conscience, Norman by birth, worn by the daily dealings of garrison life, rendered elastic by the examples of pillaging in Africa, illicit commissions, shaky dodges; spurred, too, by the notions of honor current in the army, military bravadoes, patriotic sentiments, the fine-sounding tales current among sub-officers, and the vain glory of the profession of arms, had become a kind of box of tricks in which something of everything was to be found.

But the wish to succeed reigned sovereign in it.

He had, without noticing it, began to dream again as he did every evening. He pictured to himself some splendid love adventure which should bring about all at once the realization of his hopes. He married the daughter of some banker or nobleman met with in the street, and captivated at the first glance.

The shrill whistle of a locomotive which, issuing from the tunnel like a big rabbit bolting out of its hole, and tearing at full speed along the rails towards the machine shed where it was to take its rest, awoke him from his dream.

Then, repossessed by the vague and joyful hope which ever haunted his mind, he wafted a kiss into the night, a kiss of love addressed to the vision of the woman he was awaiting, a kiss of desire addressed to the fortune he coveted. Then he closed his window and began to undress, murmuring:

"I shall feel in a better mood for it to-morrow. My thoughts are not clear to-night. Perhaps, too, I have had just a little too much to drink. One can't work well under those circumstances."

He got into bed, blew out his light, and went off to sleep almost immediately.

He awoke early, as one awakes on mornings of hope and trouble, and jumping out of bed, opened his window to drink a cup of fresh air, as he phrased it.

The houses of the Rue de Rome opposite, on the other side of the broad railway cutting, glittering in the rays of the rising sun, seemed to be painted with white light. Afar off on the right a glimpse was caught of the slopes of Argenteuil, the hills of Sannois, and the windmills of Orgemont through a light bluish mist; like a floating and transparent veil cast onto the horizon.

Duroy remained for some minutes gazing at the distant country side, and he murmured: "It would be devilish nice out there a day like this." Then he bethought himself that he must set to work, and that at once, and also send his concierge's lad, at a cost of ten sous, to the office to say that he was ill.

He sat down at his table, dipped his pen in the ink, leaned his forehead on his hand, and sought for ideas. All in vain, nothing came.

He was not discouraged, however. He thought, "Bah! I am not accustomed to it. It is a trade to be learned like all other trades. I must have some help the first time. I will go and find Forestier, who will give me a start for my article in ten minutes."

And he dressed himself.

When he got into the street he came to the conclusion that it was still too early to present himself at the residence of his friend, who must be a late sleeper. He therefore walked slowly along beneath the trees of the outer boulevards. It was not yet nine o'clock when he reached the Parc Monceau, fresh from its morning watering. Sitting down upon a bench he began to dream again. A well-dressed young man was walking up and down at a short distance, awaiting a woman, no doubt. Yes, she appeared, close veiled and quick stepping, and taking his arm, after a brief clasp of the hand, they walked away together.

A riotous need of love broke out in Duroy's heart, a need of amours at once distinguished and delicate. He rose and resumed his journey, thinking of Forestier. What luck the fellow had!

He reached the door at the moment his friend was coming out of it. "You here at this time of day. What do you want of me?"

Duroy, taken aback at meeting him thus, just as he was starting off, stammered: "You see, you see, I can't manage to write my article; you know the article Monsieur Walter asked me to write on Algeria. It is not very surprising, considering that I have never written anything. Practice is needed for that, as for everything else. I shall get used to it very quickly, I am sure, but I do not know how to set about beginning. I have plenty of ideas, but I cannot manage to express them."

He stopped, hesitatingly, and Forestier smiled somewhat slyly, saying: "I know what it is."

Duroy went on: "Yes, it must happen to everyone at the beginning. Well, I came, I came to ask you for a lift. In ten minutes you can give me a start, you can show me how to shape it. It will be a good lesson in style you will give me, and really without you I do not see how I can get on with it."

Forestier still smiled, and tapping his old comrade on the arm, said: "Go in and see my wife; she will settle your business quite as well as I could. I have trained her for that kind of work. I, myself, have not time this morning, or I would willingly have done it for you."

Duroy suddenly abashed, hesitated, feeling afraid.

"But I cannot call on her at this time of the day."

"Oh, yes; she is up. You will find her in my study arranging some notes for me."

Duroy refused to go upstairs, saying: "No, I can't think of such a thing."

Forestier took him by the shoulders, twisted him round on his heels, and pushing him towards the staircase, said: "Go along, you great donkey, when I tell you to. You are not going to oblige me to go up these flights of stairs again to introduce you and explain the fix you are in."

Then Duroy made up his mind. "Thanks, then, I will go up," he said. "I shall tell her that you forced me, positively forced me to come and see her."

"All right. She won't scratch your eyes out. Above all, do not forget our appointment for three o'clock."

"Oh! don't be afraid about that."

Forestier hastened off, and Duroy began to ascend the stairs slowly, step by step, thinking over what he should say, and feeling uneasy as to his probable reception.

The man servant, wearing a blue apron, and holding a broom in his hand, opened the door to him.

"Master is not at home," he said, without waiting to be spoken to.

Duroy persisted.

"Ask Madame Forestier," said he, "whether she will receive me, and tell her that I have come from her husband, whom I met in the street."

Then he waited while the man went away, returned, and opening the door on the right, said: "Madame will see you, sir."

She was seated in an office armchair in a small room, the walls of which were wholly hidden by books carefully ranged on shelves of black wood. The bindings, of various tints, red, yellow, green, violet, and blue, gave some color and liveliness to those monotonous lines of volumes.

She turned round, still smiling. She was wrapped in a white dressing gown, trimmed with lace, and as she held out her hand, displayed her bare arm in its wide sleeve.

"Already?" said she, and then added: "That is not meant for a reproach, but a simple question."

"Oh, madame, I did not want to come up, but your husband, whom I met at the bottom of the house, obliged me to. I am so confused that I dare not tell you what brings me."

She pointed to a chair, saying: "Sit down and tell me about it."

She was twirling a goose-quill between her fingers, and in front of her was a half-written page, interrupted by the young fellow's arrival. She seemed quite at home at this work table, as much at her ease as if in her drawing-room, engaged on everyday tasks. A faint perfume emanated from her dressing gown, the fresh perfume of a recent toilet. Duroy sought to divine, fancied he could trace, the outline of her plump, youthful figure through the soft material enveloping it.

She went on, as he did not reply: "Well, come tell me what is it."

He murmured, hesitatingly: "Well, you see – but I really dare not – I was working last night very late and quite early this morning on the article upon Algeria, upon which Monsieur Walter asked me to write, and I could not get on with it – I tore up all my attempts. I am not accustomed to this kind of work, and I came to ask Forestier to help me this once –"

She interrupted him, laughing heartily. "And he told you to come and see me? That is a nice thing."

"Yes, madame. He said that you will get me out of my difficulty better than himself, but I did not dare, I did not wish to – you understand."

She rose, saying: "It will be delightful to work in collaboration with you like that. I am charmed at the notion. Come, sit down in my place, for they know my hand-writing at the office. And we will knock you off an article; oh, but a good one."

He sat down, took a pen, spread a sheet of paper before him, and waited.

Madame Forestier, standing by, watched him make these preparations, then took a cigarette from the mantel-shelf, and lit it.

"I cannot work without smoking," said she. "Come, what are you going to say?"

He lifted his head towards her with astonishment.

"But that is just what I don't know, since it is that I came to see you about."

She replied: "Oh, I will put it in order for you. I will make the sauce, but then I want the materials of the dish."

He remained embarrassed before her. At length he said, hesitatingly: "I should like to relate my journey, then, from the beginning."

Then she sat down before him on the other side of the table, and looking him in the eyes:

"Well, tell it me first; for myself alone, you understand, slowly and without forgetting anything, and I will select what is to be used of it."

But as he did not know where to commence, she began to question him as a priest would have done in the confessional, putting precise questions which recalled to him forgotten details, people encountered and faces merely caught sight of.

When she had made him speak thus for about a quarter of an hour, she suddenly interrupted him with: "Now we will begin. In the first place, we will imagine that you are narrating your impressions to a friend, which will allow you to write a lot of tom-foolery, to make remarks of all kinds, to be natural and funny if we can. Begin:

"My Dear Henry, – You want to know what Algeria is like, and you shall. I will send you, having nothing else to do in a little cabin of dried mud which serves me as a habitation, a kind of journal of my life, day by day, and hour by hour. It will be a little lively at times, more is the pity, but you are not obliged to show it to your lady friends."

