

GUY DE MAUPASSANT

NOTRE COEUR OR A
WOMAN'S PASTIME

Guy de Maupassant
Notre Coeur or A
Woman's Pastime

http://www.litres.ru/pages/biblio_book/?art=25293683

Notre Coeur or A Woman's Pastime / A Novel:

Содержание

GUY DE MAUPASSANT	4
INTRODUCTION	18
NOTRE CŒUR	27
CHAPTER I.	27
CHAPTER II.	57
CHAPTER III.	72
CHAPTER IV.	85
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.	88

Guy de Maupassant

Notre Coeur or A Woman's Pastime / A Novel

GUY DE MAUPASSANT

Of the French writers of romance of the latter part of the nineteenth century no one made a reputation as quickly as did Guy de Maupassant. Not one has preserved that reputation with more ease, not only during life, but in death. None so completely hides his personality in his glory. In an epoch of the utmost publicity, in which the most insignificant deeds of a celebrated man are spied, recorded, and commented on, the author of "Boule de Suif," of "Pierre et Jean," of "Notre Cœur," found a way of effacing his personality in his work.

Of De Maupassant we know that he was born in Normandy about 1850; that he was the favorite pupil, if one may so express it, the literary *protégé*, of Gustave Flaubert; that he made his *début* late in 1880, with a novel inserted in a small collection, published by Emile Zola and his young friends, under the title: "The Soirées of Medan"; that subsequently he did not fail to publish stories and romances every year up to 1891, when a disease of the brain struck him down in the fullness of

production; and that he died, finally, in 1893, without having recovered his reason.

We know, too, that he passionately loved a strenuous physical life and long journeys, particularly long journeys upon the sea. He owned a little sailing yacht, named after one of his books, "Bel-Ami," in which he used to sojourn for weeks and months. These meager details are almost the only ones that have been gathered as food for the curiosity of the public.

I leave the legendary side, which is always in evidence in the case of a celebrated man, – that gossip, for example, which avers that Maupassant was a high liver and a worldling. The very number of his volumes is a protest to the contrary. One could not write so large a number of pages in so small a number of years without the virtue of industry, a virtue incompatible with habits of dissipation. This does not mean that the writer of these great romances had no love for pleasure and had not tasted the world, but that for him these were secondary things. The psychology of his work ought, then, to find an interpretation other than that afforded by wholly false or exaggerated anecdotes. I wish to indicate here how this work, illumined by the three or four positive data which I have given, appears to me to demand it.

And first, what does that anxiety to conceal his personality prove, carried as it was to such an extreme degree? The answer rises spontaneously in the minds of those who have studied closely the history of literature. The absolute silence about himself, preserved by one whose position among us was that of a

Tourgenief, or of a Mérimée, and of a Molière or a Shakespeare among the classic great, reveals, to a person of instinct, a nervous sensibility of extreme depth. There are many chances for an artist of his kind, however timid, or for one who has some grief, to show the depth of his emotion. To take up again only two of the names just cited, this was the case with the author of "Terres Vierges," and with the writer of "Colomba."

A somewhat minute analysis of the novels and romances of Maupassant would suffice to demonstrate, even if we did not know the nature of the incidents which prompted them, that he also suffered from an excess of nervous emotionalism. Nine times out of ten, what is the subject of these stories to which freedom of style gives the appearance of health? A tragic episode. I cite, at random, "Mademoiselle Fifi," "La Petite Roque," "Inutile Beauté," "Le Masque," "Le Horla," "L'Épreuve," "Le Champ d'Oliviers," among the novels, and among the romances, "Une Vie," "Pierre et Jean," "Fort comme la Mort," "Notre Cœur." His imagination aims to represent the human being as imprisoned in a situation at once insupportable and inevitable. The spell of this grief and trouble exerts such a power upon the writer that he ends stories commenced in pleasantries with some sinister drama. Let me instance "Saint-Antonin," "A Midnight Revel," "The Little Cask," and "Old Amable." You close the book at the end of these vigorous sketches, and feel how surely they point to constant suffering on the part of him who executed them.

This is the leading trait in the literary physiognomy of Maupassant, as it is the leading and most profound trait in the psychology of his work, viz., that human life is a snare laid by nature, where joy is always changed to misery, where noble words and the highest professions of faith serve the lowest plans and the most cruel egoism, where chagrin, crime, and folly are forever on hand to pursue implacably our hopes, nullify our virtues, and annihilate our wisdom. But this is not the whole.

Maupassant has been called a literary nihilist – but (and this is the second trait of his singular genius) in him nihilism finds itself coexistent with an animal energy so fresh and so intense that for a long time it deceives the closest observer. In an eloquent discourse, pronounced over his premature grave, Emile Zola well defined this illusion: "We congratulated him," said he, "upon that health which seemed unbreakable, and justly credited him with the soundest constitution of our band, as well as with the clearest mind and the sanest reason. It was then that this frightful thunderbolt destroyed him."

It is not exact to say that the lofty genius of De Maupassant was that of an absolutely sane man. We comprehend it today, and, on re-reading him, we find traces everywhere of his final malady. But it is exact to say that this wounded genius was, by a singular circumstance, the genius of a robust man. A physiologist would without doubt explain this anomaly by the coexistence of a nervous lesion, light at first, with a muscular, athletic temperament. Whatever the cause, the effect is

undeniable. The skilled and dainty pessimism of De Maupassant was accompanied by a vigor and physique very unusual. His sensations are in turn those of a hunter and of a sailor, who have, as the old French saying expressively puts it, "swift foot, eagle eye," and who are attuned to all the whisperings of nature.

The only confidences that he has ever permitted his pen to tell of the intoxication of a free, animal existence are in the opening pages of the story entitled "Mouche," where he recalls, among the sweetest memories of his youth, his rollicking canoe parties upon the Seine, and in the description in "La Vie Errante" of a night spent on the sea, – "to be alone upon the water under the sky, through a warm night," – in which he speaks of the happiness of those "who receive sensations through the whole surface of their flesh, as they do through their eyes, their mouth, their ears, and sense of smell."

His unique and too scanty collection of verses, written in early youth, contains the two most fearless, I was going to say the most ingenuous, paeans, perhaps, that have been written since the Renaissance: "At the Water's Edge" (Au Bord de l'Eau) and the "Rustic Venus" (La Venus Rustique). But here is a paganism whose ardor, by a contrast which brings up the ever present duality of his nature, ends in an inexpressible shiver of scorn:

"We look at each other, astonished, immovable,
And both are so pale that it makes us fear."

* * * * *

"Alas! through all our senses slips life itself away."

This ending of the "Water's Edge" is less sinister than the murder and the vision of horror which terminate the pantheistic hymn of the "Rustic Venus." Considered as documents revealing the cast of mind of him who composed them, these two lyrical essays are especially significant, since they were spontaneous. They explain why De Maupassant, in the early years of production, voluntarily chose, as the heroes of his stories, creatures very near to primitive existence, peasants, sailors, poachers, girls of the farm, and the source of the vigor with which he describes these rude figures. The robustness of his animalism permits him fully to imagine all the simple sensations of these beings, while his pessimism, which tinges these sketches of brutal customs with an element of delicate scorn, preserves him from coarseness. It is this constant and involuntary antithesis which gives unique value to those Norman scenes which have contributed so much to his glory. It corresponds to those two contradictory tendencies in literary art, which seek always to render life in motion with the most intense coloring, and still to make more and more subtle the impression of this life. How is one ambition to be satisfied at the same time as the other, since all gain in color and movement brings about a diminution of sensibility, and conversely? The paradox of his constitution permitted to Maupassant this seemingly impossible accord, aided as he was by an intellect whose influence was all powerful upon his development – the writer I mention above,

Gustave Flaubert.

These meetings of a pupil and a master, both great, are indeed rare. They present, in fact, some troublesome conditions, the first of which is a profound analogy between two types of thought. There must have been, besides, a reciprocity of affection, which does not often obtain between a renowned senior who is growing old and an obscure junior, whose renown is increasing. From generation to generation, envy reascends no less than she redescends. For the honor of French men of letters, let us add that this exceptional phenomenon has manifested itself twice in the nineteenth century. Mérimée, whom I have also named, received from Stendhal, at twenty, the same benefits that Maupassant received from Flaubert.

The author of "Une Vie" and the writer of "Clara Jozul" resemble each other, besides, in a singular and analogous circumstance. Both achieved renown at the first blow, and by a masterpiece which they were able to equal but never surpass. Both were misanthropes early in life, and practised to the end the ancient advice that the disciple of Beyle carried upon his seal: *μηνήσο απιστείν* – "Remember to distrust." And, at the same time, both had delicate, tender hearts under this affectation of cynicism, both were excellent sons, irreproachable friends, indulgent masters, and both were idolized by their inferiors. Both were worldly, yet still loved a wanderer's life; both joined to a constant taste for luxury an irresistible desire for solitude. Both belonged to the extreme left of the literature of their epoch,

but kept themselves from excess and used with a judgment marvelously sure the sounder principles of their school. They knew how to remain lucid and classic, in taste as much as in form – Mérimée through all the audacity of a fancy most exotic, and Maupassant in the realism of the most varied and exact observation. At a little distance they appear to be two patterns, identical in certain traits, of the same family of minds, and Tourgenief, who knew and loved the one and the other, never failed to class them as brethren.

They are separated, however, by profound differences, which perhaps belong less to their nature than to that of the masters from whom they received their impulses: Stendhal, so alert, so mobile, after a youth passed in war and a ripe age spent in vagabond journeys, rich in experiences, immediate and personal; Flaubert so poor in direct impressions, so paralyzed by his health, by his family, by his theories even, and so rich in reflections, for the most part solitary.

Among the theories of the anatomist of "Madame Bovary," there are two which appear without ceasing in his Correspondence, under one form or another, and these are the ones which are most strongly evident in the art of De Maupassant. We now see the consequences which were inevitable by reason of them, endowed as Maupassant was with a double power of feeling life bitterly, and at the same time with so much of animal force. The first theory bears upon the choice of personages and the story of the romance, the second upon the

character of the style. The son of a physician, and brought up in the rigors of scientific method, Flaubert believed this method to be efficacious in art as in science. For instance, in the writing of a romance, he seemed to be as scientific as in the development of a history of customs, in which the essential is absolute exactness and local color. He therefore naturally wished to make the most scrupulous and detailed observation of the environment.

Thus is explained the immense labor in preparation which his stories cost him – the story of "Madame Bovary," of "The Sentimental Education," and "Bouvard and Pécuchet," documents containing as much *minutiæ* as his historical stories. Beyond everything he tried to select details that were eminently significant. Consequently he was of the opinion that the romance writer should discard all that lessened this significance, that is, extraordinary events and singular heroes. The exceptional personage, it seemed to him, should be suppressed, as should also high dramatic incident, since, produced by causes less general, these have a range more restricted. The truly scientific romance writer, proposing to paint a certain class, will attain his end more effectively if he incarnate personages of the middle order, and, consequently, paint traits common to that class. And not only middle-class traits, but middle-class adventures.

From this point of view, examine the three great romances of the Master from Rouen, and you will see that he has not lost sight of this first and greatest principle of his art, any more than he has of the second, which was that these documents should be drawn

up in prose of absolutely perfect technique. We know with what passionate care he worked at his phrases, and how indefatigably he changed them over and over again. Thus he satisfied that instinct of beauty which was born of his romantic soul, while he gratified the demand of truth which inhered from his scientific training by his minute and scrupulous exactness.

The theory of the mean of truth on one side, as the foundation of the subject, – "the humble truth," as he termed it at the beginning of "Une Vie," – and of the agonizing of beauty on the other side, in composition, determines the whole use that Maupassant made of his literary gifts. It helped to make more intense and more systematic that dainty yet dangerous pessimism which in him was innate. The middle-class personage, in wearisome society like ours, is always a caricature, and the happenings are nearly always vulgar. When one studies a great number of them, one finishes by looking at humanity from the angle of disgust and despair. The philosophy of the romances and novels of De Maupassant is so continuously and profoundly surprising that one becomes overwhelmed by it. It reaches limitation; it seems to deny that man is susceptible to grandeur, or that motives of a superior order can uplift and ennoble the soul, but it does so with a sorrow that is profound. All that portion of the sentimental and moral world which in itself is the highest remains closed to it.

