

ÉMILE ZOLA

A LOVE
EPISODE

ЭМИЛЬ ЗОЛЯ
A Love Episode

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Émile Zola

A Love Episode

ZOLA AND HIS WRITINGS

Emile Zola was born in Paris, April 2, 1840. His father was Francois Zola, an Italian engineer, who constructed the Canal Zola in Provence. Zola passed his early youth in the south of France, continuing his studies at the Lycee St. Louis, in Paris, and at Marseilles. His sole patrimony was a lawsuit against the town of Aix. He became a clerk in the publishing house of Hachette, receiving at first the modest honorarium of twenty-five francs a week. His journalistic career, though marked by immense toil, was neither striking nor remunerative. His essays in criticism, of which he collected and published several volumes, were not particularly successful. This was evidently not his field. His first stories, *Les Mysteres de Marseilles* and *Le Voeu d'Une Morte* fell flat, disclosing no indication of remarkable talent. But in 1864 appeared *Les Contes a Ninon*, which attracted wide attention, the public finding them charming. *Les Confessions de Claude* was published in 1865. In this work Zola had evidently struck his gait, and when *Therese Raquin* followed, in 1867, Zola was fully launched on his great career as a writer of the school which he called "Naturalist." *Therese Raquin* was a powerful study of the effects of remorse preying upon the mind. In this work the naturalism was generally characterized as "brutal," yet many critics admitted that it was absolutely true to nature. It had, in fact, all the gruesome accuracy of a clinical lecture. In 1868 came *Madeleine Ferat*, an exemplification of the doctrine of heredity, as inexorable as the "Destiny" of the Greek tragedies of old.

And now dawned in Zola's teeming brain the vast conception of a "Naturalistic Comedy of Life." It was to be Balzac "naturalized," so to speak. The great cycle should run through the whole gamut of human passions, foibles, motives and interests. It should consist of human documents, of painstaking minuteness of detail and incontrovertible truth.

The idea of destiny or heredity permeates all the works of this portentously ambitious series. Details may be repellant. One should not "smell" a picture, as the artists say. If one does, he gets an impression merely of a small blotch of paint. The vast canvas should be studied as a whole. Frailties are certainly not the whole of human nature. But they cannot be excluded from a comprehensive view of it. The "*Rougon-Macquart* series" did not carry Zola into the Academy. But the reputation of Moliere has managed to survive a similar exclusion, and so will the fame of Zola, who will be bracketed with Balzac in future classifications of artistic excellence. For twenty-two years, from *La Fortune des Rougon*, in 1871, to *Docteur Pascal* in 1893, the series continued to focus the attention of the world, and Zola was the most talked about man in the literature of the epoch. *La Fortune des Rougon* was introductory. *La Curee* discussed society under the second Empire. *Le Ventre de Paris* described the great market of Paris. *La Conquete de Plassans* spoke of life in the south of France. *La Faute de l'Abbe Mouret* treated of the results of celibacy. *Son Excellence Eugene Rougon* dealt with official life. *L'Assommoir* was a tract against the vice of drunkenness. Some think this the strongest of the naturalist series. Its success was prodigious. In this the marvellous talent of Zola for minute description is evinced. *Une Page d'Amour* (A Love Episode) appeared in 1878. Of *Nana*, 1880, three hundred thousand copies were quickly sold. *Pot-Bouille* portrayed the lower *bourgeoisie* and their servants. *Au Bonheur des Dames* treated of the great retail shops. *La Joie de Vivre* came in 1884. *Germinal* told of mining and the misery of the proletariat. *L'Oeuvre* pictured the life of artists and authors. *La Terre* portrayed, with startling realism, the lowest peasant life. *Le Reve*, which followed, was a reaction. It was a graceful idyl. *Le Reve* was termed "a symphony in white," and was considered as a concession to the views of the majority of the French Academy. *La Bete Humaine* exhausted the details of railway life. *L'Argent* treats of financial scandals and panics. *La Debacle*, 1892, is a realistic

picture of the desperate struggles of the Franco-Prussian war. *Le Docteur Pascal*, 1893, a story of the emotions, wound up the series. Through it all runs the thread of heredity and environment in their influence on human character.

But Zola's work was not finished. A series of three romances on cities showed a continuance of power. They are *Lourdes*, *Rome*, and *Paris*. After the books on the three cities Zola planned a sort of tetralogy, intended to sum up his social philosophy, which he called the "Four Gospels." *Feconditie* is a tract against race suicide. The others of this series are entitled *Travail*, *Verite* and *Justice*, the latter projected but not begun.

The attitude which Zola took in reference to the wretched Dreyfus scandal will add greatly to his fame as a man of courage and a lover of truth. From this filthy mess of perjury and forgery Zola's intrepidity and devotion to justice arise clear and white as a lily from a cesspool.

Several of Zola's books have been dramatized.

Zola died suddenly at his home in Paris, in September, 1902. He received a public funeral, Anatole France delivering an oration at the grave. There is every indication that Zola's great reputation as an artist and philosopher will increase with the passing of the years.

C. C. STARKWEATHER.

CHAPTER I

The night-lamp with a bluish shade was burning on the chimney-piece, behind a book, whose shadows plunged more than half the chamber in darkness. There was a quiet gleam of light cutting across the round table and the couch, streaming over the heavy folds of the velvet curtains, and imparting an azure hue to the mirror of the rosewood wardrobe placed between the two windows. The quiet simplicity of the room, the blue tints on the hangings, furniture, and carpet, served at this hour of night to invest everything with the delightful vagueness of cloudland. Facing the windows, and within sweep of the shadow, loomed the velvet-curtained bed, a black mass, relieved only by the white of the sheets. With hands crossed on her bosom, and breathing lightly, lay Helene, asleep – mother and widow alike personified by the quiet unrestraint of her attitude.

In the midst of the silence one o'clock chimed from the timepiece. The noises of the neighborhood had died away; the dull, distant roar of the city was the only sign of life that disturbed those Trocadero heights. Helene's breathing, so light and gentle, did not ruffle the chaste repose of her bosom. She was in a beauteous sleep, peaceful yet sound, her profile perfect, her nut-brown hair twisted into a knot, and her head leaning forward somewhat, as though she had fallen asleep while eagerly listening. At the farther end of the room the open door of an adjoining closet seemed but a black square in the wall.

Still there was not a sound. The half-hour struck. The pendulum gave but a feeble tick-tack amid the general drowsiness that brooded over the whole chamber. Everything was sleeping, night-lamp and furniture alike; on the table, near an extinguished lamp, some woman's handiwork was disposed also in slumber. Helene in her sleep retained her air of gravity and kindness.