She paused to re-light her cigarette, which had gone out, and the faint creaking of the quill on the paper stopped, too.

"Let us continue," said she.

"Algeria is a great French country on the frontiers of the great unknown countries called the Desert, the Sahara, central Africa, etc., etc.

"Algiers is the door, the pretty white door of this strange continent.

"But it is first necessary to get to it, which is not a rosy job for everyone. I am, you know, an excellent horseman, since I break in the colonel's horses; but a man may be a very good rider and a very bad sailor. That is my case.

"You remember Surgeon-Major Simbretras, whom we used to call Old Ipecacuanha, and how, when we thought ourselves ripe for a twenty-four hours' stay in the infirmary, that blessed sojourning place, we used to go up before him.

"How he used to sit in his chair, with his fat legs in his red trousers, wide apart, his hands on his knees, and his elbows stuck, rolling his great eyes and gnawing his white moustache.

"You remember his favorite mode of treatment: 'This man's stomach is out of order. Give him a dose of emetic number three, according to my prescription, and then twelve hours off duty, and he will be all right.'

"It was a sovereign remedy that emetic – sovereign and irresistible. One swallowed it because one had to. Then when one had undergone the effects of Old Ipecacuanha's prescription, one enjoyed twelve well-earned hours' rest.

"Well, my dear fellow, to reach Africa, it is necessary to undergo for forty hours the effects of another kind of irresistible emetic, according to the prescription of the Compagnie Transatlantique."

She rubbed her hands, delighted with the idea.

She got up and walked about, after having lit another cigarette, and dictated as she puffed out little whiffs of smoke, which, issuing at first through a little round hole in the midst of her compressed lips, slowly evaporated, leaving in the air faint gray lines, a kind of transparent mist, like a spider's web. Sometimes with her open hand she would brush these light traces aside; at others she would cut them asunder with her forefinger, and then watch with serious attention the two halves of the almost impenetrable vapor slowly disappear.

Duroy, with his eyes, followed all her gestures, her attitudes, the movements of her form and features – busied with this vague pastime which did not preoccupy her thoughts.

She now imagined the incidents of the journey, sketched traveling companions invented by herself, and a love affair with the wife of a captain of infantry on her way to join her husband.

Then, sitting down again, she questioned Duroy on the topography of Algeria, of which she was absolutely ignorant. In ten minutes she knew as much about it as he did, and she dictated a little chapter of political and colonial geography to coach the reader up in such matters and prepare him to understand the serious questions which were to be brought forward in the following articles. She continued by a trip into the provinces of Oran, a fantastic trip, in which it was, above all, a question of women, Moorish, Jewish, and Spanish.

"That is what interests most," she said.

She wound up by a sojourn at Saïda, at the foot of the great tablelands; and by a pretty little intrigue between the sub-officer, George Duroy, and a Spanish work-girl employed at the *alfa* factory at Ain el Hadjar. She described their rendezvous at night amidst the bare, stony hills, with jackals, hyenas, and Arab dogs yelling, barking and howling among the rocks.

And she gleefully uttered the words: "To be continued." Then rising, she added: "That is how one writes an article, my dear sir. Sign it, if you please."

He hesitated.

"But sign it, I tell you."

Then he began to laugh, and wrote at the bottom of the page, "George Duroy."

She went on smoking as she walked up and down; and he still kept looking at her, unable to find anything to say to thank her, happy to be with her, filled with gratitude, and with the sensual pleasure of this new-born intimacy. It seemed to him that everything surrounding him was part of her, everything down to the walls covered with books. The chairs, the furniture, the air in which the perfume of tobacco was floating, had something special, nice, sweet, and charming, which emanated from her.

Suddenly she asked: "What do you think of my friend, Madame de Marelle?"

He was surprised, and answered: "I think – I think – her very charming."

"Is it not so?"

"Yes, certainly."

He longed to add: "But not so much as yourself," but dared not.

She resumed: "And if you only knew how funny, original, and intelligent she is. She is a Bohemian – a true Bohemian. That is why her husband scarcely cares for her. He only sees her defects, and does not appreciate her good qualities."

Duroy felt stupefied at learning that Madame de Marelle was married, and yet it was only natural that she should be.

He said: "Oh, she is married, then! And what is her husband?"

Madame Forestier gently shrugged her shoulders, and raised her eyebrows, with a gesture of incomprehensible meaning.

"Oh! he is an inspector on the Northern Railway. He spends eight days out of the month in Paris. What his wife calls 'obligatory service,' or 'weekly duty,' or 'holy week.' When you know her better you will see how nice and bright she is. Go and call on her one of these days."

Duroy no longer thought of leaving. It seemed to him that he was going to stop for ever; that he was at home.

But the door opened noiselessly, and a tall gentleman entered without being announced. He stopped short on seeing a stranger. Madame Forestier seemed troubled for a moment; then she said in natural tones, though a slight rosy flush had risen to her cheeks:

"Come in, my dear sir. I must introduce one of Charles' old friends, Monsieur George Duroy, a future journalist." Then in another tone, she added: "Our best and most intimate friend, the Count de Vaudrec."

The two men bowed, looking each other in the eyes, and Duroy at once took his leave.

There was no attempt to detain him. He stammered a few thanks, grasped the outstretched hand of Madame Forestier, bowed again to the new-comer, who preserved the cold, grave air of a man of position, and went out quite disturbed, as if he had made a fool of himself.

On finding himself once more in the street, he felt sad and uneasy, haunted by the vague idea of some hidden vexation. He walked on, asking himself whence came this sudden melancholy. He could not tell, but the stern face of the Count de Vaudrec, already somewhat aged, with gray hair, and the calmly insolent look of a very wealthy man, constantly recurred to his recollection. He noted that the arrival of this unknown, breaking off a charming *tête-à-tête*, had produced in him that chilly, despairing sensation that a word overheard, a trifle noticed, the least thing suffices sometimes to bring about. It seemed to him, too, that this man, without his being able to guess why, had been displeased at finding him there.

He had nothing more to do till three o'clock, and it was not yet noon. He had still six francs fifty centimes in his pocket, and he went and lunched at a Bouillon Duval. Then he prowled about the boulevard, and as three o'clock struck, ascended the staircase, in itself an advertisement, of the *Vie Francaise*.

The messengers-in-waiting were seated with folded arms on a bench, while at a kind of desk a doorkeeper was sorting the correspondence that had just arrived. The entire get-up of the place, intended to impress visitors, was perfect. Everyone had the appearance, bearing, dignity, and smartness suitable to the ante-room of a large newspaper.

"Monsieur Walter, if you please?" inquired Duroy.

"The manager is engaged, sir," replied the doorkeeper. "Will you take a seat, sir?" and he indicated the waiting-room, already full of people.

There were men grave, important-looking, and decorated; and men without visible linen, whose frock-coats, buttoned up to the chin, bore upon the breast stains recalling the outlines of continents and seas on geographical maps. There were three women among them. One of them was pretty, smiling, and decked out, and had the air of a gay woman; her neighbor, with a wrinkled, tragic countenance, decked out also, but in more severe fashion, had about her something worn and artificial which old actresses generally have; a kind of false youth, like a scent of stale love. The third woman, in mourning, sat in a corner, with the air of a desolate widow. Duroy thought that she had come to ask for charity.

However, no one was ushered into the room beyond, and more than twenty minutes had elapsed.

Duroy was seized with an idea, and going back to the doorkeeper, said: "Monsieur Walter made an appointment for me to call on him here at three o'clock. At all events, see whether my friend, Monsieur Forestier, is here."

He was at once ushered along a lengthy passage, which brought him to a large room where four gentlemen were writing at a large green-covered table.

Forestier standing before the fireplace was smoking a cigarette and playing at cup and ball. He was very clever at this, and kept spiking the huge ball of yellow boxwood on the wooden point. He was counting "Twenty-two, twenty-three, twenty-four, twenty-five."

"Twenty-six," said Duroy.

His friend raised his eyes without interrupting the regular movement of his arm, saying: "Oh! here you are, then. Yesterday I landed the ball fifty-seven times right off. There is only Saint-Potin who can beat me at it among those here. Have you seen the governor? There is nothing funnier than to see that old tubby Norbert playing at cup and ball. He opens his mouth as if he was going to swallow the ball every time."

One of the others turned round towards him, saying: "I say, Forestier, I know of one for sale, a beauty in West Indian wood; it is said to have belonged to the Queen of Spain. They want sixty francs for it. Not dear."