In revenge, this philosophy finds itself in a relation cruelly exact with the half-civilization of our day. By that I mean the

poorly educated individual who has rubbed against knowledge enough to justify a certain egoism, but who is too poor in faculty to conceive an ideal, and whose native grossness is corrupted beyond redemption. Under his blouse, or under his coat – whether he calls himself Renardet, as does the foul assassin in "Petite Roque," or Duroy, as does the sly hero of "Bel-Ami," or Bretigny, as does the vile seducer of "Mont Oriol," or Césaire, the son of Old Amable in the novel of that name, – this degraded type abounds in Maupassant's stories, evoked with a ferocity almost jovial where it meets the robustness of temperament which I have pointed out, a ferocity which gives them a reality more exact still because the half-civilized person is often impulsive and, in consequence, the physical easily predominates. There, as elsewhere, the degenerate is everywhere a degenerate who gives the impression of being an ordinary man.

There are quantities of men of this stamp in large cities. No writer has felt and expressed this complex temperament with more justice than De Maupassant, and, as he was an infinitely careful observer of *milieu* and landscape and all that constitutes a precise middle distance, his novels can be considered an irrefutable record of the social classes which he studied at a certain time and along certain lines. The Norman peasant and the Provençal peasant, for example; also the small officeholder, the gentleman of the provinces, the country squire, the clubman of Paris, the journalist of the boulevard, the doctor at the spa, the commercial artist, and, on the feminine side, the servant

girl, the working girl, the *demi-grisette*, the street girl, rich or poor, the gallant lady of the city and of the provinces, and the society woman – these are some of the figures that he has painted at many sittings, and whom he used to such effect that the novels and romances in which they are painted have come to be history. Just as it is impossible to comprehend the Rome of the Cæsars without the work of Petronius, so is it impossible to fully comprehend the France of 1850-90 without these stories of Maupassant. They are no more the whole image of the country than the "Satyricon" was the whole image of Rome, but what their author has wished to paint, he has painted to the life and with a brush that is graphic in the extreme.

If Maupassant had only painted, in general fashion, the characters and the phase of literature mentioned, he would not be distinguished from other writers of the group called "naturalists." His true glory is in the extraordinary superiority of his art. He did not invent it, and his method is not alien to that of "Madame Bovary," but he knew how to give it a suppleness, a variety, and a freedom which were always wanting in Flaubert. The latter, in his best pages, is always strained. To use the expressive metaphor of the Greek athletes, he "smells of the oil." When one recalls that when attacked by hysteric epilepsy, Flaubert postponed the crisis of the terrible malady by means of sedatives, this strained atmosphere of labor – I was going to say of stupor – which pervades his work is explained. He is an athlete, a runner, but one who drags at his feet a terrible weight. He is in the race only

for the prize of effort, an effort of which every motion reveals the intensity.

Maupassant, on the other hand, if he suffered from a nervous lesion, gave no sign of it, except in his heart. His intelligence was bright and lively, and above all, his imagination, served by senses always on the alert, preserved for some years an astonishing freshness of direct vision. If his art was due to Flaubert, it is no more belittling to him than if one call Raphael an imitator of Perugini.

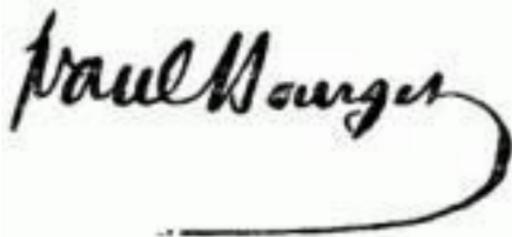
Like Flaubert, he excelled in composing a story, in distributing the facts with subtle gradation, in bringing in at the end of a familiar dialogue something startlingly dramatic; but such composition, with him, seems easy, and while the descriptions are marvelously well established in his stories, the reverse is true of Flaubert's, which always appear a little veneered. Maupassant's phrasing, however dramatic it may be, remains easy and flowing.

Maupassant always sought for large and harmonious rhythm in his deliberate choice of terms, always chose sound, wholesome language, with a constant care for technical beauty. Inheriting from his master an instrument already forged, he wielded it with a surer skill. In the quality of his style, at once so firm and clear, so gorgeous yet so sober, so supple and so firm, he equals the writers of the seventeenth century. His method, so deeply and simply French, succeeds in giving an indescribable "tang" to his descriptions. If observation from nature imprints upon his tales

the strong accent of reality, the prose in which they are shrined so conforms to the genius of the race as to smack of the soil.

It is enough that the critics of to-day place Guy de Maupassant among our classic writers. He has his place in the ranks of pure French genius, with the Regniers, the La Fontaines, the Molières. And those signs of secret ill divined everywhere under this wholesome prose surround it for those who knew and loved him with a pathos that is inexpressible.

Paul Bourget

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Paul Bourget". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long, sweeping underline that curves to the right and then back to the left.

INTRODUCTION

Born in the middle year of the nineteenth century, and fated unfortunately never to see its close, Guy de Maupassant was probably the most versatile and brilliant among the galaxy of novelists who enriched French literature between the years 1800 and 1900. Poetry, drama, prose of short and sustained effort, and volumes of travel and description, each sparkling with the same minuteness of detail and brilliancy of style, flowed from his pen during the twelve years of his literary life.

Although his genius asserted itself in youth, he had the patience of the true artist, spending his early manhood in cutting and polishing the facets of his genius under the stern though paternal mentorship of Gustave Flaubert. Not until he had attained the age of thirty did he venture on publication, challenging criticism for the first time with a volume of poems.

Many and various have been the judgments passed upon Maupassant's work. But now that the perspective of time is lengthening, enabling us to form a more deliberate and therefore a juster, view of his complete achievement, we are driven irresistibly to the conclusion that the force that shaped and swayed Maupassant's prose writings was the conviction that in life there could be no phase so noble or so mean, so honorable or so contemptible, so lofty or so low as to be unworthy of chronicling, – no groove of human virtue or fault, success or

failure, wisdom or folly that did not possess its own peculiar psychological aspect and therefore demanded analysis.

To this analysis Maupassant brought a facile and dramatic pen, a penetration as searching as a probe, and a power of psychological vision that in its minute detail, now pathetic, now ironical, in its merciless revelation of the hidden springs of the human heart, whether of aristocrat, *bourgeois*, peasant, or priest, allow one to call him a Meissonier in words.

The school of romantic realism which was founded by Mérimée and Balzac found its culmination in De Maupassant. He surpassed his mentor, Flaubert, in the breadth and vividness of his work, and one of the greatest of modern French critics has recorded the deliberate opinion, that of all Taine's pupils Maupassant had the greatest command of language and the most finished and incisive style. Robust in imagination and fired with natural passion, his psychological curiosity kept him true to human nature, while at the same time his mental eye, when fixed upon the most ordinary phases of human conduct, could see some new motive or aspect of things hitherto unnoticed by the careless crowd.

It has been said by casual critics that Maupassant lacked one quality indispensable to the production of truly artistic work, viz.: an absolutely normal, that is, moral, point of view. The answer to this criticism is obvious. No dissector of the gamut of human passion and folly in all its tones could present aught that could be called new, if ungifted with a view-point totally

out of the ordinary plane. Cold and merciless in the use of this *point de vue* De Maupassant undoubtedly is, especially in such vivid depictions of love, both physical and maternal, as we find in "L'histoire d'une fille de ferme" and "La femme de Paul." But then the surgeon's scalpel never hesitates at giving pain, and pain is often the road to health and ease. Some of Maupassant's short stories are sermons more forcible than any moral dissertation could ever be.

Of De Maupassant's sustained efforts "Une Vie" may bear the palm. This romance has the distinction of having changed Tolstoi from an adverse critic into a warm admirer of the author. To quote the Russian moralist upon the book:

"'Une Vie' is a romance of the best type, and in my judgment the greatest that has been produced by any French writer since Victor Hugo penned 'Les Misérables.' Passing over the force and directness of the narrative, I am struck by the intensity, the grace, and the insight with which the writer treats the new aspects of human nature which he finds in the life he describes."

And as if gracefully to recall a former adverse criticism, Tolstoi adds:

"I find in the book, in almost equal strength, the three cardinal qualities essential to great work, viz: moral purpose, perfect style, and absolute sincerity... Maupassant is a man whose vision has penetrated the silent depths of human life, and from that vantage-ground interprets the

struggle of humanity."

"Bel-Ami" appeared almost two years after "Une Vie," that is to say, about 1885. Discussed and criticised as it has been, it is in reality a satire, an indignant outburst against the corruption of society which in the story enables an ex-soldier, devoid of conscience, honor, even of the commonest regard for others, to gain wealth and rank. The purport of the story is clear to those who recognize the ideas that governed Maupassant's work, and even the hasty reader or critic, on reading "Mont Oriol," which was published two years later and is based on a combination of the *motifs* which inspired "Une Vie" and "Bel-Ami," will reconsider former hasty judgments, and feel, too, that beneath the triumph of evil which calls forth Maupassant's satiric anger there lies the substratum on which all his work is founded, viz: the persistent, ceaseless questioning of a soul unable to reconcile or explain the contradiction between love in life and inevitable death. Who can read in "Bel-Ami" the terribly graphic description of the consumptive journalist's demise, his frantic clinging to life, and his refusal to credit the slow and merciless approach of death, without feeling that the question asked at Naishapur many centuries ago is still waiting for the solution that is always promised but never comes?

In the romances which followed, dating from 1888 to 1890, a sort of calm despair seems to have settled down upon De Maupassant's attitude toward life. Psychologically acute as ever, and as perfect in style and sincerity as before, we miss the note of

anger. Fatality is the keynote, and yet, sounding low, we detect a genuine subtone of sorrow. Was it a prescience of 1893? So much work to be done, so much work demanded of him, the world of Paris, in all its brilliant and attractive phases, at his feet, and yet – inevitable, ever advancing death, with the question of life still unanswered.

This may account for some of the strained situations we find in his later romances. Vigorous in frame and hearty as he was, the atmosphere of his mental processes must have been vitiated to produce the dainty but dangerous pessimism that pervades some of his later work. This was partly a consequence of his honesty and partly of mental despair. He never accepted other people's views on the questions of life. He looked into such problems for himself, arriving at the truth, as it appeared to him, by the logic of events, often finding evil where he wished to find good, but never hoodwinking himself or his readers by adapting or distorting the reality of things to suit a preconceived idea.

Maupassant was essentially a worshiper of the eternal feminine. He was persuaded that without the continual presence of the gentler sex man's existence would be an emotionally silent wilderness. No other French writer has described and analyzed so minutely and comprehensively the many and various motives and moods that shape the conduct of a woman in life. Take for instance the wonderfully subtle analysis of a woman's heart as wife and mother that we find in "Une Vie." Could aught be more delicately incisive? Sometimes in describing the apparently

inexplicable conduct of a certain woman he leads his readers to a point where a false step would destroy the spell and bring the reproach of banality and ridicule upon the tale. But the catastrophe never occurs. It was necessary to stand poised upon the brink of the precipice to realize the depth of the abyss and feel the terror of the fall.

Closely allied to this phase of Maupassant's nature was the peculiar feeling of loneliness that every now and then breaks irresistibly forth in the course of some short story. Of kindly soul and genial heart, he suffered not only from the oppression of spirit caused by the lack of humanity, kindness, sanity, and harmony which he encountered daily in the world at large, but he had an ever abiding sense of the invincible, unbanishable solitariness of his own Inmost self. I know of no more poignant expression of such a feeling than the cry of despair which rings out in the short story called "Solitude," in which he describes the insurmountable barrier which exists between man and man, or man and woman, however intimate the friendship between them. He could picture but one way of destroying this terrible loneliness, the attainment of a spiritual – a divine – state of love, a condition to which he would give no name utterable by human lips, lest it be profaned, but for which his whole being yearned. How acutely he felt his failure to attain his deliverance may be drawn from his wail that mankind has no universal measure of happiness.