Two o'clock struck, and the stillness was broken. A deep sigh issued from the darkness of the closet. There was a rustling of linen sheets, and then silence reigned again. Anon labored breathing broke through the gloom. Helene had not moved. Suddenly, however, she started up, for the moanings and cries of a child in pain had roused her. Dazed with sleep, she pressed her hands against her temples, but hearing a stifled sob, she leaped from her couch on to the carpet.

"Jeanne! my Jeanne! what ails you? tell me, love," she asked; and as the child remained silent, she murmured, while running towards the night-light, "Gracious Heaven! why did I go to bed when she was so ill?"

Quickly she entered the closet, where deep silence had again fallen. The feeble gleam of the lamp threw but a circular patch of light on the ceiling. Bending over the iron cot, she could at first make out nothing, but amidst the bed-clothes, tossed about in disorder, the dim light soon revealed Jeanne, with limbs quite stiff, her head flung back, the muscles of her neck swollen and rigid. Her sweet face was distorted, her eyes were open and fixed on the curtain-rod above.

"My child!" cried Helene. "My God! my God! she is dying."

Setting down the lamp, Helene touched her daughter with trembling hands. The throbbing of the pulse and the heart's action seemed to have died away. The child's puny arms and legs were stretched out convulsively, and the mother grew frantic at the sight.

"My child is dying! Help, help!" she stammered. "My child! my child!"

She wandered back to her room, brushing against the furniture, and unconscious of her movements; then, distracted, she again returned to the little bed, throwing herself on her knees, and ever appealing for help. She took Jeanne in her arms, rained kisses on her hair, and stroked her little body, begging her to answer, and seeking one word – only one word – from her silent lips. Where was the pain? Would she have some of the cooling drink she had liked the other day? Perhaps the fresh air would revive her? So she rattled on, bent on making the child speak.

"Speak to me, Jeanne! speak to me, I entreat you!"

Oh, God! and not to know what to do in this sudden terror born of the night! There was no light even. Then her ideas grew confused, though her supplications to the child continued – at one moment she was beseeching, at another answering in her own person. Thus, the pain gripped her in the stomach; no, no, it must be in the breast. It was nothing at all; she need merely keep quiet. Then Helene tried to collect her scattered senses; but as she felt her daughter stark and stiff in her embrace, her heart sickened unto death. She tried to reason with herself, and to resist the yearning to scream. But all at once, despite herself, her cry rang out

"Rosalie, Rosalie! my child is dying. Quick, hurry for the doctor."

Screaming out these words, she ran through dining-room and kitchen to a room in the rear, where the maid started up from sleep, giving vent to her surprise. Helene speeded back again. Clad only in her night-dress she moved about, seemingly not feeling the icy cold of the February night. Pah! this maid would loiter, and her child would die! Back again she hurried through the kitchen to the bedroom before a minute had elapsed. Violently, and in the dark, she slipped on a petticoat, and threw a shawl over her shoulders. The furniture in her way was overturned; the room so still and silent was filled with the echoes of her despair. Then leaving the doors open, she rushed down three flights of stairs in her slippers, consumed with the thought that she alone could bring back a doctor.

After the house-porter had opened the door Helene found herself upon the pavement, with a ringing in her ears and her mind distracted. However, she quickly ran down the Rue Vineuse and pulled the door-bell of Doctor Bodin, who had already tended Jeanne; but a servant – after an interval which seemed an eternity – informed her that the doctor was attending a woman in childbed. Helene remained stupefied on the footway; she knew no other doctor in Passy. For a few moments she rushed about the streets, gazing at the houses. A slight but keen wind was blowing, and she was walking in slippers through the light snow that had fallen during the evening. Ever before her was her daughter, with the agonizing thought that she was killing her by not finding a doctor at once. Then, as she retraced her steps along the Rue Vineuse, she rang the bell of another house. She would inquire, at all events; some one would perhaps direct her. She gave a second tug at the bell; but no one seemed to come. The wind meanwhile played with her petticoat, making it cling to her legs, and tossed her dishevelled hair.

At last a servant answered her summons. "Doctor Deberle was in bed asleep." It was a doctor's house at which she had rung, so Heaven had not abandoned her! Straightway, intent upon entering, she pushed the servant aside, still repeating her prayer:

"My child, my child is dying! Oh, tell him he must come!"

The house was small and seemed full of hangings. She reached the first floor, despite the servant's opposition, always answering his protest with the words, "My child is dying!" In the apartment she entered she would have been content to wait; but the moment she heard the doctor stirring in the next room she drew near and appealed to him through the doorway:

"Oh, sir, come at once, I beseech you. My child is dying!"

When the doctor at last appeared in a short coat and without a neckcloth, she dragged him away without allowing him to finish dressing. He at once recognized her as a resident in the next-door house, and one of his own tenants; so when he induced her to cross a garden – to shorten the way by using a side-door between the two houses – memory suddenly awoke within her.

"True, you are a doctor!" she murmured, "and I knew it. But I was distracted. Oh, let us hurry!"

On the staircase she wished him to go first. She could not have admitted the Divinity to her home in a more reverent manner. Upstairs Rosalie had remained near the child, and had lit the large lamp on the table. After the doctor had entered the room he took up this lamp and cast its light upon the body of the child, which retained its painful rigidity; the head, however, had slipped forward, and nervous twitchings were ceaselessly drawing the face. For a minute he looked on in silence, his lips compressed. Helene anxiously watched him, and on noticing the mother's imploring glance, he muttered: "It will be nothing. But she must not lie here. She must have air."

Helene grasped her child in a strong embrace, and carried her away on her shoulder. She could have kissed the doctor's hand for his good tidings, and a wave of happiness rippled through her. Scarcely, however, had Jeanne been placed in the larger bed than her poor little frame was again seized with violent convulsions. The doctor had removed the shade from the lamp, and a white light was streaming through the room. Then, opening a window, he ordered Rosalie to drag the bed away from the curtains. Helene's heart was again filled with anguish. "Oh, sir, she is dying," she stammered. "Look! look! Ah! I scarcely recognize her."

The doctor did not reply, but watched the paroxysm attentively.

"Step into the alcove," he at last exclaimed. "Hold her hands to prevent her from tearing herself. There now, gently, quietly! Don't make yourself uneasy. The fit must be allowed to run its course."

They both bent over the bed, supporting and holding Jeanne, whose limbs shot out with sudden jerks. The doctor had buttoned up his coat to hide his bare neck, and Helene's shoulders had till now been enveloped in her shawl; but Jeanne in her struggles dragged a corner of the shawl away, and unbuttoned the top of the coat. Still they did not notice it; they never even looked at one another.