Forestier asked: "Where does it hang out?"

And as he had missed his thirty-seventh shot, he opened a cupboard in which Duroy saw a score of magnificent cups and balls, arranged and numbered like a collection of art objects. Then having put back the one he had been using in its usual place, he repeated: "Where does this gem hang out?"

The journalist replied: "At a box-office keeper's of the Vaudeville. I will bring it you to-morrow, if you like."

"All right. If it is really a good one I will take it; one can never have too many." Then turning to Duroy he added: "Come with me. I will take you in to see the governor; otherwise you might be getting mouldy here till seven in the evening."

They re-crossed the waiting-room, in which the same people were waiting in the same order. As soon as Forestier appeared the young woman and the old actress, rising quickly, came up to him. He took them aside one after the other into the bay of the window, and although they took care to talk in low tones, Duroy noticed that they were on familiar terms.

Then, having passed through two padded doors, they entered the manager's room. The conference which had been going on for an hour or so was nothing more than a game at *ecarté* with some of the gentlemen with the flat brimmed hats whom Duroy had noticed the night before.

Monsieur Walter dealt and played with concentrated attention and crafty movements, while his adversary threw down, picked up, and handled the light bits of colored pasteboard with the swiftness, skill, and grace of a practiced player. Norbert de Varenne, seated in the managerial armchair, was writing an article. Jacques Rival, stretched at full length on a couch, was smoking a cigar with his eyes closed.

The room smelled close, with that blended odor of leather-covered furniture, stale tobacco, and printing-ink peculiar to editors' rooms and familiar to all journalists. Upon the black wood table, inlaid with brass, lay an incredible pile of papers, letters, cards, newspapers, magazines, bills, and printed matter of every description.

Forestier shook hands with the punters standing behind the card players, and without saying a word watched the progress of the game; then, as soon as Daddy Walter had won, he said: "Here is my friend, Duroy."

The manager glanced sharply at the young fellow over the glasses of his spectacles, and said: "Have you brought my article? It would go very well to-day with the Morel debate."

Duroy took the sheets of paper folded in four from his pocket, saying: "Here it is sir."

The manager seemed pleased, and remarked, with a smile: "Very good, very good. You are a man of your word. You must look through this for me, Forestier."

But Forestier hastened to reply: "It is not worth while, Monsieur Walter. I did it with him to give him a lesson in the tricks of the trade. It is very well done."

And the manager, who was gathering up the cards dealt by a tall, thin gentleman, a deputy belonging to the Left Center, remarked with indifference: "All right, then."

Forestier, however, did not let him begin the new game, but stooping, murmured in his ear: "You know you promised me to take on Duroy to replace Marambot. Shall I engage him on the same terms?"

"Yes, certainly."

Taking his friend's arm, the journalist led him away, while Monsieur Walter resumed the game.

Norbert de Varenne had not lifted his head; he did not appear to have seen or recognized Duroy. Jacques Rival, on the contrary, had taken his hand with the marked and demonstrative energy of a comrade who may be reckoned upon in the case of any little difficulty.

They passed through the waiting-room again, and as everyone looked at them, Forestier said to the youngest of the women, in a tone loud enough to be heard by the rest: "The manager will see you directly. He is just now engaged with two members of the Budget Committee."

Then he passed swiftly on, with an air of hurry and importance, as though about to draft at once an article of the utmost weight.

As soon as they were back in the reporters' room Forestier at once took up his cup and ball, and as he began to play with it again, said to Duroy, breaking his sentences in order to count: "You will come here every day at three o'clock, and I will tell you the places you are to go to, either during the day or in the evening, or the next morning – one – I will give you, first of all, a letter of introduction to the head of the First Department of the Préfecture of Police – two – who will put you in communication with one of his clerks. You will settle with him about all the important information – three – from the Préfecture, official and quasi-official information, you know. In all matters of detail you will apply to Saint-Potin, who is up in the work – four – You can see him by-and-by, or to-morrow. You must, above all, cultivate the knack of dragging information out of men I send you to see – five – and to get in everywhere, in spite of closed doors – six – You will have for this a salary of two hundred francs a month, with two sous a line for the paragraphs you glean – seven – and two sous a line for all articles written by you to order on different subjects – eight."

Then he gave himself up entirely to his occupation, and went on slowly counting: "Nine, ten, eleven, twelve, thirteen." He missed the fourteenth, and swore, "Damn that thirteen, it always brings me bad luck. I shall die on the thirteenth of some month, I am certain."

One of his colleagues who had finished his work also took a cup and ball from the cupboard. He was a little man, who looked like a boy, although he was really five-and-thirty. Several other journalists having come in, went one after the other and got out the toy belonging to each of them. Soon there were six standing side by side, with their backs to the wall, swinging into the air, with even and regular motion, the balls of red, yellow, and black, according to the wood they were made of. And a match having begun, the two who were still working got up to act as umpires. Forestier won by eleven points. Then the little man, with the juvenile aspect, who had lost, rang for the messenger, and gave the order, "Nine bocks." And they began to play again pending the arrival of these refreshments.

Duroy drank a glass of beer with his new comrades, and then said to his friend: "What am I to do now?"

"I have nothing for you to-day. You can go if you want to."

"And our – our – article, will it go in to-night?"

"Yes, but do not bother yourself about it; I will correct the proofs. Write the continuation for to-morrow, and come here at three o'clock, the same as to-day."

Duroy having shaken hands with everyone, without even knowing their names, went down the magnificent staircase with a light heart and high spirits.

IV

George Duroy slept badly, so excited was he by the wish to see his article in print. He was up as soon as it was daylight, and was prowling about the streets long before the hour at which the porters from the newspaper offices run with their papers from kiosk to kiosk. He went on to the Saint Lazare terminus, knowing that the *Vie Francaise* would be delivered there before it reached his own district. As he was still too early, he wandered up and down on the footpath.

He witnessed the arrival of the newspaper vendor who opened her glass shop, and then saw a man bearing on his head a pile of papers. He rushed forward. There were the *Figaro*, the *Gil Blas*, the *Gaulois*, the *Evenement*, and two or three morning journals, but the *Vie Francaise* was not among them. Fear seized him. Suppose the "Recollections of a Chasseur d'Afrique" had been kept over for the next day, or that by chance they had not at the last moment seemed suitable to Daddy Walter.

Turning back to the kiosk, he saw that the paper was on sale without his having seen it brought there. He darted forward, unfolded it, after having thrown down the three sous, and ran through the headings of the articles on the first page. Nothing. His heart began to beat, and he experienced strong emotion on reading at the foot of a column in large letters, "George Duroy." It was in; what happiness!

He began to walk along unconsciously, the paper in his hand and his hat on one side of his head, with a longing to stop the passers-by in order to say to them: "Buy this, buy this, there is an article by me in it." He would have liked to have bellowed with all the power of his lungs, like some vendors of papers at night on the boulevards, "Read the *Vie Francaise*; read George Duroy's article, 'Recollections of a Chasseur d'Afrique.'" And suddenly he felt a wish to read this article himself, read it in a public place, a *café*, in sight of all. He looked about for some establishment already filled with customers. He had to walk in search of one for some time. He sat down at last in front of a kind of wine shop, where several customers were already installed, and asked for a glass of rum, as he would have asked for one of absinthe, without thinking of the time. Then he cried: "Waiter, bring me the *Vie Francaise*."

A man in a white apron stepped up, saying: "We have not got it, sir; we only take in the *Rappel*, the *Siecle*, the *Lanierne*, and the *Petit Parisien*."

"What a den!" exclaimed Duroy, in a tone of anger and disgust. "Here, go and buy it for me."

The waiter hastened to do so, and brought back the paper. Duroy began to read his article, and several times said aloud: "Very good, very well put," to attract the attention of his neighbors, and inspire them with the wish to know what there was in this sheet. Then, on going away, he left it on the table. The master of the place, noticing this, called him back, saying: "Sir, sir, you are forgetting your paper."

And Duroy replied: "I will leave it to you. I have finished with it. There is a very interesting article in it this morning."

He did not indicate the article, but he noticed as he went away one of his neighbors take the *Vie Francaise* up from the table on which he had left it.

He thought: "What shall I do now?" And he decided to go to his office, take his month's salary, and tender his resignation. He felt a thrill of anticipatory pleasure at the thought of the faces that would be pulled up by the chief of his room and his colleagues. The notion of the bewilderment of the chief above all charmed him.