"Each one of us," writes De Maupassant, "forms for himself

an illusion through which he views the world, be it poetic, sentimental, joyous, melancholy, or dismal; an illusion of beauty, which is a human convention; of ugliness, which is a matter of opinion; of truth, which, alas, is never immutable." And he concludes by asserting that the happiest artist is he who approaches most closely to the truth of things as he sees them through his own particular illusion.

Salient points in De Maupassant's genius were that he possessed the rare faculty of holding direct communion with his gifts, and of writing from their dictation as it was interpreted by his senses. He had no patience with writers who in striving to present life as a whole purposely omit episodes that reveal the influence of the senses. "As well," he says, "refrain from describing the effect of intoxicating perfumes upon man as omit the influence of beauty on the temperament of man."

De Maupassant's dramatic instinct was supremely powerful. He seems to select unerringly the one thing in which the soul of the scene is prisoned, and, making that his keynote, gives a picture in words which haunt the memory like a strain of music. The description of the ride of Madame Tellier and her companions in a country cart through a Norman landscape is an admirable example. You smell the masses of the colza in blossom, you see the yellow carpets of ripe corn spotted here and there by the blue coronets of the cornflower, and rapt by the red blaze of the poppy beds and bathed in the fresh greenery of the landscape, you share in the emotions felt by the happy

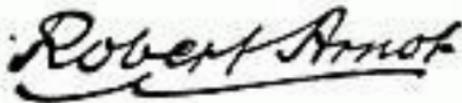
party in the country cart. And yet with all his vividness of description, De Maupassant is always sober and brief. He had the genius of condensation and the reserve which is innate in power, and to his reader could convey as much in a paragraph as could be expressed in a page by many of his predecessors and contemporaries, Flaubert not excepted.

Apart from his novels, De Maupassant's tales may be arranged under three heads: Those that concern themselves with Norman peasant life; those that deal with Government employees (Maupassant himself had long been one) and the Paris middle classes, and those that represent the life of the fashionable world, as well as the weird and fantastic ideas of the later years of his career. Of these three groups the tales of the Norman peasantry perhaps rank highest. He depicts the Norman farmer in surprisingly free and bold strokes, revealing him in all his caution, astuteness, rough gaiety, and homely virtue.

The tragic stage of De Maupassant's life may, I think, be set down as beginning just before the drama of "Musotte" was issued, in conjunction with Jacques Normand, in 1891. He had almost given up the hope of interpreting his puzzles, and the struggle between the falsity of the life which surrounded him and the nobler visions which possessed him was wearing him out. Doubtless he resorted to unwise methods for the dispelling of physical lassitude or for surcease from troubling mental problems. To this period belong such weird and horrible fancies as are contained in the short stories known as "He" and "The

Diary of a Madman." Here and there, we know, were rising in him inklings of a finer and less sordid attitude 'twixt man and woman throughout the world and of a purer constitution of existing things which no exterior force should blemish or destroy. But with these yearningly prophetic gleams came a period of mental death. Then the physical veil was torn aside and for Guy de Maupassant the riddle of existence was answered.

Robert Arnot

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Robert Arnot". The signature is written in a cursive style with a prominent underline.

NOTRE CŒUR

CHAPTER I. THE INTRODUCTION

One day Massival, the celebrated composer of "Rebecca," who for fifteen years, now, had been known as "the young and illustrious master," said to his friend André Mariolle:

"Why is it that you have never secured a presentation to Mme. Michèle de Burne? Take my word for it, she is one of the most interesting women in new Paris."

"Because I do not feel myself at all adapted to her surroundings."

"You are wrong, my dear fellow. It is a house where there is a great deal of novelty and originality; it is wide-awake and very artistic. There is excellent music, and the conversation is as good as in the best salons of the last century. You would be highly appreciated – in the first place because you play so well on the violin, then because you have been very favorably spoken of in the house, and finally because you have the reputation of being select in your choice of friends."

Flattered, but still maintaining his attitude of resistance, supposing, moreover, that this urgent invitation was not given

without the young woman being aware of it, Mariolle ejaculated a "Bah! I shall not bother my head at all about it," in which, through the disdain that he intended to express, was evident his foregone acceptance.

Massival continued: "Would you like to have me present you some of these days? You are already known to her through all of us who are on terms of intimacy with her, for we talk about you often enough. She is a very pretty woman of twenty-eight, abounding in intelligence, who will never take a second husband, for her first venture was a very unfortunate one. She has made her abode a rendezvous for agreeable men. There are not too many club-men or society-men found there – just enough of them to give the proper effect. She will be delighted to have me introduce you."

Mariolle was vanquished; he replied: "Very well, then; one of these days."

At the beginning of the following week the musician came to his house and asked him: "Are you disengaged to-morrow?"

"Why, yes."

"Very well. I will take you to dine with Mme. de Burne; she requested me to invite you. Besides, here is a line from her."

After a few seconds' reflection, for form's sake, Mariolle answered: "That is settled!"

André Mariolle was about thirty-seven years old, a bachelor without a profession, wealthy enough to live in accordance with his likings, to travel, and even to indulge himself in

collecting modern paintings and ancient knickknacks. He had the reputation of being a man of intelligence, rather odd and unsociable, a little capricious and disdainful, who affected the hermit through pride rather than through timidity. Very talented and acute, but indolent, quick to grasp the meaning of things, and capable, perhaps, of accomplishing something great, he had contented himself with enjoying life as a spectator, or rather as a *dilettante*. Had he been poor, he would doubtless have turned out to be a remarkable or celebrated man; born with a good income, he was eternally reproaching himself that he could never be anything better than a nobody.

It is true that he had made more than one attempt in the direction of the arts, but they had lacked vigor. One had been in the direction of literature, by publishing a pleasing book of travels, abounding in incident and correct in style; one toward music by his violin-playing, in which he had gained, even among professional musicians, a respectable reputation; and, finally, one at sculpture, that art in which native aptitude and the faculty of rough-hewing striking and deceptive figures atone in the eyes of the ignorant for deficiencies in study and knowledge. His statuette in terra-cotta, "Masseur Tunisien," had even been moderately successful at the Salon of the preceding year. He was a remarkable horseman, and was also, it was said, an excellent fencer, although he never used the foils in public, owing, perhaps, to the same self-distrustful feeling which impelled him to absent himself from society resorts where serious rivalries were to be

apprehended.

His friends appreciated him, however, and were unanimous in extolling his merits, perhaps for the reason that they had little to fear from him in the way of competition. It was said of him that in every case he was reliable, a devoted friend, extremely agreeable in manner, and very sympathetic in his personality.

Tall of stature, wearing his black beard short upon the cheeks and trained down to a fine point upon the chin, with hair that was beginning to turn gray but curled very prettily, he looked one straight in the face with a pair of clear, brown, piercing eyes in which lurked a shade of distrust and hardness.

Among his intimates he had an especial predilection for artists of every kind – among them Gaston de Lamarthe the novelist, Massival the musician, and the painters Jobin, Rivollet, De Mandol – who seemed to set a high value on his reason, his friendship, his intelligence, and even his judgment, although at bottom, with the vanity that is inseparable from success achieved, they set him down as a very agreeable and very intelligent man who had failed to score a success.

Mariolle's haughty reserve seemed to say: "I am nothing because I have not chosen to be anything." He lived within a narrow circle, therefore, disdaining gallantry and the great frequented salons, where others might have shone more brilliantly than he, and might have obliged him to take his place among the lay-figures of society. He visited only those houses where appreciation was extended to the solid qualities that he

was unwilling to display; and though he had consented so readily to allow himself to be introduced to Mme. Michèle de Burne, the reason was that his best friends, those who everywhere proclaimed his hidden merits, were the intimates of this young woman.

She lived in a pretty *entresol* in the Rue du Général-Foy, behind the church of Saint Augustin. There were two rooms with an outlook on the street – the dining-room and a salon, the one in which she received her company indiscriminately – and two others that opened on a handsome garden of which the owner of the property had the enjoyment. Of the latter the first was a second salon of large dimensions, of greater length than width, with three windows opening on the trees, the leaves of which brushed against the awnings, a room which was embellished with furniture and ornaments exceptionally rare and simple, in the purest and soberest taste and of great value. The tables, the chairs, the little cupboards or *étagères*, the pictures, the fans and the porcelain figures beneath glass covers, the vases, the statuettes, the great clock fixed in the middle of a panel, the entire decoration of this young woman's apartment attracted and held attention by its shape, its age, or its elegance. To create for herself this home, of which she was almost as proud as she was of her own person, she had laid under contribution the knowledge, the friendship, the good nature, and the rummaging instinct of every artist of her acquaintance. She was rich and willing to pay well, and her friends had discovered for her many things,

distinguished by originality, which the mere vulgar amateur would have passed by with contempt. Thus, with their assistance, she had furnished this dwelling, to which access was obtained with difficulty, and where she imagined that her friends received more pleasure and returned more gladly than elsewhere.

It was even a favorite hobby of hers to assert that the colors of the curtains and hangings, the comfort of the seats, the beauty of form, and the gracefulness of general effect are of as much avail to charm, captivate, and acclimatize the eye as are pretty smiles. Sympathetic or antipathetic rooms, she would say, whether rich or poor, attract, hold, or repel, just like the people who live in them. They awake the feelings or stifle them, warm or chill the mind, compel one to talk or be silent, make one sad or cheerful; in a word, they give every visitor an unaccountable desire to remain or to go away.

About the middle of this dimly lighted gallery a grand piano, standing between two *jardinières* filled with flowers, occupied the place of honor and dominated the room. Beyond this a lofty door with two leaves opened gave access to the bedroom, which in turn communicated with a dressing-room, also very large and elegant, hung with chintz like a drawing-room in summer, where Mme. de Burne generally kept herself when she had no company.

Married to a well-mannered good-for-nothing, one of those domestic tyrants before whom everything must bend and yield, she had at first been very unhappy. For five years she had had to endure the unreasonable exactions, the harshness, the jealousy,

even the violence of this intolerable master, and terrified, beside herself with astonishment, she had submitted without revolt to this revelation of married life, crushed as she was beneath the despotic and torturing will of the brutal man whose victim she had become.

He died one night, from an aneurism, as he was coming home, and when she saw the body of her husband brought in, covered with a sheet, unable to believe in the reality of this deliverance, she looked at his corpse with a deep feeling of repressed joy and a frightful dread lest she might show it.

Cheerful, independent, even exuberant by nature, very flexible and attractive, with bright flashes of wit such as are shown in some incomprehensible way in the intellects of certain little girls of Paris, who seem to have breathed from their earliest childhood the stimulating air of the boulevards – where every evening, through the open doors of the theaters, the applause or the hisses that greet the plays come forth, borne on the air – she nevertheless retained from her five years of servitude a strange timidity grafted upon her old-time audacity, a great fear lest she might say too much, do too much, together with a burning desire for emancipation and a stern resolve never again to do anything to imperil her liberty.

Her husband, a man of the world, had trained her to receive like a mute slave, elegant, polite, and well dressed. The despot had numbered among his friends many artists, whom she had received with curiosity and listened to with delight, without ever

daring to allow them to see how she understood and appreciated them.

When her period of mourning was ended she invited a few of them to dinner one evening. Two of them sent excuses; three accepted and were astonished to find a young woman of admirable intelligence and charming manners, who immediately put them at their ease and gracefully told them of the pleasure that they had afforded her in former days by coming to her house. From among her old acquaintances who had ignored her or failed to recognize her qualities she thus gradually made a selection according to her inclinations, and as a widow, an enfranchised woman, but one determined to maintain her good name, she began to receive all the most distinguished men of Paris whom she could bring together, with only a few women. The first to be admitted became her intimates, formed a nucleus, attracted others, and gave to the house the air of a small court, to which every *habitué* contributed either personal merit or a great name, for a few well-selected titles were mingled with the intelligence of the commonalty.