At last the convulsion ceased, and the little one then appeared to sink into deep prostration. Doctor Deberle was evidently ill at ease, though he had assured the mother that there was no danger. He kept his gaze fixed on the sufferer, and put some brief questions to Helene as she stood by the bedside.

"How old is the child?"

"Eleven years and six months, sir," was the reply.

Silence again fell between them. He shook his head, and stooped to raise one of Jeanne's lowered eyelids and examine the mucus. Then he resumed his questions, but without raising his eyes to Helene.

"Did she have convulsions when she was a baby?"

"Yes, sir; but they left her after she reached her sixth birthday. Ah! she is very delicate. For some days past she had seemed ill at ease. She was at times taken with cramp, and plunged in a stupor."

"Do you know of any members of your family that have suffered from nervous affections?"

"I don't know. My mother was carried off by consumption."

Here shame made her pause. She could not confess that she had a grandmother who was an inmate of a lunatic asylum.[*] There was something tragic connected with all her ancestry.

[*] This is Adelaide Fouque, otherwise Aunt Dide, the ancestress of the Rougon-Macquart family, whose early career is related in the "Fortune of the Rougons," whilst her death is graphically described in the pages of "Dr. Pascal."

"Take care! the convulsions are coming on again!" now hastily exclaimed the doctor.

Jeanne had just opened her eyes, and for a moment she gazed around her with a vacant look, never speaking a word. Her glance then grew fixed, her body was violently thrown backwards, and her limbs became distended and rigid. Her skin, fiery-red, all at once turned livid. Her pallor was the pallor of death; the convulsions began once more.

"Do not loose your hold of her," said the doctor. "Take her other hand!"

He ran to the table, where, on entering, he had placed a small medicine-case. He came back with a bottle, the contents of which he made Jeanne inhale; but the effect was like that of a terrible lash; the child gave such a violent jerk that she slipped from her mother's hands.

"No, no, don't give her ether," exclaimed Helene, warned by the odor. "It drives her mad."

The two had now scarcely strength enough to keep the child under control. Her frame was racked and distorted, raised by the heels and the nape of the neck, as if bent in two. But she fell back again and began tossing from one side of the bed to the other. Her fists were clenched, her thumbs bent against the palms of her hands. At times she would open the latter, and, with fingers wide apart, grasp at phantom bodies in the air, as though to twist them. She touched her mother's shawl and fiercely clung to it. But Helene's greatest grief was that she no longer recognized her daughter. The

suffering angel, whose face was usually so sweet, was transformed in every feature, while her eyes swam, showing balls of a nacreous blue.

"Oh, do something, I implore you!" she murmured. "My strength is exhausted, sir."

She had just remembered how the child of a neighbor at Marseilles had died of suffocation in a similar fit. Perhaps from feelings of pity the doctor was deceiving her. Every moment she believed she felt Jeanne's last breath against her face; for the child's halting respiration seemed suddenly to cease. Heartbroken and overwhelmed with terror, Helene then burst into tears, which fell on the body of her child, who had thrown off the bedclothes.

The doctor meantime was gently kneading the base of the neck with his long supple fingers. Gradually the fit subsided, and Jeanne, after a few slight twitches, lay there motionless. She had fallen back in the middle of the bed, with limbs outstretched, while her head, supported by the pillow, inclined towards her bosom. One might have thought her an infant Jesus. Helene stooped and pressed a long kiss on her brow.

"Is it over?" she asked in a whisper. "Do you think she'll have another fit?"

The doctor made an evasive gesture, and then replied:

"In any case the others will be less violent."

He had asked Rosalie for a glass and water-bottle. Half-filling the glass with water, he took up two fresh medicine phials, and counted out a number of drops. Helene assisted in raising the child's head, and the doctor succeeded in pouring a spoonful of the liquid between the clenched teeth. The white flame of the lamp was leaping up high and clear, revealing the disorder of the chamber's furnishings. Helene's garments, thrown on the back of an arm-chair before she slipped into bed, had now fallen, and were littering the carpet. The doctor had trodden on her stays, and had picked them up lest he might again find them in his way. An odor of vervain stole through the room. The doctor himself went for the basin, and soaked a linen cloth in it, which he then pressed to Jeanne's temples.

"Oh, madame, you'll take cold!" expostulated Rosalie as she stood there shivering. "Perhaps the window might be shut? The air is too raw."

"No, no!" cried Helene; "leave the window open. Should it not be so?" she appealed to the doctor.

The wind entered in slight puffs, rustling the curtains to and fro; but she was quite unconscious of it. Yet the shawl had slipped off her shoulders, and her hair had become unwound, some wanton tresses sweeping down to her hips. She had left her arms free and uncovered, that she might be the more ready; she had forgotten all, absorbed entirely in her love for her child. And on his side, the doctor, busy with his work, no longer thought of his unbuttoned coat, or of the shirt-collar that Jeanne's clutch had torn away.

"Raise her up a little," said he to Helene. "No, no, not in that way! Give me your hand."

He took her hand and placed it under the child's head. He wished to give Jeanne another spoonful of the medicine. Then he called Helene close to him, made use of her as his assistant; and she obeyed him reverently on seeing that her daughter was already more calm.

"Now, come," he said. "You must let her head lean against your shoulder, while I listen."

Helene did as he bade her, and he bent over her to place his ear against Jeanne's bosom. He touched her bare shoulder with his cheek, and as the pulsation of the child's heart struck his ear he could also have heard the throbbing of the mother's breast. As he rose up his breath mingled with Helene's.

"There is nothing wrong there," was the quiet remark that filled her with delight. "Lay her down again. We must not worry her more."

However, another, though much less violent, paroxysm followed. From Jeanne's lips burst some broken words. At short intervals two fresh attacks seemed about to convulse her, and then a great prostration, which again appeared to alarm the doctor, fell on the child. He had placed her so that her head lay high, with the clothes carefully tucked under her chin; and for nearly an hour he remained

there watching her, as though awaiting the return of a healthy respiration. On the other side of the bed Helene also waited, never moving a limb.

Little by little a great calm settled on Jeanne's face. The lamp cast a sunny light upon it, and it regained its exquisite though somewhat lengthy oval. Jeanne's fine eyes, now closed, had large, bluish, transparent lids, which veiled – one could divine it – a sombre, flashing glance. A light breathing came from her slender nose, while round her somewhat large mouth played a vague smile. She slept thus, amidst her outspread tresses, which were inky black.

"It has all passed away now," said the doctor in a whisper; and he turned to arrange his medicine bottles prior to leaving.