He walked slowly, so as not to get there too early, the cashier's office not opening before ten o'clock.

His office was a large, gloomy room, in which gas had to be kept burning almost all day long in winter. It looked into a narrow court-yard, with other offices on the further side of it. There were eight clerks there, besides a sub-chief hidden behind a screen in one corner.

Duroy first went to get the hundred and eighteen francs twenty-five centimes enclosed in a yellow envelope, and placed in the drawer of the clerk entrusted with such payments, and then, with a conquering air, entered the large room in which he had already spent so many days.

As soon as he came in the sub-chief, Monsieur Potel, called out to him: "Ah! it is you, Monsieur Duroy? The chief has already asked for you several times. You know that he will not allow anyone to plead illness two days running without a doctor's certificate."

Duroy, who was standing in the middle of the room preparing his sensational effect, replied in a loud voice:

"I don't care a damn whether he does or not."

There was a movement of stupefaction among the clerks, and Monsieur Potel's features showed affrightedly over the screen which shut him up as in a box. He barricaded himself behind it for fear of draughts, for he was rheumatic, but had pierced a couple of holes through the paper to keep an eye on his staff. A pin might have been heard to fall. At length the sub-chief said, hesitatingly: "You said?"

"I said that I don't care a damn about it. I have only called to-day to tender my resignation. I am engaged on the staff of the *Vie Francaise* at five hundred francs a month, and extra pay for all I write. Indeed, I made my *début* this morning."

He had promised himself to spin out his enjoyment, but had not been able to resist the temptation of letting it all out at once.

The effect, too, was overwhelming. No one stirred.

Duroy went on: "I will go and inform Monsieur Perthuis, and then come and wish you good-bye."

And he went out in search of the chief, who exclaimed, on seeing him: "Ah, here you are. You know that I won't have –"

His late subordinate cut him short with: "It's not worth while yelling like that."

Monsieur Perthuis, a stout man, as red as a turkey cock, was choked with bewilderment.

Duroy continued: "I have had enough of this crib. I made my *début* this morning in journalism, where I am assured of a very good position. I have the honor to bid you good-day." And he went out. He was avenged.

As he promised, he went and shook hands with his old colleagues, who scarcely dared to speak to him, for fear of compromising themselves, for they had overheard his conversation with the chief, the door having remained open.

He found himself in the street again, with his salary in his pocket. He stood himself a substantial breakfast at a good but cheap restaurant he was acquainted with, and having again purchased the *Vie Francaise*, and left it on the table, went into several shops, where he bought some trifles, solely for the sake of ordering them to be sent home, and giving his name: "George Duroy," with the addition, "I am the editor of the *Vie Francaise*."

Then he gave the name of the street and the number, taking care to add: "Leave it with the doorkeeper."

As he had still some time to spare he went into the shop of a lithographer, who executed visiting cards at a moment's notice before the eyes of passers-by, and had a hundred, bearing his new occupation under his name, printed off while he waited.

Then he went to the office of the paper.

Forestier received him loftily, as one receives a subordinate. "Ah! here you are. Good. I have several things for you to attend to. Just wait ten minutes. I will just finish what I am about."

And he went on with a letter he was writing.

At the other end of the large table a fat, bald little man, with a very pale, puffy face, and a white and shining head, was writing, with his nose on the paper owing to extreme shortsightedness. Forestier said to him: "I say, Saint-Potin, when are you going to interview those people?"

"At four o'clock."

"Will you take young Duroy here with you, and let him into the way of doing it?"

"All right."

Then turning to his friend, Forestier added: "Have you brought the continuation of the Algerian article? The opening this morning was very successful."

Duroy, taken aback, stammered: "No. I thought I should have time this afternoon. I had heaps of things to do. I was not able."

The other shrugged his shoulders with a dissatisfied air. "If you are not more exact than that you will spoil your future. Daddy Walter was reckoning on your copy. I will tell him it will be ready to-morrow. If you think you are to be paid for doing nothing you are mistaken."

Then, after a short silence, he added: "One must strike the iron while it is hot, or the deuce is in it."

Saint-Potin rose, saying: "I am ready."

Then Forestier, leaning back in his chair, assumed a serious attitude in order to give his instructions, and turning to Duroy, said: "This is what it is. Within the last two days the Chinese General, Li Theng Fao, has arrived at the Hotel Continental, and the Rajah Taposahib Ramaderao Pali at the Hotel Bristol. You will go and interview them." Turning to Saint-Potin, he continued: "Don't forget the main points I told you of. Ask the General and the Rajah their opinion upon the action of England in the East, their ideas upon her system of colonization and domination, and their hopes respecting the intervention of Europe, and especially of France." He was silent for a moment, and then added in a theatrical aside: "It will be most interesting to our readers to learn at the same time what is thought in China and India upon these matters which so forcibly occupy public attention at this moment." He continued, for the benefit of Duroy: "Watch how Saint-Potin sets to work; he is a capital reporter; and try to learn the trick of pumping a man in five minutes."

Then he gravely resumed his writing, with the evident intention of defining their relative positions, and putting his old comrade and present colleague in his proper place.

As soon as they had crossed the threshold Saint-Potin began to laugh, and said to Duroy: "There's a fluffer for you. He tried to fluff even us. One would really think he took us for his readers."

They reached the boulevard, and the reporter observed: "Will you have a drink?"

"Certainly. It is awfully hot."

They turned into a *café* and ordered cooling drinks. Saint-Potin began to talk. He talked about the paper and everyone connected with it with an abundance of astonishing details.

"The governor? A regular Jew? And you know, nothing can alter a Jew. What a breed!" And he instanced some astounding traits of avariciousness peculiar to the children of Israel, economies of ten centimes, petty bargaining, shameful reductions asked for and obtained, all the ways of a usurer and pawnbroker.

"And yet with all this, a good fellow who believes in nothing and does everyone. His paper, which is Governmental, Catholic, Liberal, Republican, Orleanist, pay your money and take your choice, was only started to help him in his speculations on the Bourse, and bolster up his other schemes. At that game he is very clever, and nets millions through companies without four sous of genuine capital."

He went on, addressing Duroy as "My dear fellow."

"And he says things worthy of Balzac, the old shark. Fancy, the other day I was in his room with that old tub Norbert, and that Don Quixote Rival, when Montelin, our business manager, came in with his morocco bill-case, that bill-case that everyone in Paris knows, under his arm. Walter raised his head and asked: 'What news?' Montelin answered simply: 'I have just paid the sixteen thousand francs we owed the paper maker.' The governor gave a jump, an astonishing jump. 'What do you mean?' said he. 'I have just paid Monsieur Privas,' replied Montelin. 'But you are mad.' 'Why?' 'Why – why – why – ' he took off his spectacles and wiped them. Then he smiled with that queer smile that flits across his fat cheeks whenever he is going to say something deep or smart, and went on in a

mocking and derisive tone, 'Why? Because we could have obtained a reduction of from four to five thousand francs.' Montelin replied, in astonishment: 'But, sir, all the accounts were correct, checked by me and passed by yourself.' Then the governor, quite serious again, observed: 'What a fool you are. Don't you know, Monsieur Montelin, that one should always let one's debts mount up, in order to offer a composition?'"

And Saint-Potin added, with a knowing shake of his head, "Eh! isn't that worthy of Balzac?"

Duroy had not read Balzac, but he replied, "By Jove! yes."

Then the reporter spoke of Madame Walter, an old goose; of Norbert de Varenne, an old failure; of Rival, a copy of Fervacques. Next he came to Forestier. "As to him, he has been lucky in marrying his wife, that is all."

Duroy asked: "What is his wife, really?"

Saint-Potin rubbed his hands. "Oh! a deep one, a smart woman. She was the mistress of an old rake named Vaudrec, the Count de Vaudrec, who gave her a dowry and married her off."

Duroy suddenly felt a cold shiver run through him, a tingling of the nerves, a longing to smack this gabbler on the face. But he merely interrupted him by asking:

"And your name is Saint-Potin?"

The other replied, simply enough:

"No, my name is Thomas. It is in the office that they have nicknamed me Saint-Potin."

Duroy, as he paid for the drinks, observed: "But it seems to me that time is getting on, and that we have two noble foreigners to call on."