Her father, M. de Pradon, who occupied the apartment over hers, served as her chaperon and "sheep-dog." An old beau, very elegant and witty, and extremely attentive to his daughter, whom he treated rather as a lady acquaintance than as a daughter, he presided at the Thursday dinners that were quickly known and talked of in Paris, and to which invitations were much sought after. The requests for introductions and invitations came in

shoals, were discussed, and very frequently rejected by a sort of vote of the inner council. Witty sayings that had their origin in this circle were quoted and obtained currency in the city. Actors, artists, and young poets made their *débuts* there, and received, as it were, the baptism of their future greatness. Longhaired geniuses, introduced by Gaston de Lamarthe, seated themselves at the piano and replaced the Hungarian violinists that Massival had presented, and foreign ballet-dancers gave the company a glimpse of their graceful steps before appearing at the Eden or the Folies-Bergères.

Mme. de Burne, over whom her friends kept jealous watch and ward and to whom the recollection of her commerce with the world under the auspices of marital authority was loathsome, was sufficiently wise not to enlarge the circle of her acquaintance to too great an extent. Satisfied and at the same time terrified as to what might be said and thought of her, she abandoned herself to her somewhat Bohemian inclinations with consummate prudence. She valued her good name, and was fearful of any rashness that might jeopardize it; she never allowed her fancies to carry her beyond the bounds of propriety, was moderate in her audacity and careful that no *liaison* or small love affair should ever be imputed to her.

All her friends had made love to her, more or less; none of them had been successful. They confessed it, admitted it to each other with surprise, for men never acknowledge, and perhaps they are right, the power of resistance of a woman who is her own

mistress. There was a story current about her. It was said that at the beginning of their married life her husband had exhibited such revolting brutality toward her that she had been forever cured of the love of men. Her friends would often discuss the case at length. They inevitably arrived at the conclusion that a young girl who has been brought up in the dream of future tenderness and the expectation of an awe-inspiring mystery must have all her ideas completely upset when her initiation into the new life is committed to a clown. That worldly philosopher, George de Maltry, would give a gentle sneer and add: "Her hour will strike; it always does for women like her, and the longer it is in coming the louder it strikes. With our friend's artistic tastes, she will wind up by falling in love with a singer or a pianist."

Gaston de Lamarthe's ideas upon the subject were quite different. As a novelist, observer, and psychologist, devoted to the study of the inhabitants of the world of fashion, of whom he drew ironical and lifelike portraits, he claimed to analyze and know women with infallible and unique penetration. He put Mme. de Burne down among those flighty creatures of the time, the type of whom he had given in his interesting novel, "Une d'Elles." He had been the first to diagnose this new race of women, distracted by the nerves of reasoning, hysterical patients, drawn this way and that by a thousand contradictory whims which never ripen into desires, disillusioned of everything, without having enjoyed anything, thanks to the times, to the way of living, and to the modern novel, and who, destitute of all ardor

and enthusiasm, seem to combine in their persons the capricious, spoiled child and the old, withered sceptic. But he, like the rest of them, had failed in his love-making.

For all the faithful of the group had in turn been lovers of Mme. de Burne, and after the crisis had retained their tenderness and their emotion in different degrees. They had gradually come to form a sort of little church; she was its Madonna, of whom they conversed constantly among themselves, subject to her charm even when she was not present. They praised, extolled, criticised, or disparaged her, according as she had manifested irritation or gentleness, aversion or preference. They were continually displaying their jealousy of each other, played the spy on each other a little, and above all kept their ranks well closed up, so that no rival might get near her who could give them any cause for alarm.

These assiduous ones were few in number: Massival, Gaston de Lamarthe, big Fresnel, George de Maltry, a fashionable young philosopher, celebrated for his paradoxes, for his eloquent and involved erudition that was always up to date though incomprehensible even to the most impassioned of his female admirers, and for his clothes, which were selected with as much care as his theories. To this tried band she had added a few more men of the world who had a reputation for wit, the Comte de Marantin, the Baron de Gravil, and two or three others.

The two privileged characters of this chosen battalion seemed to be Massival and Lamarthe, who, it appears, had the gift of

being always able to divert the young woman by their artistic unceremoniousness, their chaff, and the way they had of making fun of everybody, even of herself, a little, when she was in humor to tolerate it. The care, whether natural or assumed, however, that she took never to manifest a marked and prolonged predilection for any one of her admirers, the unconstrained air with which she practiced her coquetry and the real impartiality with which she dispensed her favors maintained between them a friendship seasoned with hostility and an alertness of wit that made them entertaining.

One of them would sometimes play a trick on the others by presenting a friend; but as this friend was never a very celebrated or very interesting man, the rest would form a league against him and quickly send him away.

It was in this way that Massival brought his comrade André Mariolle to the house. A servant in black announced these names: "Monsieur Massival! Monsieur Mariolle!"

Beneath a great rumpled cloud of pink silk, a huge shade that was casting down upon a square table with a top of ancient marble the brilliant light of a lamp supported by a lofty column of gilded bronze, one woman's head and three men's heads were bent over an album that Lamarthe had brought in with him. Standing between them, the novelist was turning the leaves and explaining the pictures.

As they entered the room, one of the heads was turned toward them, and Mariolle, as he stepped forward, became conscious

of a bright, blond face, rather tending to ruddiness, upon the temples of which the soft, fluffy locks of hair seemed to blaze with the flame of burning brushwood. The delicate *retroussé* nose imparted a smiling expression to this countenance, and the clean-cut mouth, the deep dimples in the cheeks, and the rather prominent cleft chin, gave it a mocking air, while the eyes, by a strange contrast, veiled it in melancholy. They were blue, of a dull, dead blue as if they had been washed out, scoured, used up, and in the center the black pupils shone, round and dilated. The strange and brilliant glances that they emitted seemed to tell of dreams of morphine, or perhaps, more simply, of the coquettish artifice of belladonna.

Mme. de Burne arose, gave her hand, thanked and welcomed them.

"For a long time I have been begging my friends to bring you to my house," she said to Mariolle, "but I always have to tell these things over and over again in order to get them done."

She was tall, elegantly shaped, rather deliberate in her movements, modestly *décolletée*, scarcely showing the tips of her handsome shoulders, the shoulders of a red-headed woman, that shone out marvelously under the light. And yet her hair was not red, but of the inexpressible color of certain dead leaves that have been burned by the frosts of autumn.

She presented M. Mariolle to her father, who bowed and shook hands.

The men were conversing familiarly together in three groups;

they seemed to be at home, in a kind of club that they were accustomed to frequent, to which the presence of a woman imparted a note of refinement.

Big Fresnel was chatting with the Comte de Marantin. Fresnel's frequent visits to this house and the preference that Mme. de Burne evinced for him shocked and often provoked her friends. Still young, but with the proportions of a drayman, always puffing and blowing, almost beardless, his head lost in a vague cloud of light, soft hair, commonplace, tiresome, ridiculous, he certainly could have but one merit in the young woman's eyes, a merit that was displeasing to the others but indispensable to her, – that of loving her blindly. He had received the nickname of "The Seal." He was married, but never said anything about bringing his wife to the house. It was said that she was very jealous in her seclusion.

Lamarthe and Massival especially evinced their indignation at the evident sympathy of their friend for this windy person, and when they could no longer refrain from reproaching her with this reprehensible inclination, this selfish and vulgar liking, she would smile and answer:

"I love him as I would love a great, big, faithful dog."

George de Maltry was entertaining Gaston de Lamarthe with the most recent discovery, not yet fully developed, of the micro-biologists. M. de Maltry was expatiating on his theme with many subtle and far-reaching theories, and the novelist accepted them enthusiastically, with the facility with which men of letters

receive and do not dispute everything that appears to them original and new.

The philosopher of "high life," fair, of the fairness of linen, slender and tall, was incased in a coat that fitted very closely about the hips. Above, his pale, intelligent face emerged from his white collar and was surmounted by smooth, blond hair, which had the appearance of being glued on.

As to Lamarthe, Gaston de Lamarthe, to whom the particle that divided his name had imparted some of the pretensions of a gentleman and man of the world, he was first, last, and all the time a man of letters, a terrible and pitiless man of letters. Provided with an eye that gathered in images, attitudes, and gestures with the rapidity and accuracy of the photographer's camera, and endowed with penetration and the novelist's instinct, which were as innate in him as the faculty of scent is in a hound, he was busy from morning till night storing away impressions to be used afterward in his profession. With these two very simple senses, a distinct idea of form and an intuitive one of substance, he gave to his books, in which there appeared none of the ordinary aims of psychological writers, the color, the tone, the appearance, the movement of life itself.

Each one of his novels as it appeared excited in society curiosity, conjecture, merriment, or wrath, for there always seemed to be prominent persons to be recognized in them, only faintly disguised under a torn mask; and whenever he made his way through a crowded salon he left a wake of uneasiness

behind him. Moreover, he had published a volume of personal recollections, in which he had given the portraits of many men and women of his acquaintance, without any clearly defined intention of unkindness, but with such precision and severity that they felt sore over it. Some one had applied to him the *sobriquet*, "Beware of your friends." He kept his secrets close-locked within his breast and was a puzzle to his intimates. He was reputed to have once passionately loved a woman who caused him much suffering, and it was said that after that he wreaked his vengeance upon others of her sex.

Massival and he understood each other very well, although the musician was of a very different disposition, more frank, more expansive, less harassed, perhaps, but manifestly more impressible. After two great successes – a piece performed at Brussels and afterward brought to Paris, where it was loudly applauded at the Opéra-Comique; then a second work that was received and interpreted at the Grand Opéra as soon as offered – he had yielded to that species of cessation of impulse that seems to smite the greater part of our contemporary artists like premature paralysis. They do not grow old, as their fathers did, in the midst of their renown and success, but seem threatened with impotence even when in the very prime of life. Lamarthe was accustomed to say: "At the present day there are in France only great men who have gone wrong."

Just at this time Massival seemed very much smitten with Mme. de Burne, so that every eye was turned upon him when he

kissed her hand with an air of adoration. He inquired:

"Are we late?"

She replied:

"No, I am still expecting the Baron de Gravil and the Marquise de Bratiane."

"Ah, the Marquise! What good luck! We shall have some music this evening, then."

"I hope so."

The two laggards made their appearance. The Marquise, a woman perhaps a little too diminutive, Italian by birth, of a lively disposition, with very black eyes and eyelashes, black eyebrows, and black hair to match, which grew so thick and so low down that she had no forehead to speak of, her eyes even being threatened with invasion, had the reputation of possessing the most remarkable voice of all the women in society.

The Baron, a very gentlemanly man, hollow-chested and with a large head, was never really himself unless he had his violoncello in his hands. He was a passionate melomaniac, and only frequented those houses where music received its due share of honor.

Dinner was announced, and Mme. de Burne, taking André Mariolle's arm, allowed her guests to precede her to the dining-room; then, as they were left together, the last ones in the drawing-room, just as she was about to follow the procession she cast upon him an oblique, swift glance from her pale eyes with their dusky pupils, in which he thought that he could perceive

more complexity of thought and more curiosity of interest than pretty women generally bestow upon a strange gentleman when receiving him at dinner for the first time.

The dinner was monotonous and rather dull. Lamarthe was nervous, and seemed ill disposed toward everyone, not openly hostile, for he made a point of his good-breeding, but displaying that almost imperceptible bad humor that takes the life out of conversation. Massival, abstracted and preoccupied, ate little, and from time to time cast furtive glances at the mistress of the house, who seemed to be in any place rather than at her own table. Inattentive, responding to remarks with a smile and then allowing her face to settle back to its former intent expression, she appeared to be reflecting upon something that seemed greatly to preoccupy her, and to interest her that evening more than did her friends. Still she contributed her share to the conversation – very amply as regarded the Marquise and Mariolle, – but she did it from habit, from a sense of duty, visibly absent from herself and from her abode. Fresnel and M. de Maltry disputed over contemporary poetry. Fresnel held the opinions upon poetry that are current among men of the world, and M. de Maltry the perceptions of the spinners of most complicated verse – verse that is incomprehensible to the general public.