"Oh, sir!" exclaimed Helene, approaching him, "don't leave me yet; wait a few minutes. Another fit might come on, and you, you alone, have saved her!"

He signed to her that there was nothing to fear; yet he tarried, with the idea of tranquillizing her. She had already sent Rosalie to bed; and now the dawn soon broke, still and grey, over the snow which whitened the housetops. The doctor proceeded to close the window, and in the deep quiet the two exchanged a few whispers.

"There is nothing seriously wrong with her, I assure you," said he; "only with one so young great care must be taken. You must see that her days are spent quietly and happily, and without shocks of any kind."

"She is so delicate and nervous," replied Helene after a moment's pause. "I cannot always control her. For the most trifling reasons she is so overcome by joy or sorrow that I grow alarmed. She loves me with a passion, a jealousy, which makes her burst into tears when I caress another child."

"So, so – delicate, nervous, and jealous," repeated the doctor as he shook his head. "Doctor Bodin has attended her, has he not? I'll have a talk with him about her. We shall have to adopt energetic treatment. She has reached an age that is critical in one of her sex."

Recognizing the interest he displayed, Helene gave vent to her gratitude. "How I must thank you, sir, for the great trouble you have taken!"

The loudness of her tones frightened her, however; she might have woken Jeanne, and she bent down over the bed. But no; the child was sound asleep, with rosy cheeks, and a vague smile playing round her lips. The air of the quiet chamber was charged with languor. The whilom drowsiness, as if born again of relief, once more seized upon the curtains, furniture, and littered garments. Everything was steeped restfully in the early morning light as it entered through the two windows.

Helene again stood up close to the bed; on the other side was the doctor, and between them lay Jeanne, lightly sleeping.

"Her father was frequently ill," remarked Helene softly, continuing her answer to his previous question. "I myself enjoy the best of health."

The doctor, who had not yet looked at her, raised his eyes, and could scarcely refrain from smiling, so hale and hearty was she in every way. She greeted his gaze with her own sweet and quiet smile. Her happiness lay in her good health.

However, his looks were still bent on her. Never had he seen such classical beauty. Tall and commanding, she was a nut-brown Juno, of a nut-brown sunny with gleams of gold. When she slowly turned her head, its profile showed the severe purity of a statue. Her grey eyes and pearly teeth lit up her whole face. Her chin, rounded and somewhat pronounced, proved her to be possessed of commonsense and firmness. But what astonished the doctor was the superbness of her whole figure. She stood there, a model of queenliness, chastity, and modesty.

On her side also she scanned him for a moment. Doctor Deberle's years were thirty-five; his face was clean-shaven and a little long; he had keen eyes and thin lips. As she gazed on him she noticed for the first time that his neck was bare. Thus they remained face to face, with Jeanne asleep between them. The distance which but a short time before had appeared immense, now seemed to be

dwindling away. Then Helene slowly wrapped the shawl about her shoulders again, while the doctor hastened to button his coat at the neck.

"Mamma! mamma!" Jeanne stammered in her sleep. She was waking, and on opening her eyes she saw the doctor and became uneasy.

"Mamma, who's that?" was her instant question; but her mother kissed her, and replied: "Go to sleep, darling, you haven't been well. It's only a friend."

The child seemed surprised; she did not remember anything. Drowsiness was coming over her once more, and she fell asleep again, murmuring tenderly: "I'm going to by-by. Good-night, mamma, dear. If he is your friend he will be mine."

The doctor had removed his medicine-case, and, with a silent bow, he left the room. Helene listened for a while to the child's breathing, and then, seated on the edge of the bed, she became oblivious to everything around her; her looks and thoughts wandering far away. The lamp, still burning, was paling in the growing sunlight.

CHAPTER II

Next day Helene thought it right and proper to pay a visit of thanks to Doctor Deberle. The abrupt fashion in which she had compelled him to follow her, and the remembrance of the whole night which he had spent with Jeanne, made her uneasy, for she realized that he had done more than is usually compassed within a doctor's visit. Still, for two days she hesitated to make her call, feeling a strange repugnance towards such a step. For this she could give herself no reasons. It was the doctor himself who inspired her with this hesitancy; one morning she met him, and shrunk from his notice as though she were a child. At this excess of timidity she was much annoyed. Her quiet, upright nature protested against the uneasiness which was taking possession of her. She decided, therefore, to go and thank the doctor that very day.

Jeanne's attack had taken place during the small hours of Wednesday morning; it was now Saturday, and the child was quite well again. Doctor Bodin, whose fears concerning her had prompted him to make an early call, spoke of Doctor Deberle with the respect that an old doctor with a meagre income pays to another in the same district, who is young, rich, and already possessed of a reputation. He did not forget to add, however, with an artful smile, that the fortune had been bequeathed by the elder Deberle, a man whom all Passy held in veneration. The son had only been put to the trouble of inheriting fifteen hundred thousand francs, together with a splendid practice. "He is, though, a very smart fellow," Doctor Bodin hastened to add, "and I shall be honored by having a consultation with him about the precious health of my little friend Jeanne!"

About three o'clock Helene made her way downstairs with her daughter, and had to take but a few steps along the Rue Vineuse before ringing at the next-door house. Both mother and daughter still wore deep mourning. A servant, in dress-coat and white tie, opened the door. Helene easily recognized the large entrance-hall, with its Oriental hangings; on each side of it, however, there were now flower-stands, brilliant with a profusion of blossoms. The servant having admitted them to a small drawing-room, the hangings and furniture of which were of a mignonette hue, stood awaiting their pleasure, and Helene gave her name – Madame Grandjean.

Thereupon the footman pushed open the door of a drawing-room, furnished in yellow and black, of dazzling effect, and, moving aside, announced:

"Madame Grandjean!"

Helene, standing on the threshold, started back. She had just noticed at the other end of the room a young woman seated near the fireplace on a narrow couch which was completely covered by her ample skirts. Facing her sat an elderly person, who had retained her bonnet and shawl, and was evidently paying a visit.

"I beg pardon," exclaimed Helene. "I wished to see Doctor Deberle."

She had made the child enter the room before her, and now took her by the hand again. She was both astonished and embarrassed in meeting this young lady. Why had she not asked for the doctor? She well knew he was married.

Madame Deberle was just finishing some story, in a quick and rather shrill voice.

"Oh! it's marvellous, marvellous! She dies with wonderful realism. She clutches at her bosom like this, throws back her head, and her face turns green. I declare you ought to see her, Mademoiselle Aurelie!"

Then, rising up, she sailed towards the doorway, rustling her skirts terribly.