Saint-Potin began to laugh. "You are still green. So you fancy I am going to ask the Chinese and the Hindoo what they think of England? As if I did not know better than themselves what they ought to think in order to please the readers of the *Vie Francaise*. I have already interviewed five hundred of these Chinese, Persians, Hindoos, Chilians, Japanese, and others. They all reply the same, according to me. I have only to take my article on the last comer and copy it word for word. What has to be changed, though, is their appearance, their name, their title, their age, and their suite. Oh! on that point it does not do to make a mistake, for I should be snapped up sharp by the *Figaro* or the *Gaulois*. But on these matters the hall porters at the Hotel Bristol and the Hotel Continental will put me right in five minutes. We will smoke a cigar as we walk there. Five francs cab hire to charge to the paper. That is how one sets about it, my dear fellow, when one is practically inclined."

"It must be worth something decent to be a reporter under these circumstances," said Duroy.

The journalist replied mysteriously: "Yes, but nothing pays so well as paragraphs, on account of the veiled advertisements."

They had got up and were passing down the boulevards towards the Madeleine. Saint-Potin suddenly observed to his companion: "You know if you have anything else to do, I shall not need you in any way."

Duroy shook hands and left him. The notion of the article to be written that evening worried him, and he began to think. He stored his mind with ideas, reflections, opinions, and anecdotes as he walked along, and went as far as the end of the Avenue des Champs Elysées, where only a few strollers were to be seen, the heat having caused Paris to be evacuated.

Having dined at a wine shop near the Arc de Triomphe, he walked slowly home along the outer boulevards and sat down at his table to work. But as soon as he had the sheet of blank paper before his eyes, all the materials that he had accumulated fled from his mind as though his brain had evaporated. He tried to seize on fragments of his recollections and to retain them, but they escaped him as fast as he laid hold of them, or else they rushed on him altogether pell-mell, and he did not know how to clothe and present them, nor which one to begin with.

After an hour of attempts and five sheets of paper blackened by opening phrases that had no continuation, he said to himself: "I am not yet well enough up in the business. I must have another lesson." And all at once the prospect of another morning's work with Madame Forestier, the hope

of another long and intimate *tête-à-tête* so cordial and so pleasant, made him quiver with desire. He went to bed in a hurry, almost afraid now of setting to work again and succeeding all at once.

He did not get up the next day till somewhat late, putting off and tasting in advance the pleasure of this visit.

It was past ten when he rang his friend's bell.

The man-servant replied: "Master is engaged at his work."

Duroy had not thought that the husband might be at home. He insisted, however, saying: "Tell him that I have called on a matter requiring immediate attention."

After waiting five minutes he was shown into the study in which he had passed such a pleasant morning. In the chair he had occupied Forestier was now seated writing, in a dressing-gown and slippers and with a little Scotch bonnet on his head, while his wife in the same white gown leant against the mantelpiece and dictated, cigarette in mouth.

Duroy, halting on the threshold, murmured: "I really beg your pardon; I am afraid I am disturbing you."

His friend, turning his face towards him – an angry face, too – growled: "What is it you want now? Be quick; we are pressed for time."

The intruder, taken back, stammered: "It is nothing; I beg your pardon."

But Forestier, growing angry, exclaimed: "Come, hang it all, don't waste time about it; you have not forced your way in just for the sake of wishing us good-morning, I suppose?"

Then Duroy, greatly perturbed, made up his mind. "No – you see – the fact is – I can't quite manage my article – and you were – so – so kind last time – that I hoped – that I ventured to come –"

Forestier cut him short. "You have a pretty cheek. So you think I am going to do your work, and that all you have to do is to call on the cashier at the end of the month to draw your screw? No, that is too good."

The young woman went on smoking without saying a word, smiling with a vague smile, which seemed like an amiable mask, concealing the irony of her thoughts.

Duroy, colored up, stammered: "Excuse me – I fancied – I thought –" then suddenly, and in a clear voice, he went on: "I beg your pardon a thousand times, Madame, while again thanking you most sincerely for the charming article you produced for me yesterday." He bowed, remarked to Charles: "I shall be at the office at three," and went out.

He walked home rapidly, grumbling: "Well, I will do it all alone, and they shall see –"

Scarcely had he got in than, excited by anger, he began to write. He continued the adventure began by Madame Forestier, heaping up details of catch-penny romance, surprising incidents, and inflated descriptions, with the style of a schoolboy and the phraseology of the barrack-room. Within an hour he had finished an article which was a chaos of nonsense, and took it with every assurance to the *Vie Francaise*.

The first person he met was Saint-Potin, who, grasping his hand with the energy of an accomplice, said: "You have read my interview with the Chinese and the Hindoo? Isn't it funny? It has amused everyone. And I did not even get a glimpse of them."

Duroy, who had not read anything, at once took up the paper and ran his eye over a long article headed: "India and China," while the reporter pointed out the most interesting passages.

Forestier came in puffing, in a hurry, with a busy air, saying:

"Good; I want both of you."

And he mentioned a number of items of political information that would have to be obtained that very afternoon.

Duroy held out his article.

"Here is the continuation about Algeria."

"Very good; hand it over; and I will give it to the governor."

That was all.

Saint-Potin led away his new colleague, and when they were in the passage, he said to him: "Have you seen the cashier?"

"No; why?"

"Why? To draw your money. You see you should always draw a month in advance. One never knows what may happen."

"But – I ask for nothing better."

"I will introduce you to the cashier. He will make no difficulty about it. They pay up well here."

Duroy went and drew his two hundred francs, with twenty-eight more for his article of the day before, which, added to what remained of his salary from the railway company, gave him three hundred and forty francs in his pocket. He had never owned such a sum, and thought himself possessed of wealth for an indefinite period.

Saint-Potin then took him to have a gossip in the offices of four or five rival papers, hoping that the news he was entrusted to obtain had already been gleaned by others, and that he should be able to draw it out of them – thanks to the flow and artfulness of his conversation.

When evening had come, Duroy, who had nothing more to do, thought of going again to the Folies Bergères, and putting a bold face on, he went up to the box office.

"I am George Duroy, on the staff of the *Vie Française*. I came here the other day with Monsieur Forestier, who promised me to see about my being put on the free list; I do not know whether he has thought of it."

The list was referred to. His name was not entered.

However, the box office-keeper, a very affable man, at once said: "Pray, go in all the same, sir, and write yourself to the manager, who, I am sure, will pay attention to your letter."

He went in and almost immediately met Rachel, the woman he had gone off with the first evening. She came up to him, saying: "Good evening, ducky. Are you quite well?"

"Very well, thanks – and you?"

"I am all right. Do you know, I have dreamed of you twice since last time?"

Duroy smiled, feeling flattered. "Ah! and what does that mean?"

"It means that you pleased me, you old dear, and that we will begin again whenever you please."

"To-day, if you like."

"Yes, I am quite willing."

"Good, but – " He hesitated, a little ashamed of what he was going to do. "The fact is that this time I have not a penny; I have just come from the club, where I have dropped everything."

She looked him full in the eyes, scenting a lie with the instinct and habit of a girl accustomed to the tricks and bargainings of men, and remarked: "Bosh! That is not a nice sort of thing to try on me."

He smiled in an embarrassed way. "If you will take ten francs, it is all I have left."

She murmured, with the disinterestedness of a courtesan gratifying a fancy: "What you please, my lady; I only want you."

And lifting her charming eyes towards the young man's moustache, she took his arm and leant lovingly upon it.

"Let us go and have a grenadine first of all," she remarked. "And then we will take a stroll together. I should like to go to the opera like this, with you, to show you off. And we will go home early, eh?"

He lay late at this girl's place. It was broad day when he left, and the notion occurred to him to buy the *Vie Française*. He opened the paper with feverish hand. His article was not there, and he stood on the footpath, anxiously running his eye down the printed columns with the hope of at length finding what he was in search of. A weight suddenly oppressed his heart, for after the fatigue of a night of love, this vexation came upon him with the weight of a disaster.

He reached home and went to sleep in his clothes on the bed.

Entering the office some hours later, he went on to see Monsieur Walter.

"I was surprised at not seeing my second article on Algeria in the paper this morning, sir," said he.

The manager raised his head, and replied in a dry tone: "I gave it to your friend Forestier, and asked him to read it through. He did not think it up to the mark; you must rewrite it."

Duroy, in a rage, went out without saying a word, and abruptly entering his old comrade's room, said:

"Why didn't you let my article go in this morning?"