Several times during the dinner Mariolle had again encountered the young woman's inquiring look, but more vague, less intent, less curious. The Marquise de Bratiane, the Comte de Marantin, and the Baron de Gravil were the only ones who

kept up an uninterrupted conversation, and they had quantities of things to say.

After dinner, during the course of the evening, Massival, who had kept growing more and more melancholy, seated himself at the piano and struck a few notes, whereupon Mme. de Burne appeared to awake and quickly organized a little concert, the numbers of which comprised the pieces that she was most fond of.

The Marquise was in voice, and, animated by Massival's presence, she sang like a real artist. The master accompanied her, with that dreamy look that he always assumed when he sat down to play. His long hair fell over the collar of his coat and mingled with his full, fine, shining, curling beard. Many women had been in love with him, and they still pursued him with their attentions, so it was said. Mme. de Burne, sitting by the piano and listening with all her soul, seemed to be contemplating him and at the same time not to see him, and Mariolle was a little jealous. He was not particularly jealous because of any relation that there was between her and him, but in presence of that look of a woman fixed so intently upon one of the Illustrious he felt himself humiliated in his masculine vanity by the consciousness of the rank that *They* bestow on us in proportion to the renown that we have gained. Often before this he had secretly suffered from contact with famous men whom he was accustomed to meet in the presence of those beings whose favor is by far the dearest reward of success.

About ten o'clock the Comtesse de Frémines and two Jewesses of the financial community arrived, one after the other. The talk was of a marriage that was on the carpet and a threatened divorce suit. Mariolle looked at Madame de Burne, who was now seated beneath a column that sustained a huge lamp. Her well-formed, tip-tilted nose, the dimples in her cheeks, and the little indentation that parted her chin gave her face the frolicsome expression of a child, although she was approaching her thirtieth year, and something in her glance that reminded one of a withering flower cast a shade of melancholy over her countenance. Beneath the light that streamed upon it her skin took on tones of blond velvet, while her hair actually seemed colored by the autumnal sun which dyes and scorches the dead leaves.

She was conscious of the masculine glance that was traveling toward her from the other end of the room, and presently she arose and went to him, smiling, as if in response to a summons from him.

"I am afraid you are somewhat bored," she said. "A person who has not got the run of a house is always bored."

He protested the contrary. She took a chair and seated herself by him, and at once the conversation began to be animated. It was instantaneous with both of them, like a fire that blazes up brightly as soon as a match is applied to it. It seemed as if they had imparted their sensations and their opinions to each other beforehand, as if a similarity of disposition and education,

of tastes and inclinations, had predisposed them to a mutual understanding and fated them to meet.

Perhaps there may have been a little artfulness on the part of the young woman, but the delight that one feels in encountering one who is capable of listening, who can understand you and reply to you and whose answers give scope for your repartees, put Mariolle into a fine glow of spirits. Flattered, moreover, by the reception which she had accorded him, subjugated by the alluring favor that she displayed and by the charm which she knew how to use so adroitly in captivating men, he did his best to exhibit to her that shade of subdued but personal and delicate wit which, when people came to know him well, had gained for him so many and such warm friendships.

She suddenly said to him:

"Really, it is very pleasant to converse with you, Monsieur. I had been told that such was the case, however."

He was conscious that he was blushing, and replied at a venture:

"And *I* had been told, Madame, that you were – "

She interrupted him:

"Say a coquette. I am a good deal of a coquette with people whom I like. Everyone knows it, and I do not attempt to conceal it from myself, but you will see that I am very impartial in my coquetry, and this allows me to keep or to recall my friends without ever losing them, and to retain them all about me."

She said this with a sly air which was meant to say: "Be easy

and don't be too presumptuous. Don't deceive yourself, for you will get nothing more than the others."

He replied:

"That is what you might call warning your guests of the perils that await them here. Thank you, Madame: I greatly admire your mode of procedure."

She had opened the way for him to speak of herself, and he availed himself of it. He began by paying her compliments and found that she was fond of them; then he aroused her woman's curiosity by telling her what was said of her in the different houses that he frequented. She was rather uneasy and could not conceal her desire for further information, although she affected much indifference as to what might be thought of herself and her tastes. He drew for her a charming portrait of a superior, independent, intelligent, and attractive woman, who had surrounded herself with a court of eminent men and still retained her position as an accomplished member of society. She disclaimed his compliments with smiles, with little disclaimers of gratified egotism, all the while taking much pleasure in the details that he gave her, and in a playful tone kept constantly asking him for more, questioning him artfully, with a sensual appetite for flattery.

As he looked at her, he said to himself, "She is nothing but a child at heart, just like all the rest of them"; and he went on to finish a pretty speech in which he was commending her love for art, so rarely found among women. Then she assumed an air of

mockery that he had not before suspected in her, that playfully tantalizing manner that seems inherent in the French. Mariolle had overdone his eulogy; she let him know that she was not a fool.

"*Mon Dieu!*" she said, "I will confess to you that I am not quite certain whether it is art or artists that I love."

He replied: "How could one love artists without being in love with art?"

"Because they are sometimes more comical than men of the world."

"Yes, but they have more unpleasant failings."

"That is true."

"Then you do not love music?"

She suddenly dropped her bantering tone. "Excuse me! I adore music; I think that I am more fond of it than of anything else. And yet Massival is convinced that I know nothing at all about it."

"Did he tell you so?"

"No, but he thinks so."

"How do you know?"

"Oh! we women guess at almost everything that we don't know."

"So Massival thinks that you know nothing of music?"

"I am sure of it. I can see it only by the way that he has of explaining things to me, by the way in which he underscores little niceties of expression, all the while saying to himself: 'That won't be of any use, but I do it because you are so nice.'"

"Still he has told me that you have the best music in your house

of any in Paris, no matter whose the other may be."

"Yes, thanks to him."

"And literature, are you not fond of that?"

"I am very fond of it; and I am even so audacious as to claim to have a very good perception of it, notwithstanding Lamarthe's opinion."

"Who also decides that you know nothing at all about it?"

"Of course."

"But who has not told you so in words, any more than the other."

"Pardon me; he is more outspoken. He asserts that certain women are capable of showing a very just and delicate perception of the sentiments that are expressed, of the truthfulness of the characters, of psychology in general, but that they are totally incapable of discerning the superiority that resides in his profession, its art. When he has once uttered this word, Art, all that is left one to do is to show him the door."

Mariolle smiled and asked:

"And you, Madame, what do you think of it?"

She reflected for a few seconds, then looked him straight in the face to see if he was in a frame of mind to listen and to understand her.

"I believe that sentiment, you understand – sentiment – can make a woman's mind receptive of everything; only it is frequently the case that what enters does not remain there. Do you follow me?"

"No, not fully, Madame."

"Very well! To make us comprehensive to the same degree as you, our woman's nature must be appealed to before addressing our intelligence. We take no interest in what a man has not first made sympathetic to us, for we look at all things through the medium of sentiment. I do not say through the medium of love; no, – but of sentiment, which has shades, forms, and manifestations of every sort. Sentiment is something that belongs exclusively to our domain, which you men have no conception of, for it befogs you while it enlightens us. Oh! I know that all this is incomprehensible to you, the more the pity! In a word, if a man loves us and is agreeable to us, for it is indispensable that we should feel that we are loved in order to become capable of the effort – and if this man is a superior being, by taking a little pains he can make us feel, know, and possess everything, everything, I say, and at odd moments and by bits impart to us the whole of his intelligence. That is all often blotted out afterward; it disappears, dies out, for we are forgetful. Oh! we forget as the wind forgets the words that are spoken to it. We are intuitive and capable of enlightenment, but changeable, impressionable, readily swayed by our surroundings. If I could only tell you how many states of mind I pass through that make of me entirely different women, according to the weather, my health, what I may have been reading, what may have been said to me! Actually there are days when I have the feelings of an excellent mother without children, and others when I almost have those of a *cocotte*

without lovers."

Greatly pleased, he asked: "Is it your opinion that intelligent women generally are gifted with this activity of thought?"

"Yes," she said. "Only they allow it to slumber, and then they have a life shaped for them which draws them in one direction or the other."

Again he questioned: "Then in your heart of hearts it is music that you prefer above all other distractions?"

"Yes! But what I was telling you just now is so true! I should certainly never have enjoyed it as I do enjoy it, adored it as I do adore it, had it not been for that angelic Massival. He seems to have given me the soul of the great masters by teaching me to play their works, of which I was passionately fond before. What a pity that he is married!"

She said these last words with a sprightly air, but so regretfully that they threw everything else into shadow, her theories upon women and her admiration for art.

Massival was, in fact, married. Before the days of his success he had contracted one of those unions that artists make and afterward trail after them through their renown until the day of their death. He never mentioned his wife's name, never presented her in society, which he frequented a great deal; and although he had three children the fact was scarcely known.

Mariolle laughed. She was decidedly nice, was this unconventional woman, pretty, and of a type not often met with. Without ever tiring, with a persistency that seemed in no wise

embarrassing to her, he kept gazing upon that face, grave and gay and a little self-willed, with its audacious nose and its sensual coloring of a soft, warm blonde, warmed by the midsummer of a maturity so tender, so full, so sweet that she seemed to have reached the very year, the month, the minute of her perfect flowering. He wondered: "Is her complexion false?" And he looked for the faint telltale line, lighter or darker, at the roots of her hair, without being able to discover it.

Soft footsteps on the carpet behind him made him start and turn his head. It was two servants bringing in the tea-table. Over the blue flame of the little lamp the water bubbled gently in a great silver receptacle, as shining and complicated as a chemist's apparatus.

"Will you have a cup of tea?" she asked.

Upon his acceptance she arose, and with a firm step in which there was no undulation, but which was rather marked by stiffness, proceeded to the table where the water was simmering in the depths of the machine, surrounded by a little garden of cakes, pastry, candied fruits, and bonbons. Then, as her profile was presented in clear relief against the hangings of the salon, Mariolle observed the delicacy of her form and the thinness of her hips beneath the broad shoulders and the full chest that he had been admiring a moment before. As the train of her light dress unrolled and dragged behind her, seemingly prolonging upon the carpet a body that had no end, this blunt thought arose to his mind: "Behold, a siren! She is altogether promising." She was

now going from one to another, offering her refreshments with gestures of exquisite grace. Mariolle was following her with his eyes; but Lamarthe, who was walking about with his cup in his hand, came up to him and said:

"Shall we go, you and I?"

"Yes, I think so."

"We will go at once, shall we not? I am tired."

"At once. Come."

They left the house. When they were in the street, the novelist asked:

"Are you going home or to the club?"

"I think that I will go and spend an hour at the club."

"At the Tambourins?"

"Yes."

"I will go as far as the door with you. Those places are tiresome to me; I never put my foot in them. I join them only because they enable me to economize in hack-hire."

They locked arms and went down the street toward Saint Augustin. They walked a little way in silence; then Mariolle said:

"What a singular woman! What do you think of her?"

Lamarthe began to laugh outright. "It is the commencement of the crisis," he said. "You will have to pass through it, just as we have all done. I have had the malady, but I am cured of it now. My dear friend, the crisis consists of her friends talking of nothing but of her when they are together, whenever they chance to meet, wherever they may happen to be."

"At all events, it is the first time in my case, and it is very natural for me to ask for information, since I scarcely know her."

"Let it be so, then; we will talk of her. Well, you are bound to fall in love with her. It is your fate, the lot that is shared by all."

"She is so very seductive, then?"