"Be so kind as to walk in, madame," she said with charming graciousness. "My husband is not at home, but I shall be delighted to receive you, I assure you. This must be the pretty little girl who was so ill a few nights ago. Sit down for a moment, I beg of you."

Helene was forced to accept the invitation, while Jeanne timidly perched herself on the edge of another chair. Madame Deberle again sank down on her little sofa, exclaiming with a pretty laugh,

"Yes, this is my day. I receive every Saturday, you see, and Pierre then announces all comers. A week or two ago he ushered in a colonel suffering from the gout."

"How silly you are, my dear Juliette!" expostulated Mademoiselle Aurelie, the elderly lady, an old friend in straitened circumstances, who had seen her come into the world.

There was a short silence, and Helene gazed round at the luxury of the apartment, with its curtains and chairs in black and gold, glittering like constellations. Flowers decorated mantel-shelf, piano, and tables alike, and the clear light streamed through the windows from the garden, in which could be seen the leafless trees and bare soil. The room had almost a hot-house temperature; in the fireplace one large log was glowing with intense heat. After another glance Helene recognized that the gaudy colors had a happy effect. Madame Deberle's hair was inky-black, and her skin of a milky whiteness. She was short, plump, slow in her movements, and withal graceful. Amidst all the golden decorations, her white face assumed a vermeil tint under her heavy, sombre tresses. Helene really admired her.

"Convulsions are so terrible," broke in Madame Deberle. "My Lucien had them when a mere baby. How uneasy you must have been, madame! However, the dear little thing appears to be quite well now."

As she drawled out these words she kept her eyes on Helene, whose superb beauty amazed and delighted her. Never had she seen a woman with so queenly an air in the black garments which draped the widow's commanding figure. Her admiration found vent in an involuntary smile, while she exchanged glances with Mademoiselle Aurelie. Their admiration was so ingenuously and charmingly expressed, that a faint smile also rippled over Helene's face.

Then Madame Deberle stretched herself on the sofa. "You were not at the first night at the Vaudeville yesterday, madame?" she asked, as she played with the fan that hung from her waist.

"I never go to the theatre," was Helene's reply.

"Oh! little Noemi was simply marvellous! Her death scene is so realistic! She clutches her bosom like this, throws back her head, and her face turns green. Oh! the effect is prodigious."

Thereupon she entered into a minute criticism of the actress's playing, which she upheld against the world; and then she passed to the other topics of the day – a fine art exhibition, at which she had seen some most remarkable paintings; a stupid novel about which too much fuss was being made; a society intrigue which she spoke of to Mademoiselle Aurelie in veiled language. And so she went on from one subject to another, without wearying, her tongue ever ready, as though this social atmosphere were peculiarly her own. Helene, a stranger to such society, was content to listen, merely interjecting a remark or brief reply every now and then.

At last the door was again thrown open and the footman announced: "Madame de Chermette! Madame Tissot!"

Two ladies entered, magnificently dressed. Madame Deberle rose eagerly to meet them, and the train of her black silk gown, heavily decked with trimmings, trailed so far behind her that she had to kick it out of her way whenever she happened to turn round. A confused babel of greetings in shrill voices arose.

"Oh! how kind of you! I declare I never see you!"

"You know we come about that lottery."

"Yes: I know, I know."

"Oh! we cannot sit down. We have to call at twenty houses yet."

"Come now, you are not going to run away at once!"

And then the visitors finished by sitting down on the edge of a couch; the chatter beginning again, shriller than ever.

"Well! what do you think of yesterday at the Vaudeville?"

"Oh! it was splendid!"

"You know she unfastens her dress and lets down her hair. All the effect springs from that."

"People say that she swallows something to make her green."

"No, no, every action is premeditated; but she had to invent and study them all, in the first place."

"It's wonderful."

The two ladies rose and made their exit, and the room regained its tranquil peacefulness. From some hyacinths on the mantel-shelf was wafted an all-pervading perfume. For a time one could hear the noisy twittering of some sparrows quarrelling on the lawn. Before resuming her seat, Madame Deberle proceeded to draw down the embroidered tulle blind of a window facing her, and then returned to her sofa in the mellowed, golden light of the room.

"I beg pardon," she now said. "We have had quite an invasion."

Then, in an affectionate way, she entered into conversation with Helene. She seemed to know some details of her history, doubtless from the gossip of her servants. With a boldness that was yet full of tact, and appeared instinct with much friendliness, she spoke to Helene of her husband, and of his sad death at the Hotel du Var, in the Rue de Richelieu.

"And you had just arrived, hadn't you? You had never been in Paris before. It must be awful to be plunged into mourning, in a strange room, the day after a long journey, and when one doesn't know a single place to go to."

Helene assented with a slow nod. Yes, she had spent some very bitter hours. The disease which carried off her husband had abruptly declared itself on the day after their arrival, just as they were going out together. She knew none of the streets, and was wholly unaware what district she was in. For eight days she had remained at the bedside of the dying man, hearing the rumble of Paris beneath her window, feeling she was alone, deserted, lost, as though plunged in the depths of an abyss. When she stepped out on the pavement for the first time, she was a widow. The mere recalling of that bare room, with its rows of medicine bottles, and with the travelling trunks standing about unpacked, still made her shudder.

"Was your husband, as I've been told, nearly twice your age?" asked Madame Deberle with an appearance of profound interest, while Mademoiselle Aurelie cocked her ears so as not to lose a syllable of the conversation.

"Oh, no!" replied Helene. "He was scarcely six years older."

Then she ventured to enter into the story of her marriage, telling in a few brief sentences how her husband had fallen deeply in love with her while she was living with her father, Monsieur Mouret, a hatter in the Rue des Petites-Maries, at Marseilles; how the Grandjean family, who were rich sugar-refiners, were bitterly opposed to the match, on account of her poverty. She spoke, too, of the ill-omened and secret wedding after the usual legal formalities, and of their hand-to-mouth existence, till the day an uncle on dying left them some ten thousand francs a year. It was then that Grandjean, within whom an intense hatred of Marseilles was growing, had decided on coming to Paris, to live there for good.

"And how old were you when you were married?" was Madame Deberle's next question.

"Seventeen."

"You must have been very beautiful."

The conversation suddenly ceased, for Helene had not seemed to hear the remark.

"Madame Manguelin!" announced the footman.

A young, retiring woman, evidently ill at ease, was ushered in. Madame Deberle scarcely rose. It was one of her dependents, who had called to thank her for some service performed. The visitor only remained for a few minutes, and left the room with a courtesy.