The journalist was smoking a cigarette with his back almost on the seat of his armchair and his feet on the table, his heels soiling an article already commenced. He said slowly, in a bored and distant voice, as though speaking from the depths of a hole: "The governor thought it poor, and told me to give it back to you to do over again. There it is." And he pointed out the slips flattened out under a paperweight.

Duroy, abashed, could find nothing to say in reply, and as he was putting his prose into his pocket, Forestier went on: "To-day you must first of all go to the Préfecture." And he proceeded to give a list of business errands and items of news to be attended to.

Duroy went off without having been able to find the cutting remark he wanted to. He brought back his article the next day. It was returned to him again. Having rewritten it a third time, and finding it still refused, he understood that he was trying to go ahead too fast, and that Forestier's hand alone could help him on his way. He did not therefore say anything more about the "Recollections of a Chasseur d'Afrique," promising himself to be supple and cunning since it was needful, and while awaiting something better to zealously discharge his duties as a reporter.

He learned to know the way behind the scenes in theatrical and political life; the waiting-rooms of statesmen and the lobby of the Chamber of Deputies; the important countenances of permanent secretaries, and the grim looks of sleepy ushers. He had continual relations with ministers, doorkeepers, generals, police agents, princes, bullies, courtesans, ambassadors, bishops, panders, adventurers, men of fashion, card-sharpers, cab drivers, waiters, and many others, having become the interested yet indifferent friend of all these; confounding them together in his estimation, measuring them with the same measure, judging them with the same eye, though having to see them every day at every hour, without any transition, and to speak with them all on the same business of his own. He compared himself to a man who had to drink off samples of every kind of wine one after the other, and who would soon be unable to tell Château Margaux from Argenteuil.

He became in a short time a remarkable reporter, certain of his information, artful, swift, subtle, a real find for the paper, as was observed by Daddy Walter, who knew what newspaper men were. However, as he got only centimes a line in addition to his monthly screw of two hundred francs, and as life on the boulevards and in *cafés* and restaurants is costly, he never had a halfpenny, and was disgusted with his poverty. There is some knack to be got hold of, he thought, seeing some of his fellows with their pockets full of money without ever being able to understand what secret methods they could make use of to procure this abundance. He enviously suspected unknown and suspicious transactions, services rendered, a whole system of contraband accepted and agreed to. But it was necessary that he should penetrate the mystery, enter into the tacit partnership, make himself one with the comrades who were sharing without him.

And he often thought of an evening, as he watched the trains go by from his window, of the steps he ought to take.

V

Two months had gone by, September was at hand, and the rapid fortune which Duroy had hoped for seemed to him slow in coming. He was, above all, uneasy at the mediocrity of his position, and did not see by what path he could scale the heights on the summit of which one finds respect, power, and money. He felt shut up in the mediocre calling of a reporter, so walled in as to be unable to get out of it. He was appreciated, but estimated in accordance with his position. Even Forestier, to whom he rendered a thousand services, no longer invited him to dinner, and treated him in every way as an inferior, though still accosting him as a friend.

From time to time, it is true, Duroy, seizing an opportunity, got in a short article, and having acquired through his paragraphs a mastery over his pen, and a tact which was lacking to him when he wrote his second article on Algeria, no longer ran any risk of having his descriptive efforts refused. But from this to writing leaders according to his fancy, or dealing with political questions with authority, there was as great a difference as driving in the Bois de Boulogne as a coachman, and as the owner of an equipage. That which humiliated him above everything was to see the door of society closed to him, to have no equal relations with it, not to be able to penetrate into the intimacy of its women, although several well-known actresses had occasionally received him with an interested familiarity.

He knew, moreover, from experience that all the sex, ladies or actresses, felt a singular attraction towards him, an instantaneous sympathy, and he experienced the impatience of a hobbled horse at not knowing those whom his future may depend on.

He had often thought of calling on Madame Forestier, but the recollection of their last meeting checked and humiliated him; and besides, he was awaiting an invitation to do so from her husband. Then the recollection of Madame de Marelle occurred to him, and recalling that she had asked him to come and see her, he called one afternoon when he had nothing to do.

"I am always at home till three o'clock," she had said.

He rang at the bell of her residence, a fourth floor in the Rue de Verneuil, at half-past two.

At the sound of the bell a servant opened the door, an untidy girl, who tied her cap strings as she replied: "Yes, Madame is at home, but I don't know whether she is up."

And she pushed open the drawing-room door, which was ajar. Duroy went in. The room was fairly large, scantily furnished and neglected looking. The chairs, worn and old, were arranged along the walls, as placed by the servant, for there was nothing to reveal the tasty care of the woman who loves her home. Four indifferent pictures, representing a boat on a stream, a ship at sea, a mill on a plain, and a wood-cutter in a wood, hung in the center of the four walls by cords of unequal length, and all four on one side. It could be divined that they had been dangling thus askew ever so long before indifferent eyes.

Duroy sat down immediately. He waited a long time. Then a door opened, and Madame de Marelle hastened in, wearing a Japanese morning gown of rose-colored silk embroidered with yellow landscapes, blue flowers, and white birds.

"Fancy! I was still in bed!" she exclaimed. "How good of you to come and see me! I had made up my mind that you had forgotten me."

She held out both her hands with a delighted air, and Duroy, whom the commonplace appearance of the room had put at his ease, kissed one, as he had seen Norbert de Varenne do.

She begged him to sit down, and then scanning him from head to foot, said: "How you have altered! You have improved in looks. Paris has done you good. Come, tell me the news."

And they began to gossip at once, as if they had been old acquaintances, feeling an instantaneous familiarity spring up between them; feeling one of those mutual currents of confidence, intimacy, and affection, which, in five minutes, make two beings of the same breed and character good friends.

Suddenly, Madame de Marelle exclaimed in astonishment: "It is funny how I get on with you. It seems to me as though I had known you for ten years. We shall become good friends, no doubt. Would you like it?"

He answered: "Certainly," with a smile which said still more.

He thought her very tempting in her soft and bright-hued gown, less refined and delicate than the other in her white one, but more exciting and spicy. When he was beside Madame Forestier, with her continual and gracious smile which attracted and checked at the same time; which seemed to say: "You please me," and also "Take care," and of which the real meaning was never clear, he felt above all the wish to lie down at her feet, or to kiss the lace bordering of her bodice, and slowly inhale the warm and perfumed atmosphere that must issue from it. With Madame de Marelle he felt within him a more definite, a more brutal desire – a desire that made his fingers quiver in presence of the rounded outlines of the light silk.

She went on talking, scattering in each phrase that ready wit of which she had acquired the habit just as a workman acquires the knack needed to accomplish a task reputed difficult, and at which other folk are astonished. He listened, thinking: "All this is worth remembering. A man could write charming articles of Paris gossip by getting her to chat over the events of the day."

Some one tapped softly, very softly, at the door by which she had entered, and she called out: "You can come in, pet."

Her little girl made her appearance, walked straight up to Duroy, and held out her hand to him. The astonished mother murmured: "But this is a complete conquest. I no longer recognize her."

The young fellow, having kissed the child, made her sit down beside him, and with a serious manner asked her pleasant questions as to what she had been doing since they last met. She replied, in her little flute-like voice, with her grave and grown-up air.

The clock struck three, and the journalist arose.

"Come often," said Madame de Marelle, "and we will chat as we have done to-day; it will always give me pleasure. But how is it one no longer sees you at the Forestiers?" He replied: "Oh! for no reason. I have been very busy. I hope to meet you there again one of these days."

He went out, his heart full of hope, though without knowing why.

He did not speak to Forestier of this visit. But he retained the recollection of it the following days, and more than the recollection – a sensation of the unreal yet persistent presence of this woman. It seemed to him that he had carried away something of her, the reflection of her form in his eyes, and the smack of her moral self in his heart. He remained under the haunted influence of her image, as it happens sometimes when we have passed pleasant hours with some one.

He paid a second visit a few days later.

The maid ushered him into the drawing-room, and Laurine at once appeared. She held out no longer her hand, but her forehead, and said: "Mamma has told me to request you to wait for her. She will be a quarter-of-an-hour, because she is not dressed yet. I will keep you company."

Duroy, who was amused by the ceremonious manners of the little girl, replied: "Certainly, Mademoiselle. I shall be delighted to pass a quarter-of-an-hour with you, but I warn you that for my part I am not at all serious, and that I play all day long, so I suggest a game at touch."

The girl was astonished; then she smiled as a woman would have done at this idea, which shocked her a little as well as astonished her, and murmured: "Rooms are not meant to be played in."