"Yes and no. Those who love the women of other days, women who have a heart and a soul, women of sensibility, the women of the old-fashioned novel, cannot endure her and execrate her to such a degree as to speak of her with ignominy. We, on the other hand, who are disposed to look favorably upon what is modern and fresh, are compelled to confess that she is delicious, provided always that we don't fall in love with her. And that is just exactly what everybody does. No one dies of the complaint, however; they do not even suffer very acutely, but they fume because she is not other than she is. You will have to go through it all if she takes the fancy; besides, she is already preparing to snap you up."

Mariolle exclaimed, in response to his secret thought:

"Oh! I am only a chance acquaintance for her, and I imagine that she values acquaintances of all sorts and conditions."

"Yes, she values them, *parbleu!* and at the same time she laughs at them. The most celebrated, even the most distinguished, man will not darken her door ten times if he is not congenial to her, and she has formed a stupid attachment for that idiotic Fresnel, and that tiresome De Maltry. She inexcusably suffers herself to be carried away by those idiots, no one knows why; perhaps because she gets more amusement out of them than she

does out of us, perhaps because their love for her is deeper; and there is nothing in the world that pleases a woman so much as to be loved like that."

And Lamarthe went on talking of her, analyzing her, pulling her to pieces, correcting himself only to contradict himself again, replying with unmistakable warmth and sincerity to Mariolle's questions, like a man who is deeply interested in his subject and carried away by it; a little at sea also, having his mind stored with observations that were true and deductions that were false. He said:

"She is not the only one, moreover; at this minute there are fifty women, if not more, who are like her. There is the little Frémines who was in her drawing-room just now; she is Mme. de Burne's exact counterpart, save that she is more forward in her manners and married to an outlandish kind of fellow, the consequence of which is that her house is one of the most entertaining lunatic asylums in Paris. I go there a great deal."

Without noticing it, they had traversed the Boulevard Malesherbes, the Rue Royale, the Avenue des Champs-Élysées, and had reached the Arc de Triomphe, when Lamarthe suddenly pulled out his watch.

"My dear fellow," he said, "we have spent an hour and ten minutes in talking of her; that is sufficient for to-day. I will take some other occasion of seeing you to your club. Go home and go to bed; it is what I am going to do."

CHAPTER II.

"WILL YOU WALK INTO MY PARLOR?"

The room was large and well lighted, the walls and ceiling hung with admirable hangings of chintz that a friend of hers in the diplomatic service had brought home and presented to her. The ground was yellow, as if it had been dipped in golden cream, and the designs of all colors, in which Persian green was predominant, represented fantastic buildings with curving roofs, about which monstrosities in the shape of beasts and birds were running and flying: lions wearing wigs, antelopes with extravagant horns, and birds of paradise.

The furniture was scanty. Upon three long tables with tops of green marble were arranged all the implements requisite for a pretty woman's toilette. Upon one of them, the central one, were the great basins of thick crystal; the second presented an array of bottles, boxes, and vases of all sizes, surmounted by silver caps bearing her arms and monogram; while on the third were displayed all the tools and appliances of modern coquetry, countless in number, designed to serve various complex and mysterious purposes. The room contained only two reclining chairs and a few low, soft, and luxurious seats, calculated to afford rest to weary limbs and to bodies relieved of the restraint

of clothing.

Covering one entire side of the apartment was an immense mirror, composed of three panels. The two wings, playing on hinges, allowed the young woman to view herself at the same time in front, rear, and profile, to envelop herself in her own image. To the right, in a recess that was generally concealed by hanging draperies, was the bath, or rather a deep pool, reached by a descent of two steps. A bronze Love, a charming conception of the sculptor Prédolé, poured hot and cold water into it through the seashells with which he was playing. At the back of this alcove a Venetian mirror, composed of smaller mirrors inclined to each other at varying angles, ascended in a curved dome, shutting in and protecting the bath and its occupant, and reflecting them in each one of its many component parts. A little beyond the bath was her writing-desk, a plain and handsome piece of furniture of modern English manufacture, covered with a litter of papers, folded letters, little torn envelopes on which glittered gilt initials, for it was in this room that she passed her time and attended to her correspondence when she was alone.

Stretched at full length upon her reclining-chair, enveloped in a dressing-gown of Chinese silk, her bare arms – and beautiful, firm, supple arms they were – issuing forth fearlessly from out the wide folds of silk, her hair turned up and burdening the head with its masses of blond coils, Mme. de Burne was indulging herself with a gentle reverie after the bath. The chambermaid knocked, then entered, bringing a letter. She took it, looked at

the writing, tore it open, and read the first lines; then calmly said to the servant: "I will ring for you in an hour."

When she was alone she smiled with the delight of victory. The first words had sufficed to let her understand that at last she had received a declaration of love from Mariolle. He had held out much longer than she had thought he was capable of doing, for during the last three months she had been besieging him with such attentions, such display of grace and efforts to charm, as she had never hitherto employed for anyone. He had seemed to be distrustful and on his guard against her, against the bait of insatiable coquetry that she was continually dangling before his eyes.

It had required many a confidential conversation, into which she had thrown all the physical seduction of her being and all the captivating efforts of her mind, many an evening of music as well, when, seated before the piano that was ringing still, before the leaves of the scores that were full of the soul of the tuneful masters, they had both thrilled with the same emotion, before she at last beheld in his eyes that avowal of the vanquished man, the mendicant supplication of a love that can no longer be concealed. She knew all this so well, the *rouée!* Many and many a time, with feline cunning and inexhaustible curiosity, she had made this secret, torturing plea rise to the eyes of the men whom she had succeeded in beguiling. It afforded her so much amusement to feel that she was gaining them, little by little, that they were conquered, subjugated by her invincible woman's might, that she

was for them the Only One, the sovereign Idol whose caprices must be obeyed.

It had all grown up within her almost imperceptibly, like the development of a hidden instinct, the instinct of war and conquest. Perhaps it was that a desire of retaliation had germinated in her heart during her years of married life, a dim longing to repay to men generally that measure of ill which she had received from one of them, to be in turn the strongest, to make stubborn wills bend before her, to crush resistance and to make others, as well as she, feel the keen edge of suffering. Above all else, however, she was a born coquette, and as soon as her way in life was clear before her she applied herself to pursuing and subjugating lovers, just as the hunter pursues the game, with no other end in view than the pleasure of seeing them fall before her.

And yet her heart was not eager for emotion, like that of a tender and sentimental woman; she did not seek a man's undivided love, nor did she look for happiness in passion. All that she needed was universal admiration, homage, prostrations, an incense-offering of tenderness. Whoever frequented her house had also to become the slave of her beauty, and no consideration of mere intellect could attach her for any length of time to those who would not yield to her coquetry, disdainful of the anxieties of love, their affections, perhaps, being placed elsewhere.

In order to retain her friendship it was indispensable to love her, but that point once reached she was infinitely nice, with

unimaginable kindnesses and delightful attentions, designed to retain at her side those whom she had captivated. Those who were once enlisted in her regiment of adorers seemed to become her property by right of conquest. She ruled them with great skill and wisdom, according to their qualities and their defects and the nature of their jealousy. Those who sought to obtain too much she expelled forthwith, taking them back again afterward when they had become wiser, but imposing severe conditions. And to such an extent did this game of bewitchment amuse her, perverse woman that she was, that she found it as pleasurable to befool steady old gentlemen as to turn the heads of the young.

It might even have been said that she regulated her affection by the fervency of the ardor that she had inspired, and that big Fresnel, a dull, heavy companion who was of no imaginable benefit to her, retained her favor thanks to the mad passion by which she felt that he was possessed. She was not entirely indifferent to men's merits, either, and more than once had been conscious of the commencement of a liking that no one divined except herself, and which she quickly ended the moment it became dangerous.

Everyone who had approached her for the first time and warbled in her ear the fresh notes of his hymn of gallantry, disclosing to her the unknown quantity of his nature – artists more especially, who seemed to her to possess more subtle and more delicate shades of refined emotion – had for a time disquieted her, had awakened in her the intermittent dream of a

grand passion and a long *liaison*. But swayed by prudent fears, irresolute, driven this way and that by her distrustful nature, she had always kept a strict watch upon herself until the moment she ceased to feel the influence of the latest lover.

And then she had the sceptical vision of the girl of the period, who would strip the greatest man of his prestige in the course of a few weeks. As soon as they were fully in her toils, and in the disorder of their heart had thrown aside their theatrical posturings and their parade manners, they were all alike in her eyes, poor creatures whom she could tyrannize over with her seductive powers. Finally, for a woman like her, perfect as she was, to attach herself to a man, what inestimable merits he would have had to possess!

She suffered much from *ennui*, however, and was without fondness for society, which she frequented for the sake of appearances, and the long, tedious evenings of which she endured with heavy eyelids and many a stifled yawn. She was amused only by its refined trivialities, by her own caprices and by her quickly changing curiosity for certain persons and certain things, attaching herself to it in such degree as to realize that she had been appreciated or admired and not enough to receive real pleasure from an affection or a liking – suffering from her nerves and not from her desires. She was without the absorbing preoccupations of ardent or simple souls, and passed her days in an *ennui* of gaieties, destitute of the simple faith that attends on happiness, constantly on the lookout for something to make the

slow hours pass more quickly, and sinking with lassitude, while deeming herself contented.

She thought that she was contented because she was the most seductive and the most sought after of women. Proud of her attractiveness, the power of which she often made trial, in love with her own irregular, odd, and captivating beauty, convinced of the delicacy of her perceptions, which allowed her to divine and understand a thousand things that others were incapable of seeing, rejoicing in the wit that had been appreciated by so many superior men, and totally ignoring the limitations that bounded her intelligence, she looked upon herself as an almost unique being, a rare pearl set in the midst of this common, workaday world, which seemed to her slightly empty and monotonous because she was too good for it.

Not for an instant would she have suspected that in her unconscious self lay the cause of the melancholy from which she suffered so continuously. She laid the blame upon others and held them responsible for her *ennui*. If they were unable sufficiently to entertain and amuse or even impassion her, the reason was that they were deficient in agreeableness and possessed no real merit in her eyes. "Everyone," she would say with a little laugh, "is tiresome. The only endurable people are those who afford me pleasure, and that solely because they do afford me pleasure."

And the surest way of pleasing her was to tell her that there was no one like her. She was well aware that no success is attained without labor, and so she gave herself up, heart and soul, to her

work of enticement, and found nothing that gave her greater enjoyment than to note the homage of the softening glance and of the heart, that unruly organ which she could cause to beat violently by the utterance of a word.

She had been greatly surprised by the trouble that she had had in subjugating André Mariolle, for she had been well aware, from the very first day, that she had found favor in his eyes. Then, little by little, she had fathomed his suspicious, secretly envious, extremely subtle, and concentrated disposition, and attacking him on his weak side, she had shown him so many attentions, had manifested such preference and natural sympathy for him, that he had finally surrendered.

Especially in the last month had she felt that he was her captive; he was agitated in her presence, now taciturn, now feverishly animated, but would make no avowal. Oh, avowals! She really did not care very much for them, for when they were too direct, too expressive, she found herself obliged to resort to severe measures. Twice she had even had to make a show of being angry and close her door to the offender. What she adored were delicate manifestations, semi-confidences, discreet allusions, a sort of moral getting-down-on-the-marrow-bones; and she really showed exceptional tact and address in extorting from her admirers this moderation in their expressions.

For a month past she had been watching and waiting to hear fall from Mariolle's lips the words, distinct or veiled, according to the nature of the man, which afford relief to the overburdened

heart.

He had said nothing, but he had written. It was a long letter: four pages! A thrill of satisfaction crept over her as she held it in her hands. She stretched herself at length upon her lounge so as to be more comfortable and kicked the little slippers from off her feet upon the carpet; then she proceeded to read. She met with a surprise. In serious terms he told her that he did not desire to suffer at her hands, and that he already knew her too well to consent to be her victim. With many compliments, in very polite words, which everywhere gave evidence of his repressed love, he let her know that he was apprised of her manner of treating men – that he, too, was in the toils, but that he would release himself from the servitude by taking himself off. He would just simply begin his vagabond life of other days over again. He would leave the country. It was a farewell, an eloquent and firm farewell.