Madame Deberle then resumed the conversation, and spoke of Abbe Jouve, with whom both were acquainted. The Abbe was a meek officiating priest at Notre-Dame-de-Grace, the parish church of Passy; however, his charity was such that he was more beloved and more respectfully hearkened to than any other priest in the district.

"Oh, he has such pious eloquence!" exclaimed Madame Deberle, with a sanctimonious look.

"He has been very kind to us," said Helene. "My husband had formerly known him at Marseilles. The moment he heard of my misfortune he took charge of everything. To him we owe our settling in Passy."

"He has a brother, hasn't he?" questioned Juliette.

"Yes, a step-brother, for his mother married again. Monsieur Rambaud was also acquainted with my husband. He has started a large business in the Rue de Rambuteau, where he sells oils and other Southern produce. I believe he makes a large amount of money by it." And she added, with a laugh: "The Abbe and his brother make up my court."

Jeanne, sitting on the edge of her chair, and wearied to death, now cast an impatient look at her mother. Her long, delicate, lamb-like face wore a pained expression, as if she disliked all this conversation; and she appeared at times to sniff the heavy, oppressive odors floating in the room, while casting suspicious side-glances at the furniture, as though her own exquisite sensibility warned her of some undefined dangers. Finally, however, she turned a look of tyrannical worship on her mother.

Madame Deberle noticed the child's uneasiness.

"Here's a little girl," she said, "who feels tired at being serious, like a grown-up person. There are some picture-books on the table, dear; they will amuse you."

Jeanne took up an album, but her eyes strayed from it to glance imploringly at her mother. Helene, charmed by her hostess's excessive kindness, did not move; there was nothing of the fidget in her, and she would of her own accord remain seated for hours. However, as the servant announced three ladies in succession – Madame Berthier, Madame de Guiraud, and Madame Levasseur – she thought she ought to rise.

"Oh! pray stop," exclaimed Madame Deberle; "I must show you my son."

The semi-circle round the fireplace was increasing in size. The ladies were all gossiping at the same time. One of them declared that she was completely broken down, as for five days she had not gone to bed till four o'clock in the morning. Another indulged in a diatribe against wet nurses; she could no longer find one who was honest. Next the conversation fell on dressmakers. Madame Deberle affirmed no woman tailor could fit you properly; a man was requisite. Two of the ladies, however, were mumbling something under their breath, and, a silence intervening, two or three words became audible. Every one then broke into a laugh, while languidly waving their fans.

"Monsieur Malignon!" announced the servant.

A tall young man, dressed in good style, was ushered in. Some exclamations greeted him. Madame Deberle, not taking the trouble to rise, stretched out her hand and inquired: "Well! what of yesterday at the Vaudeville?"

"Vile!" was his reply.

"What! vile! She's marvellous when she clutches her bosom and throws back her head – "

"Stop! stop! The whole thing is loathsome in its realism."

And then quite a dispute commenced. It was easy to talk of realism, but the young man would have no realism at all.

"I would not have it in anything, you hear!" said he, raising his voice. "No, not in anything! it degrades art."

People would soon be seeing some fine things on the stage, indeed! Why didn't Noemi follow out her actions to their logical conclusion? And he illustrated his remark with a gesture which quite scandalized the ladies. Oh, how horrible! However, when Madame Deberle had declared that the actress produced a great effect, and Madame Levasseur had related how a lady had fainted in the balcony, everybody agreed that the affair was a great success; and with this the discussion stopped short.

The young man sat in an arm-chair, with his legs stretched out among the ladies' flowing skirts. He seemed to be quite at home in the doctor's house. He had mechanically plucked a flower from a vase, and was tearing it to pieces with his teeth. Madame Deberle interrupted him:

"Have you read that novel which – "

He did not allow her to finish, but replied, with a superior air, that he only read two novels in the year.

As for the exhibition of paintings at the Art Club, it was not worth troubling about; and then, every topic being exhausted, he rose and leaned over Juliette's little sofa, conversing with her in a low voice, while the other ladies continued chatting together in an animated manner.

At length: "Dear me! he's gone," exclaimed Madame Berthier turning round. "I met him only an hour ago in Madame Robinot's drawing-room."

"Yes, and he is now going to visit Madame Lecomte," said Madame Deberle. "He goes about more than any other man in Paris." She turned to Helene, who had been following the scene, and added: "A very distinguished young fellow he is, and we like him very much. He has some interest in a stockbroking business; he's very rich besides, and well posted in everything."

The other ladies, however, were now going off.

"Good-bye, dear madame. I rely upon you for Wednesday."

"Yes, to be sure; Wednesday."

"Oh, by the way, will you be at that evening party? One doesn't know whom one may meet. If you go, I'll go."

"Ah, well! I'll go, I promise you. Give my best regards to Monsieur de Guiraud."

When Madame Deberle returned she found Helene standing in the middle of the drawing-room. Jeanne had drawn close to her mother, whose hands she firmly grasped; and thus clinging to her caressingly and almost convulsively, she was drawing her little by little towards the doorway.

"Ah, I was forgetting!" exclaimed the lady of the house; and ringing the bell for the servant, she said to him: "Pierre, tell Miss Smithson to bring Lucien here."

During the short interval of waiting that ensued the door was again opened, but this time in a familiar fashion and without any formal announcement. A good-looking girl of some sixteen years of age entered in company with an old man, short of stature but with a rubicund, chubby face.

"Good-day, sister," was the girl's greeting, as she kissed Madame Deberle.

"Good-day, Pauline! good-day, father!" replied the doctor's wife.

Mademoiselle Aurelie, who had not stirred from her seat beside the fire, rose to exchange greetings with Monsieur Letellier. He owned an extensive silk warehouse on the Boulevard des Capucines. Since his wife's death he had been taking his younger daughter about everywhere, in search of a rich husband for her.

"Were you at the Vaudeville last night?" asked Pauline.

"Oh, it was simply marvellous!" repeated Juliette in parrot-fashion, as, standing before a mirror, she rearranged a rebellious curl.

"It is annoying to be so young; one can't go to anything!" said Pauline, pouting like a spoiled child. "I went with papa to the theatre-door at midnight, to find out how the piece had taken."

"Yes, and we tumbled upon Malignon," said the father.

"He was extremely pleased with it."

"Really!" exclaimed Juliette. "He was here a minute ago, and declared it vile. One never knows how to take him."

"Have you had many visitors to-day?" asked Pauline, rushing off to another subject.

"Oh, several ladies; quite a crowd! The room was never once empty. I'm dead-beat – "

Here she abruptly broke off, remembering she had a formal introduction to make

"My father, my sister – Madame Grandjean."