He said: "It is all the same to me. I play everywhere. Come, catch me."

And he began to go round the table, exciting her to pursue him, while she came after him, smiling with a species of polite condescension, and sometimes extending her hand to touch him, but without ever giving way so far as to run. He stopped, stooped down, and when she drew near with her little hesitating steps, sprung up in the air like a jack-in-the-box, and then bounded with a single stride to the other end of the dining-room. She thought it funny, ended by laughing, and becoming aroused, began to trot after him, giving little gleeful yet timid cries when she thought she had him.

He shifted the chairs and used them as obstacles, forcing her to go round and round one of them for a minute at a time, and then leaving that one to seize upon another. Laurine ran now, giving herself wholly up to the charm of this new game, and with flushed face, rushed forward with the bound of a delighted child at each of the flights, the tricks, the feints of her companion. Suddenly, just as she thought she had got him, he seized her in his arms, and lifting her to the ceiling, exclaimed: "Touch."

The delighted girl wriggled her legs to escape, and laughed with all her heart.

Madame de Marelle came in at that moment, and was amazed. "What, Laurine, Laurine, playing! You are a sorcerer, sir."

He put down the little girl, kissed her mother's hand, and they sat down with the child between them. They began to chat, but Laurine, usually so silent, kept talking all the while, and had to be sent to her room. She obeyed without a word, but with tears in her eyes.

As soon as they were alone, Madame de Marelle lowered her voice. "You do not know, but I have a grand scheme, and I have thought of you. This is it. As I dine every week at the Forestiers, I return their hospitality from time to time at some restaurant. I do not like to entertain company at home, my household is not arranged for that, and besides, I do not understand anything about domestic affairs, anything about the kitchen, anything at all. I like to live anyhow. So I entertain them now and then at a restaurant, but it is not very lively when there are only three, and my own acquaintances scarcely go well with them. I tell you all this in order to explain a somewhat irregular invitation. You understand, do you not, that I want you to make one of us on Saturday at the Café Riche, at half-past seven. You know the place?"

He accepted with pleasure, and she went on: "There will be only us four. These little outings are very amusing to us women who are not accustomed to them."

She was wearing a dark brown dress, which showed off the lines of her waist, her hips, her bosom, and her arm in a coquettishly provocative way. Duroy felt confusedly astonished at the lack of harmony between this carefully refined elegance and her evident carelessness as regarded her dwelling. All that clothed her body, all that closely and directly touched her flesh was fine and delicate, but that which surrounded her did not matter to her.

He left her, retaining, as before, the sense of her continued presence in species of hallucination of the senses. And he awaited the day of the dinner with growing impatience.

Having hired, for the second time, a dress suit – his funds not yet allowing him to buy one – he arrived first at the rendezvous, a few minutes before the time. He was ushered up to the second story, and into a small private dining-room hung with red and white, its single window opening into the boulevard. A square table, laid for four, displaying its white cloth, so shining that it seemed to be varnished, and the glasses and the silver glittered brightly in the light of the twelve candles of two tall candelabra. Without was a broad patch of light green, due to the leaves of a tree lit up by the bright light from the dining-rooms.

Duroy sat down in a low armchair, upholstered in red to match the hangings on the walls. The worn springs yielding beneath him caused him to feel as though sinking into a hole. He heard throughout the huge house a confused murmur, the murmur of a large restaurant, made up of the clattering of glass and silver, the hurried steps of the waiters, deadened by the carpets in the passages, and the opening of doors letting out the sound of voices from the numerous private rooms in which people were dining. Forestier came in and shook hands with him, with a cordial familiarity which he never displayed at the offices of the *Vie Française*.

"The ladies are coming together," said he; "these little dinners are very pleasant."

Then he glanced at the table, turned a gas jet that was feebly burning completely off, closed one sash of the window on account of the draught, and chose a sheltered place for himself, with a remark: "I must be careful; I have been better for a month, and now I am queer again these last few days. I must have caught cold on Tuesday, coming out of the theater."

The door was opened, and, followed by a waiter, the two ladies appeared, veiled, muffled, reserved, with that charmingly mysterious bearing they assume in such places, where the surroundings are suspicious.

As Duroy bowed to Madame Forestier she scolded him for not having come to see her again; then she added with a smile, in the direction of her friend: "I know what it is; you prefer Madame de Marelle, you can find time to visit her."

They sat down to table, and the waiter having handed the wine card to Forestier, Madame de Marelle exclaimed: "Give these gentlemen whatever they like, but for us iced champagne, the best, sweet champagne, mind – nothing else." And the man having withdrawn, she added with an excited laugh: "I am going to get tipsy this evening; we will have a spree – a regular spree."

Forestier, who did not seem to have heard, said: "Would you mind the window being closed? My chest has been rather queer the last few days."

"No, not at all."

He pushed too the sash left open, and returned to his place with a reassured and tranquil countenance. His wife said nothing. Seemingly lost in thought, and with her eyes lowered towards the table, she smiled at the glasses with that vague smile which seemed always to promise and never to grant.

The Ostend oysters were brought in, tiny and plump like little ears enclosed in shells, and melting between the tongue and the palate like salt bon-bons. Then, after the soup, was served a trout as rose-tinted as a young girl, and the guests began to talk.

They spoke at first of a current scandal; the story of a lady of position, surprised by one of her husband's friends supping in a private room with a foreign prince. Forestier laughed a great deal at the adventure; the two ladies declared that the indiscreet gossip was nothing less than a blackguard and a coward. Duroy was of their opinion, and loudly proclaimed that it is the duty of a man in these matters, whether he be actor, confidant, or simple spectator, to be silent as the grave. He added: "How full life would be of pleasant things if we could reckon upon the absolute discretion of one another. That which often, almost always, checks women is the fear of the secret being revealed. Come, is it not true?" he continued. "How many are there who would yield to a sudden desire, the caprice of an hour, a passing fancy, did they not fear to pay for a short-lived and fleeting pleasure by an irremediable scandal and painful tears?"

He spoke with catching conviction, as though pleading a cause, his own cause, as though he had said: "It is not with me that one would have to dread such dangers. Try me and see."

They both looked at him approvingly, holding that he spoke rightly and justly, confessing by their friendly silence that their flexible morality as Parisians would not have held out long before the certainty of secrecy. And Forestier, leaning back in his place on the divan, one leg bent under him, and his napkin thrust into his waistcoat, suddenly said with the satisfied laugh of a skeptic: "The deuce! yes, they would all go in for it if they were certain of silence. Poor husbands!"

And they began to talk of love. Without admitting it to be eternal, Duroy understood it as lasting, creating a bond, a tender friendship, a confidence. The union of the senses was only a seal to the union of hearts. But he was angry at the outrageous jealousies, melodramatic scenes, and unpleasantness which almost always accompany ruptures.

When he ceased speaking, Madame de Marelle replied: "Yes, it is the only pleasant thing in life, and we often spoil it by preposterous unreasonableness."

Madame Forestier, who was toying with her knife, added: "Yes – yes – it is pleasant to be loved."

And she seemed to be carrying her dream further, to be thinking things that she dared not give words to.

As the first *entrée* was slow in coming, they sipped from time to time a mouthful of champagne, and nibbled bits of crust. And the idea of love, entering into them, slowly intoxicated their souls, as the bright wine, rolling drop by drop down their throats, fired their blood and perturbed their minds.

The waiter brought in some lamb cutlets, delicate and tender, upon a thick bed of asparagus tips.

"Ah! this is good," exclaimed Forestier; and they ate slowly, savoring the delicate meat and vegetables as smooth as cream.

Duroy resumed: "For my part, when I love a woman everything else in the world disappears." He said this in a tone of conviction.

Madame Forestier murmured, with her let-me-alone air:

"There is no happiness comparable to that of the first hand-clasp, when the one asks, 'Do you love me?' and the other replies, 'Yes.'"

Madame de Marelle, who had just tossed a fresh glass of champagne off at a draught, said gayly, as she put down her glass: "For my part, I am not so Platonic."

And all began to smile with kindling eyes at these words.

Forestier, stretched out in his seat on the divan, opened his arms, rested them on the cushions, and said in a serious tone: "This frankness does you honor, and proves that you are a practical woman. But may one ask you what is the opinion of Monsieur de Marelle?"

She shrugged her shoulders slightly, with infinite and prolonged disdain; and then in a decided tone remarked: "Monsieur de Marelle has no opinions on this point. He only has – abstentions."