Certainly it was a surprise as she read, re-read, and commenced to read again these four pages of prose that were so full of tender irritation and passion. She arose, put on her slippers, and began to walk up and down the room, her bare arms out of her turned-back sleeves, her hands thrust halfway into the little pockets of her dressing-gown, one of them holding the crumpled letter.

Taken all aback by this unforeseen declaration, she said to herself: "He writes very well, very well indeed; he is sincere, feeling, touching. He writes better than Lamarthe; there is nothing of the novel sticking out of his letter."

She felt like smoking, went to the table where the perfumes were and took a cigarette from a box of Dresden china; then, having lighted it, she approached the great mirror in which she saw three young women coming toward her in the three diversely inclined panels. When she was quite near she halted, made herself a little bow with a little smile, a friendly little nod of the head, as if to say: "Very pretty, very pretty." She inspected her eyes, looked at her teeth, raised her arms, placed her hands on her hips and turned her profile so as to behold her entire person in the three mirrors, bending her head slightly forward. She stood there amorously facing herself surrounded by the threefold reflection of her own being, which she thought was charming, filled with delight at sight of herself, engrossed by an egotistical and physical pleasure in presence of her own beauty, and enjoying it with a keen satisfaction that was almost as sensual as a man's.

Every day she surveyed herself in this manner, and her maid, who had often caught her at it, used to say, spitefully:

"Madame looks at herself so much that she will end up by wearing out all the looking-glasses in the house."

In this love of herself, however, lay all the secret of her charm and the influence that she exerted over men. Through admiring herself and tenderly loving the delicacy of her features and the elegance of her form, by constantly seeking for and finding means of showing them to the greatest advantage, through discovering imperceptible ways of rendering her gracefulness

more graceful and her eyes more fascinating, through pursuing all the artifices that embellished her to her own vision, she had as a matter of course hit upon that which would most please others. Had she been more beautiful and careless of her beauty, she would not have possessed that attractiveness which drew to her everyone who had not from the beginning shown himself unassailable.

Wearying soon a little of standing thus, she spoke to her image that was smiling to her still, and her image in the threefold mirror moved its lips as if to echo: "We will see about it." Then she crossed the room and seated herself at her desk. Here is what she wrote:

"DEAR MONSIEUR MARIOLLE: Come to see me tomorrow at four o'clock. I shall be alone, and hope to be able to reassure you as to the imaginary danger that alarms you.

"I subscribe myself your friend, and will prove to you that I am...

MICHÈLE DE BURNE."

How plainly she dressed next day to receive André Mariolle's visit! A little gray dress, of a light gray bordering on lilac, melancholy as the dying day and quite unornamented, with a collar fitting closely to the neck, sleeves fitting closely to the arms, corsage fitting closely to the waist and bust, and skirt fitting closely to the hips and legs.

When he made his appearance, wearing rather a solemn face, she came forward to meet him, extending both her hands. He

kissed them, then they seated themselves, and she allowed the silence to last a few moments in order to assure herself of his embarrassment.

He did not know what to say, and was waiting for her to speak. She made up her mind to do so.

"Well! let us come at once to the main question. What is the matter? Are you aware that you wrote me a very insolent letter?"

"I am very well aware of it, and I render my most sincere apology. I am, I have always been with everyone, excessively, brutally frank. I might have gone away without the unnecessary and insulting explanations that I addressed to you. I considered it more loyal to act in accordance with my nature and trust to your understanding, with which I am acquainted."

She resumed with an expression of pitying satisfaction:

"Come, come! What does all this folly mean?"

He interrupted her: "I would prefer not to speak of it."

She answered warmly, without allowing him to proceed further:

"I invited you here to discuss it, and we will discuss it until you are quite convinced that you are not exposing yourself to any danger." She laughed like a little girl, and her dress, so closely resembling that of a boarding-school miss, gave her laughter a character of childish youth.

He hesitatingly said: "What I wrote you was the truth, the sincere truth, the terrifying truth."

Resuming her seriousness, she rejoined: "I do not doubt you:

all my friends travel that road. You also wrote that I am a fearful coquette. I admit it, but then no one ever dies of it; I do not even believe that they suffer a great deal. There is, indeed, what Lamarthe calls the crisis. You are in that stage now, but that passes over and subsides into – what shall I call it? – into the state of chronic love, which does no harm to a body, and which I keep simmering over a slow fire in all my friends, so that they may be very much attached, very devoted, very faithful to me. Am not I, also, sincere and frank and nice with you? Eh? Have you known many women who would dare to talk as I have talked to you?"

She had an air of such drollness, coupled with such decision, she was so unaffected and at the same time so alluring, that he could not help smiling in turn. "All your friends," he said, "are men who have often had their fingers burned in that fire, even before it was done at your hearth. Toasted and roasted already, it is easy for them to endure the oven in which you keep them; but for my part, I, Madame, have never passed through that experience, and I have felt for some time past that it would be a dreadful thing for me to give way to the sentiment that is growing and waxing in my heart."

Suddenly she became familiar, and bending a little toward him, her hands clasped over her knees: "Listen to me," she said, "I am in earnest. I hate to lose a friend for the sake of a fear that I regard as chimerical. You will be in love with me, perhaps, but the men of this generation do not love the women of to-day so violently as to do themselves any actual injury. You may believe

me; I know them both." She was silent; then with the singular smile of a woman who utters a truth while she thinks she is telling a fib, she added: "Besides, I have not the necessary qualifications to make men love me madly; I am too modern. Come, I will be a friend to you, a real nice friend, for whom you will have affection, but nothing more, for I will see to it." She went on in a more serious tone: "In any case I give you fair warning that I am incapable of feeling a real passion for anyone, let him be who he may; you shall receive the same treatment as the others, you shall stand on an equal footing with the most favored, but never on any better; I abominate despotism and jealousy. I have had to endure everything from a husband, but from a friend, a simple friend, I do not choose to accept affectionate tyrannizings, which are the bane of all cordial relations. You see that I am just as nice as nice can be, that I talk to you like a comrade, that I conceal nothing from you. Are you willing loyally to accept the trial that I propose? If it does not work well, there will still be time enough for you to go away if the gravity of the situation demands it. A lover absent is a lover cured."

He looked at her, already vanquished by her voice, her gestures, all the intoxication of her person; and quite resigned to his fate, and thrilling through every fiber at the consciousness that she was sitting there beside him, he murmured:

"I accept, Madame, and if harm comes to me, so much the worse! I can afford to endure a little suffering for your sake."

She stopped him.

"Now let us say nothing more about it," she said; "let us never speak of it again." And she diverted the conversation to topics that might calm his agitation.

In an hour's time he took his leave; in torments, for he loved her; delighted, for she had asked and he had promised that he would not go away.

CHAPTER III.

THE THORNS OF THE ROSE

He was in torments, for he loved her. Differing in this from the common run of lovers, in whose eyes the woman chosen of their heart appears surrounded by an aureole of perfection, his attachment for her had grown within him while studying her with the clairvoyant eyes of a suspicious and distrustful man who had never been entirely enslaved. His timid and sluggish but penetrating disposition, always standing on the defensive in life, had saved him from his passions. A few intrigues, two brief *liaisons* that had perished of *ennui*, and some mercenary loves that had been broken off from disgust, comprised the history of his heart. He regarded women as an object of utility for those who desire a well-kept house and a family, as an object of comparative pleasure to those who are in quest of the pastime of love.

Before he entered Mme. de Burne's house his friends had confidentially warned him against her. What he had learned of her interested, puzzled, and pleased him, but it was also rather distasteful to him. As a matter of principle he did not like those gamblers who never pay when they lose. After their first few meetings he had decided that she was very amusing, and that she possessed a special charm that had a contagion in it. The natural and artificial beauties of this charming, slender, blond person, who was neither fat nor lean, who was furnished with beautiful

arms that seemed formed to attract and embrace, and with legs that one might imagine long and tapering, calculated for flight, like those of a gazelle, with feet so small that they would leave no trace, seemed to him to be a symbol of hopes that could never be realized.

He had experienced, moreover, in his conversation with her a pleasure that he had never thought of meeting with in the intercourse of fashionable society. Gifted with a wit that was full of familiar animation, unforeseen and mocking and of a caressing irony, she would, notwithstanding this, sometimes allow herself to be carried away by sentimental or intellectual influences, as if beneath her derisive gaiety there still lingered the secular shade of poetic tenderness drawn from some remote ancestress. These things combined to render her exquisite.

She petted him and made much of him, desirous of conquering him as she had conquered the others, and he visited her house as often as he could, drawn thither by his increasing need of seeing more of her. It was like a force emanating from her and taking possession of him, a force that lay in her charm, her look, her smile, her speech, a force that there was no resisting, although he frequently left her house provoked at something that she had said or done.

The more he felt working on him that indescribable influence with which a woman penetrates and subjugates us, the more clearly did he see through her, the more did he understand and suffer from her nature, which he devoutly wished was different.

It was certainly true, however, that the very qualities which he disapproved of in her were the qualities that had drawn him toward her and captivated him, in spite of himself, in spite of his reason, and more, perhaps, than her real merits.

Her coquetry, with which she toyed, making no attempt at concealing it, as with a fan, opening and folding it in presence of everybody according as the men to whom she was talking were pleasing to her or the reverse; her way of taking nothing in earnest, which had seemed droll to him upon their first acquaintance, but now seemed threatening; her constant desire for distraction, for novelty, which rested insatiable in her heart, always weary – all these things would so exasperate him that sometimes upon returning to his house he would resolve to make his visits to her more infrequent until such time as he might do away with them altogether. The very next day he would invent some pretext for going to see her. What he thought to impress upon himself, as he became more and more enamored, was the insecurity of this love and the certainty that he would have to suffer for it.

He was not blind; little by little he yielded to this sentiment, as a man drowns because his vessel has gone down under him and he is too far from the shore. He knew her as well as it was possible to know her, for his passion had served to make his mental vision abnormally clairvoyant, and he could not prevent his thoughts from going into indefinite speculations concerning her. With indefatigable perseverance, he

was continually seeking to analyze and understand the obscure depths of this feminine soul, this incomprehensible mixture of bright intelligence and disenchantment, of sober reason and childish triviality, of apparent affection and fickleness, of all those ill-assorted inclinations that can be brought together and co-ordinated to form an unnatural, perplexing, and seductive being.

But why was it that she attracted him thus? He constantly asked himself this question, and was unable to find a satisfactory answer to it, for, with his reflective, observing, and proudly retiring nature, his logical course would have been to look in a woman for those old-fashioned and soothing attributes of tenderness and constancy which seem to offer the most reliable assurance of happiness to a man. In her, however, he had encountered something that he had not expected to find, a sort of early vegetable of the human race, as it were, one of those creatures who are the beginning of a new generation, exciting one by their strange novelty, unlike anything that one has ever known before, and even in their imperfections awakening the dormant senses by a formidable power of attraction.

To the romantic and dreamily passionate women of the Restoration had succeeded the gay triflers of the imperial epoch, convinced that pleasure is a reality; and now, here there was afforded him a new development of this everlasting femininity, a woman of refinement, of indeterminate sensibility, restless, without fixed resolves, her feelings in constant turmoil, who

seemed to have made it part of her experience to employ every narcotic that quiets the aching nerves: chloroform that stupefies, ether and morphine that excite to abnormal reverie, kill the senses, and deaden the emotions.

He relished in her that flavor of an artificial nature, the sole object of whose existence was to charm and allure. She was a rare and attractive bauble, exquisite and delicate, drawing men's eyes to her, causing the heart to throb, and desire to awake, as one's appetite is excited when he looks through the glass of the shop-window and beholds the dainty viands that have been prepared and arranged for the purpose of making him hunger for them.