The conversation was turning on children and the ailments which give mothers so much worry when Miss Smithson, an English governess, appeared with a little boy clinging to her hand. Madame Deberle scolded her in English for having kept them waiting.

"Ah! here's my little Lucien!" exclaimed Pauline as she dropped on her knees before the child, with a great rustling of skirts.

"Now, now, leave him alone!" said Juliette. "Come here, Lucien; come and say good-day to this little lady."

The boy came forward very sheepishly. He was no more than seven years old, fat and dumpy, and dressed as coquettishly as a doll. As he saw that they were all looking at him with smiles, he stopped short, and surveyed Jeanne, his blue eyes wide open with astonishment.

"Go on!" urged his mother.

He turned his eyes questioningly on her and advanced a step, evincing all the sullenness peculiar to lads of his age, his head lowered, his thick lips pouting, and his eyebrows bent into a growing frown. Jeanne must have frightened him with the serious look she wore standing there in her black dress. She had not ceased holding her mother's hand, and was nervously pressing her fingers on the bare part of the arm between the sleeve and glove. With head lowered she awaited Lucien's approach uneasily, like a young and timid savage, ready to fly from his caress. But a gentle push from her mother prompted her to step forward.

"Little lady, you will have to kiss him first," Madame Deberle said laughingly. "Ladies always have to begin with him. Oh! the little stupid."

"Kiss him, Jeanne," urged Helene.

The child looked up at her mother; and then, as if conquered by the bashful looks of the little noodle, seized with sudden pity as she gazed on his good-natured face, so dreadfully confused – she smiled divinely. A sudden wave of hidden tenderness rose within her and brightened her features, and she whispered: "Willingly, mamma!"

Then, taking Lucien under the armpits, almost lifting him from the ground, she gave him a hearty kiss on each cheek. He had no further hesitation in embracing her.

"Bravo! capital!" exclaimed the onlookers.

With a bow Helene turned to leave, accompanied to the door by Madame Deberle.

"I beg you, madame," said she, "to present my heartiest thanks to the doctor. He relieved me of such dreadful anxiety the other night."

"Is Henri not at home?" broke in Monsieur Letellier.

"No, he will be away some time yet," was Juliette's reply. "But you're not going away; you'll dine with us," she continued, addressing Mademoiselle Aurelie, who had risen as if to leave with Madame Grandjean.

The old maid with each Saturday expected a similar invitation, then decided to relieve herself of shawl and bonnet. The heat in the drawing-room was intense, and Monsieur Letellier hastened to open a window, at which he remained standing, struck by the sight of a lilac bush which was already budding. Pauline, meantime, had begun playfully running after Lucien behind the chairs and couches, left in confusion by the visitors.

On the threshold Madame Deberle held out her hand to Helene with a frank and friendly movement.

"You will allow me," said she. "My husband spoke to me about you, and I felt drawn to you. Your bereavement, your lonely life – in short, I am very glad to have seen you, and you must not be long in coming back."

"I give you my promise, and I am obliged to you," said Helene, moved by these tokens of affection from a woman whom she had imagined rather flighty. They clasped hands, and each looked into the other's face with a happy smile. Juliette's avowal of her sudden friendship was given with a caressing air. "You are too lovely not to be loved!" she said.

Helene broke into a merry laugh, for her beauty never engaged her thoughts, and she called Jeanne, whose eyes were busy watching the pranks of Lucien and Pauline. But Madame Deberle detained the girl for a moment longer.

"You are good friends henceforth," she said; "you must just say *au revoir*."

Thereupon the two children blew one another a kiss with their finger-tips.

CHAPTER III

Every Tuesday Helene had Monsieur Rambaud and Abbe Jouve to dine with her. It was they who, during the early days of her bereavement, had broken in on her solitude, and drawn up their chairs to her table with friendly freedom; their object being to extricate her, at least once a week, from the solitude in which she lived. The Tuesday dinners became established institutions, and the partakers in these little feasts appeared punctually at seven o'clock, serenely happy in discharging what they deemed a duty.

That Tuesday Helene was seated at the window, profiting by the last gleams of the twilight to finish some needle work, pending the arrival of her guests. She here spent her days in pleasant peacefulness. The noises of the street died away before reaching such a height. She loved this large, quiet chamber, with its substantial luxury, its rosewood furniture and blue velvet curtains. When her friends had attended to her installation, she not having to trouble about anything, she had at first somewhat suffered from all this sombre luxury, in preparing which Monsieur Rambaud had realized his ideal of comfort, much to the admiration of his brother, who had declined the task. She was not long, however, in feeling happy in a home in which, as in her heart, all was sound and simple. Her only enjoyment during her long hours of work was to gaze before her at the vast horizon, the huge pile of Paris, stretching its roofs, like billows, as far as the eye could reach. Her solitary corner overlooked all that immensity.

"Mamma, I can no longer see," said Jeanne, seated near her on a low chair. And then, dropping her work, the child gazed at Paris, which was darkening over with the shadows of night. She rarely romped about, and her mother even had to exert authority to induce her to go out. In accordance with Doctor Bodin's strict injunction, Helene made her stroll with her two hours each day in the Bois de Boulogne, and this was their only promenade; in eighteen months they had not gone three times into Paris.[*] Nowhere was Jeanne so evidently happy as in their large blue room. Her mother had been obliged to renounce her intention of having her taught music, for the sound of an organ in the silent streets made her tremble and drew tears from her eyes. Her favorite occupation was to assist her mother in sewing linen for the children of the Abbe's poor.

[*] Passy and the Trocadero are now well inside Paris, but at the time fixed for this story they were beyond the *barrieres*.

Night had quite fallen when the lamp was brought in by Rosalie, who, fresh from the glare of her range, looked altogether upset. Tuesday's dinner was the one event of the week, which put things topsy-turvy.

"Aren't the gentlemen coming here to-night, madame?" she inquired.

Helene looked at the timepiece: "It's a quarter to seven; they will be here soon," she replied.

Rosalie was a gift from Abbe Jouve, who had met her at the station on the day she arrived from Orleans, so that she did not know a single street in Paris. A village priest, an old schoolmate of Abbe Jouve's, had sent her to him. She was dumpy and plump, with a round face under her narrow cap, thick black hair, a flat nose, and deep red lips; and she was expert in preparing savory dishes, having been brought up at the parsonage by her godmother, servant to the village priest.

"Here is Monsieur Rambaud at last!" she exclaimed, rushing to open the door before there was even a ring.

Full and broad-shouldered, Monsieur Rambaud entered, displaying an expansive countenance like that of a country notary. His forty-five years had already silvered his hair, but his large blue eyes retained a wondering, artless, gentle expression, akin to a child's.