And the conversation, descending from the elevated theories, concerning love, strayed into the flowery garden of polished blackguardism. It was the moment of clever double meanings; veils raised by words, as petticoats are lifted by the wind; tricks of language; clever disguised audacities; sentences which reveal nude images in covered phrases; which cause the vision of all that may not be said to flit rapidly before the eye and the mind, and allow the well-bred people the enjoyment of a kind of subtle and mysterious love, a species of impure mental contact, due to the simultaneous evocation of secret, shameful, and longed-for pleasures. The roast, consisting of partridges flanked by quails, had been served; then a dish of green peas, and then a terrine of foie gras, accompanied by a curly-leaved salad, filling a salad bowl as though with green foam. They had partaken of all these things without tasting them, without knowing, solely taken up by what they were talking of, plunged as it were in a bath of love.

The two ladies were now going it strongly in their remarks. Madame de Marelle, with a native audacity which resembled a direct provocation, and Madame Forestier with a charming reserve, a modesty in her tone, voice, smile, and bearing that underlined while seeming to soften the bold remarks falling from her lips. Forestier, leaning quite back on the cushions, laughed, drank and ate without leaving off, and sometimes threw in a word so risqué or so crude that the ladies, somewhat shocked by its appearance, and for appearance sake, put on a little air of embarrassment that lasted two or three seconds. When he had given vent to something a little too coarse, he added: "You are going ahead nicely, my children. If you go on like that you will end by making fools of yourselves."

Dessert came, and then coffee; and the liquors poured a yet warmer dose of commotion into the excited minds.

As she had announced on sitting down to table, Madame de Marelle was intoxicated, and acknowledged it in the lively and graceful rabble of a woman emphasizing, in order to amuse her guests, a very real commencement of drunkenness.

Madame Forestier was silent now, perhaps out of prudence, and Duroy, feeling himself too much excited not to be in danger of compromising himself, maintained a prudent reserve.

Cigarettes were lit, and all at once Forestier began to cough. It was a terrible fit, that seemed to tear his chest, and with red face and forehead damp with perspiration, he choked behind his napkin. When the fit was over he growled angrily: "These feeds are very bad for me; they are ridiculous." All his good humor had vanished before his terror of the illness that haunted his thoughts. "Let us go home," said he.

Madame de Marelle rang for the waiter, and asked for the bill. It was brought almost immediately. She tried to read it, but the figures danced before her eyes, and she passed it to Duroy, saying: "Here, pay for me; I can't see, I am too tipsy."

And at the same time she threw him her purse. The bill amounted to one hundred and thirty francs. Duroy checked it, and then handed over two notes and received back the change, saying in a low tone: "What shall I give the waiter?"

"What you like; I do not know."

He put five francs on the salver, and handed back the purse, saying: "Shall I see you to your door?"

"Certainly. I am incapable of finding my way home."

They shook hands with the Forestiers, and Duroy found himself alone with Madame de Marelle in a cab. He felt her close to him, so close, in this dark box, suddenly lit up for a moment by the lamps on the sidewalk. He felt through his sleeve the warmth of her shoulder, and he could find nothing to say to her, absolutely nothing, his mind being paralyzed by the imperative desire to seize her in his arms.

"If I dared to, what would she do?" he thought. The recollection of all the things uttered during dinner emboldened him, but the fear of scandal restrained him at the same time.

Nor did she say anything either, but remained motionless in her corner. He would have thought that she was asleep if he had not seen her eyes glitter every time that a ray of light entered the carriage.

"What was she thinking?" He felt that he must not speak, that a word, a single word, breaking this silence would destroy his chance; yet courage failed him, the courage needed for abrupt and brutal action. All at once he felt her foot move. She had made a movement, a quick, nervous movement of impatience, perhaps of appeal. This almost imperceptible gesture caused a thrill to run through him from head to foot, and he threw himself upon her, seeking her mouth with his lips, her form with his hands.

But the cab having shortly stopped before the house in which she resided, Duroy, surprised, had no time to seek passionate phrases to thank her, and express his grateful love. However, stunned by what had taken place, she did not rise, she did not stir. Then he was afraid that the driver might suspect something, and got out first to help her to alight.

At length she got out of the cab, staggering and without saying a word. He rang the bell, and as the door opened, said, tremblingly: "When shall I see you again?"

She murmured so softly that he scarcely heard it: "Come and lunch with me to-morrow." And she disappeared in the entry, pushed to the heavy door, which closed with a noise like that of a cannon. He gave the driver five francs, and began to walk along with rapid and triumphant steps, and heart overflowing with joy.

He had won at last – a married woman, a lady. How easy and unexpected it had all been. He had fancied up till then that to assail and conquer one of these so greatly longed-for beings, infinite pains, interminable expectations, a skillful siege carried on by means of gallant attentions, words of love, sighs, and gifts were needed. And, lo! suddenly, at the faintest attack, the first whom he had encountered had yielded to him so quickly that he was stupefied at it.

"She was tipsy," he thought; "to-morrow it will be another story. She will meet me with tears." This notion disturbed him, but he added: "Well, so much the worse. Now I have her, I mean to keep her."

He was somewhat agitated the next day as he ascended Madame de Marelle's staircase. How would she receive him? And suppose she would not receive him at all? Suppose she had forbidden them to admit him? Suppose she had said – but, no, she could not have said anything without letting the whole truth be guessed. So he was master of the situation.

The little servant opened the door. She wore her usual expression. He felt reassured, as if he had anticipated her displaying a troubled countenance, and asked: "Is your mistress quite well?"

She replied: "Oh! yes, sir, the same as usual," and showed him into the drawing-room.

He went straight to the chimney-glass to ascertain the state of his hair and his toilet, and was arranging his necktie before it, when he saw in it the young woman watching him as she stood at the door leading from her room. He pretended not to have noticed her, and the pair looked at one another for a few moments in the glass, observing and watching before finding themselves face to face. He turned round. She had not moved, and seemed to be waiting. He darted forward, stammering: "My darling! my darling!"

She opened her arms and fell upon his breast; then having lifted her head towards him, their lips met in a long kiss.

He thought: "It is easier than I should have imagined. It is all going on very well."

And their lips separating, he smiled without saying a word, while striving to throw a world of love into his looks. She, too, smiled, with that smile by which women show their desire, their consent, their wish to yield themselves, and murmured: "We are alone. I have sent Laurine to lunch with one of her young friends."

He sighed as he kissed her. "Thanks, I will worship you."

Then she took his arm, as if he had been her husband, to go to the sofa, on which they sat down side by side. He wanted to start a clever and attractive chat, but not being able to do so to his liking, stammered: "Then you are not too angry with me?"

She put her hand on his mouth, saying "Be quiet."

They sat in silence, looking into one another's eyes, with burning fingers interlaced.

"How I did long for you!" said he.

She repeated: "Be quiet."

They heard the servant arranging the table in the adjoining dining-room, and he rose, saying: "I must not remain so close to you. I shall lose my head."

The door opened, and the servant announced that lunch was ready. Duroy gravely offered his arm.

They lunched face to face, looking at one another and constantly smiling, solely taken up by themselves, and enveloped in the sweet enchantment of a growing love. They ate, without knowing what. He felt a foot, a little foot, straying under the table. He took it between his own and kept it there, squeezing it with all his might. The servant came and went, bringing and taking away the dishes with a careless air, without seeming to notice anything.

When they had finished they returned to the drawing-room, and resumed their place on the sofa, side by side. Little by little he pressed up against her, striving to take her in his arms. But she calmly repulsed him, saying: "Take care; someone may come in."

He murmured: "When can I see you quite alone, to tell you how I love you?"

She leant over towards him and whispered: "I will come and pay you a visit one of these days."

He felt himself redden. "You know – you know – my place is very small."

She smiled: "That does not matter. It is you I shall call to see, and not your rooms."

Then he pressed her to know when she would come. She named a day in the latter half of the week. He begged of her to advance the date in broken sentences, playing with and squeezing her hands, with glittering eyes, and flushed face, heated and torn by desire, that imperious desire which follows *tête-à-tête* repasts. She was amazed to see him implore her with such ardor, and yielded a day from time to time. But he kept repeating: "To-morrow, only say to-morrow."

She consented at length. "Yes, to-morrow; at five o'clock."

He gave a long sigh of joy, and they then chatted almost quietly with an air of intimacy, as though they had known one another twenty years. The sound of the door bell made them start, and with a bound they separated to a distance. She murmured: "It must be Laurine."

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