When he was quite assured that he had started on his perilous descent toward the bottom of the gulf, he began to reflect with consternation upon the dangers of his infatuation. What would happen him? What would she do with him? Most assuredly she would do with him what she had done with everyone else: she would bring him to the point where a man follows a woman's capricious fancies as a dog follows his master's steps, and she would classify him among her collection of more or less illustrious favorites. Had she really played this game with all the others? Was there not one, not a single one, whom she had loved, if only for a month, a day, an hour, in one of those effusions of feeling that she had the faculty of repressing so readily? He talked with them interminably about her as they came forth from her dinners, warmed by contact with her. He felt that they were all uneasy, dissatisfied, unstrung, like men whose dreams have

failed of realization.

No, she had loved no one among these paraders before public curiosity. But he, who was a nullity in comparison with them, he, to whom it was not granted that heads should turn and wondering eyes be fixed on him when his name was mentioned in a crowd or in a salon, – what would he be for her? Nothing, nothing; a mere supernumerary upon her scene, a Monsieur, the sort of man that becomes a familiar, commonplace attendant upon a distinguished woman, useful to hold her bouquet, a man comparable to the common grade of wine that one drinks with water. Had he been a famous man he might have been willing to accept this rôle, which his celebrity would have made less humiliating; but unknown as he was, he would have none of it. So he wrote to bid her farewell.

When he received her brief answer he was moved by it as by the intelligence of some unexpected piece of good fortune, and when she had made him promise that he would not go away he was as delighted as a schoolboy released for a holiday.

Several days elapsed without bringing any fresh development to their relations, but when the calm that succeeds the storm had passed, he felt his longing for her increasing within him and burning him. He had promised that he would never again speak to her on the forbidden topic, but he had not promised that he would not write, and one night when he could not sleep, when she had taken possession of all his faculties in the restless vigil of his insomnia of love, he seated himself at his table, almost

against his will, and set himself to put down his feelings and his sufferings upon fair, white paper. It was not a letter; it was an aggregation of notes, phrases, thoughts, throbs of moral anguish, transmuting themselves into words. It soothed him; it seemed to him to give him a little comfort in his suffering, and lying down upon his bed, he was at last able to obtain some sleep.

Upon awaking the next morning he read over these few pages and decided that they were sufficiently harrowing; then he inclosed and addressed them, kept them by him until evening, and mailed them very late so that she might receive them when she arose. He thought that she would not be alarmed by these innocent sheets of paper. The most timorous of women have an infinite kindness for a letter that speaks to them of a sincere love, and when these letters are written by a trembling hand, with tearful eyes and melancholy face, the power that they exercise over the female heart is unbounded.

He went to her house late that afternoon to see how she would receive him and what she would say to him. He found M. de Pradon there, smoking cigarettes and conversing with his daughter. He would often pass whole hours with her in this way, for his manner toward her was rather that of a gentleman visitor than of a father. She had brought into their relations and their affection a tinge of that homage of love which she bestowed upon herself and exacted from everyone else.

When she beheld Mariolle her face brightened with delight; she shook hands with him warmly and her smile told him: "You

have afforded me much pleasure."

Mariolle was in hopes that the father would go away soon, but M. de Pradon did not budge. Although he knew his daughter thoroughly, and for a long time past had placed the most implicit confidence in her as regarded her relations with men, he always kept an eye on her with a kind of curious, uneasy, somewhat marital attention. He wanted to know what chance of success there might be for this newly discovered friend, who he was, what he amounted to. Would he be a mere bird of passage, like so many others, or a permanent member of their usual circle?

He intrenched himself, therefore, and Mariolle immediately perceived that he was not to be dislodged. The visitor made up his mind accordingly, and even resolved to gain him over if it were possible, considering that his good-will, or at any rate his neutrality, would be better than his hostility. He exerted himself and was brilliant and amusing, without any of the airs of a sighing lover. She said to herself contentedly: "He is not stupid; he acts his part in the comedy extremely well"; and M. de Pradon thought: "This is a very agreeable man, whose head my daughter does not seem to have turned."

When Mariolle decided that it was time for him to take his leave, he left them both delighted with him.

But he left that house with sorrow in his soul. In the presence of that woman he felt deeply the bondage in which she held him, realizing that it would be vain to knock at that heart, as a man imprisoned fruitlessly beats the iron door with his fist. He was

well assured that he was entirely in her power, and he did not try to free himself. Such being the case, and as he could not avoid this fatality, he resolved that he would be patient, tenacious, cunning, dissembling, that he would conquer by address, by the homage that she was so greedy of, by the adoration that intoxicated her, by the voluntary servitude to which he would suffer himself to be reduced.

His letter had pleased her; he would write. He wrote. Almost every night, when he came home, at that hour when the mind, fresh from the influence of the day's occurrences, regards whatever interests or moves it with a sort of abnormally developed hallucination, he would seat himself at his table by his lamp and exalt his imagination by thoughts of her. The poetic germ, that so many indolent men suffer to perish within them from mere slothfulness, grew and thrived under this regimen. He infused a feverish ardor into this task of literary tenderness by means of constantly writing the same thing, the same idea, that is, his love, in expressions that were ever renewed by the constantly fresh-springing, daily renewal of his desire. All through the long day he would seek for and find those irresistible words that stream from the brain like fiery sparks, compelled by the over-excited emotions. Thus he would breathe upon the fire of his own heart and kindle it into raging flames, for often love-letters contain more danger for him who writes than for her who receives them.

By keeping himself in this continuous state of effervescence,

by heating his blood with words and peopling his brain with one solitary thought, his ideas gradually became confused as to the reality of this woman. He had ceased to entertain the opinion of her that he had first held, and now beheld her only through the medium of his own lyrical phrases, and all that he wrote of her night by night became to his heart so many gospel truths. This daily labor of idealization displayed her to him as in a dream. His former resistance melted away, moreover, in presence of the affection that Mme. de Burne undeniably evinced for him. Although no word had passed between them at this time, she certainly showed a preference for him beyond others, and took no pains to conceal it from him. He therefore thought, with a kind of mad hope, that she might finally come to love him.

The fact was that the charm of those letters afforded her a complicated and naïve delight. No one had ever flattered and caressed her in that manner, with such mute reserve. No one had ever had the delicious idea of sending to her bedside, every morning, that feast of sentiment in paper wrapping that her maid presented to her on the little silver salver. And what made it all the dearer in her eyes was that he never mentioned it, that he seemed to be quite unaware of it himself, that when he visited her salon he was the most undemonstrative of her friends, that he never by word or look alluded to those showers of tenderness that he was secretly raining down upon her.

Of course she had had love-letters before that, but they had been pitched in a different key, had been less reserved, more

pressing, more like a summons to surrender. For the three months that his "crisis" had lasted Lamarthe had dedicated to her a very nice correspondence from a much-smitten novelist who maunders in a literary way. She kept in her secretary, in a drawer specially allotted to them, these delicate and seductive epistles from a writer who had shown much feeling, who had caressed her with his pen up to the very day when he saw that he had no hope of success.

Mariolle's letters were quite different; they were so strong in their concentrated desire, so deep in the expression of their sincerity, so humble in their submissiveness, breathing a devotion that promised to be lasting, that she received and read them with a delight that no other writings could have afforded her.

It was natural that her friendly feeling for the man should increase under such conditions. She invited him to her house the more frequently because he displayed such entire reserve in his relations toward her, seeming not to have the slightest recollection in conversation with her that he had ever taken up a sheet of paper to tell her of his adoration. Moreover she looked upon the situation as an original one, worthy of being celebrated in a book; and in the depths of her satisfaction in having at her side a being who loved her thus, she experienced a sort of active fermentation of sympathy which caused her to measure him by a standard other than her usual one.

Up to the present time, notwithstanding the vanity of her coquetry she had been conscious of preoccupations that

antagonized her in all the hearts that she had laid waste. She had not held undisputed sovereignty over them, she had found in them powerful interests that were entirely dissociated from her. Jealous of music in Massival's case, of literature in Lamarthe's, always jealous of something, discontented that she only obtained partial successes, powerless to drive all before her in the minds of these ambitious men, men of celebrity, or artists to whom their profession was a mistress from whom nobody could part them, she had now for the first time fallen in with one to whom she was all in all. Certainly big Fresnel, and he alone, loved her to the same degree. But then he was big Fresnel. She felt that it had never been granted her to exercise such complete dominion over anyone, and her selfish gratitude for the man who had afforded her this triumph displayed itself in manifestations of tenderness. She had need of him now; she had need of his presence, of his glance, of his subjection, of all this domesticity of love. If he flattered her vanity less than the others did, he flattered more those supreme exactions that sway coquettes body and soul – her pride and her instinct of domination, her strong instinct of feminine repose.

Like an invader she gradually assumed possession of his life by a series of small incursions that every day became more numerous. She got up *fêtes*, theater-parties, and dinners at the restaurant, so that he might be of the party. She dragged him after her with the satisfaction of a conqueror; she could not dispense with his presence, or rather with the state of slavery to which he

was reduced. He followed in her train, happy to feel himself thus petted, caressed by her eyes, her voice, by her every caprice, and he lived only in a continuous transport of love and longing that desolated and burned like a wasting fever.

CHAPTER IV.

THE BENEFIT OF CHANGE OF SCENE

One day Mariolle had gone to her house. He was awaiting her, for she had not come in, although she had sent him a telegram to tell him that she wanted to see him that morning. Whenever he was alone in this drawing-room which it gave him such pleasure to enter and where everything was so charming to him, he nevertheless was conscious of an oppression of the heart, a slight feeling of affright and breathlessness that would not allow him to remain seated as long as she was not there. He walked about the room in joyful expectation, dashed by the fear that some unforeseen obstacle might intervene to detain her and cause their interview to go over until next day. His heart gave a hopeful bound when he heard a carriage draw up before the street door, and when the bell of the apartment rang he ceased to doubt.

She came in with her hat on, a thing which she was not accustomed to do, wearing a busy and satisfied look. "I have some news for you," she said.

"What is it, Madame?"

She looked at him and laughed. "Well! I am going to the country for a while."

Her words produced in him a quick, sharp shock of sorrow that was reflected upon his face. "Oh! and you tell me that as if you were glad of it!"

"Yes. Sit down and I will tell you all about it. I don't know whether you are aware that M. Valsaci, my poor mother's brother, the engineer and bridge-builder, has a country-place at Avranches where he spends a portion of his time with his wife and children, for his business lies mostly in that neighborhood. We pay them a visit every summer. This year I said that I did not care to go, but he was greatly disappointed and made quite a time over it with papa. Speaking of scenes, I will tell you confidentially that papa is jealous of you and makes scenes with me, too; he says that I am entangling myself with you. You will have to come to see me less frequently. But don't let that trouble you; I will arrange matters. So papa gave me a scolding and made me promise to go to Avranches for a visit of ten days, perhaps twelve. We are to start Tuesday morning. What have you got to say about it?"

"I say that it breaks my heart."

"Is that all?"

"What more can I say? There is no way of preventing you from going."

"And nothing presents itself to you?"

"Why, no; I can't say that there does. And you?"

"I have an idea; it is this: Avranches is quite near Mont Saint-Michel. Have you ever been at Mont Saint-Michel?"

"No, Madame."

"Well, something will tell you next Friday that you want to go and see this wonder. You will leave the train at Avranches; on Friday evening at sunset, if you please, you will take a walk in the public garden that overlooks the bay. We will happen to meet there. Papa will grumble, but I don't care for that. I will make up a party to go and see the abbey next day, including all the family. You must be enthusiastic over it, and very charming, as you can be when you choose; be attentive to my aunt and gain her over, and invite us all to dine at the inn where we alight. We will sleep there, and will have all the next day to be together. You will return by way of Saint Malo, and a week later I shall be back in Paris. Isn't that an ingenious scheme? Am I not nice?"

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

Текст предоставлен ООО «ЛитРес».

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

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