"And here's his reverence; everybody has come now!" resumed Rosalie, as she opened the door once more.

Whilst Monsieur Rambaud pressed Helene's hand and sat down without speaking, smiling like one who felt quite at home, Jeanne threw her arms round the Abbe's neck.

"Good-evening, dear friend," said she. "I've been so ill!"

"So ill, my darling?"

The two men at once showed their anxiety, the Abbe especially. He was a short, spare man, with a large head and awkward manners, and dressed in the most careless way; but his eyes, usually half-closed, now opened to their full extent, all aglow with exquisite tenderness. Jeanne relinquished one of her hands to him, while she gave the other to Monsieur Rambaud. Both held her and gazed at her with troubled looks. Helene was obliged to relate the story of her illness, and the Abbe was on the point of quarrelling with her for not having warned him of it. And then they each questioned her. "The attack was quite over now? She had not had another, had she?" The mother smiled as she listened.

"You are even fonder of her than I am, and I think you'll frighten me in the end," she replied. "No, she hasn't been troubled again, except that she has felt some pains in her limbs and had some headaches. But we shall get rid of these very soon."

The maid then entered to announce that dinner was ready.

The table, sideboard, and eight chairs furnishing the dining-room were of mahogany. The curtains of red reps had been drawn close by Rosalie, and a hanging lamp of white porcelain within a plain brass ring lighted up the tablecloth, the carefully-arranged plates, and the tureen of steaming soup. Each Tuesday's dinner brought round the same remarks, but on this particular day Dr. Deberle served naturally as a subject of conversation. Abbe Jouve lauded him to the skies, though he knew that he was no church-goer. He spoke of him, however, as a man of upright character, charitable to a fault, a good father, and a good husband – in fact, one who gave the best of examples to others. As for Madame Deberle she was most estimable, in spite of her somewhat flighty ways, which were doubtless due to her Parisian education. In a word, he dubbed the couple charming. Helene seemed happy to hear this; it confirmed her own opinions; and the Abbe's remarks determined her to continue the acquaintance, which had at first rather frightened her.

"You shut yourself up too much!" declared the priest.

"No doubt," echoed his brother.

Helene beamed on them with her quiet smile, as though to say that they themselves sufficed for all her wants, and that she dreaded new acquaintances. However, ten o'clock struck at last, and the Abbe and his brother took up their hats. Jeanne had just fallen asleep in an easy-chair in the bedroom, and they bent over her, raising their heads with satisfied looks as they observed how tranquilly she slumbered. They stole from the room on tiptoe, and in the lobby whispered their good-byes:

"Till next Tuesday!"

"O, by the way," said the Abbe, returning a step or two, "I was forgetting: Mother Fetu is ill. You should go to see her."

"I will go to-morrow," answered Helene.

The Abbe had a habit of commissioning her to visit his poor. They engaged in all sorts of whispered talk together on this subject, private business which a word or two enabled them to settle together, and which they never referred to in the presence of other persons.

On the morrow Helene went out alone. She decided to leave Jeanne in the house, as the child had been troubled with fits of shivering since paying a visit of charity to an old man who had become paralyzed. Once out of doors, she followed the Rue Vineuse, turned down the Rue Raynouard, and soon found herself in the Passage des Eaux, a strange, steep lane, like a staircase, pent between garden walls, and conducting from the heights of Passy to the quay. At the bottom of this descent was a dilapidated house, where Mother Fetu lived in an attic lighted by a round window, and furnished with a wretched bed, a rickety table, and a seatless chair.

"Oh! my good lady, my good lady!" she moaned out, directly she saw Helene enter.

The old woman was in bed. In spite of her wretchedness, her body was plump, swollen out, as it were, while her face was puffy, and her hands seemed numbed as she drew the tattered sheet over her. She had small, keen eyes and a whimpering voice, and displayed a noisy humility in a rush of words.

"Ah! my good lady, how I thank you! Ah, ah! oh, how I suffer! It's just as if dogs were tearing at my side. I'm sure I have a beast inside me – see, just there! The skin isn't broken; the complaint is internal. But, oh! oh! the pain hasn't ceased for two days past. Good Lord, how is it possible to suffer so much? Ah, my good lady, thank you! You don't forget the poor. It will be taken into account up above; yes, yes, it will be taken into account!"

Helene had sat down. Noticing on the table a jug of warm *tisane*, she filled a cup which was near at hand, and gave it to the sufferer. Near the jug were placed a packet of sugar, two oranges, and some other comfits.

"Has any one been to see you?" Helene asked.

"Yes, yes, – a little lady. But she doesn't know. That isn't the sort of stuff I need. Oh, if I could get a little meat! My next-door neighbor would cook it for me. Oh! oh! this pain is something dreadful! A dog is tearing at me – oh, if only I had some broth!"

In spite of the pains which were racking her limbs, she kept her sharp eyes fixed on Helene, who was now busy fumbling in her pocket, and on seeing her visitor place a ten-franc piece on the table, she whimpered all the more, and tried to rise to a sitting posture. Whilst struggling, she extended her arm, and the money vanished, as she repeated:

"Gracious Heaven! this is another frightful attack. Oh! oh! I cannot stand such agony any longer! God will requite you, my good lady; I will pray to Him to requite you. Bless my soul, how these pains shoot through my whole body! His reverence Abbe Jouve promised me you would come. It's only you who know what I want. I am going to buy some meat. But now the pain's going down into my legs. Help me; I have no strength left – none left at all!"

The old woman wished to turn over, and Helene, drawing off her gloves, gently took hold of her and placed her as she desired. As she was still bending over her the door opened, and a flush of surprise mounted to her cheeks as she saw Dr. Deberle entering. Did he also make visits to which he never referred?

"It's the doctor!" blurted out the old woman. "Oh! Heaven must bless you both for being so good!"

The doctor bowed respectfully to Helene. Mother Fetu had ceased whining on his entrance, but kept up a sibilant wheeze, like that of a child in pain. She had understood at once that the doctor and her benefactress were known to one another; and her eyes never left them, but travelled from one to the other, while her wrinkled face showed that her mind was covertly working. The doctor put some questions to her, and sounded her right side; then, turning to Helene, who had just sat down, he said:

"She is suffering from hepatic colic. She will be on her feet again in a few days."

And, tearing from his memorandum book a leaf on which he had written some lines, he added, addressing Mother Fetu:

"Listen to me. You must send this to the chemist in the Rue de Passy, and every two hours you must drink a spoonful of the draught he will give you."

The old woman burst out anew into blessings. Helene remained seated. The doctor lingered gazing at her; but when their eyes had met, he bowed and discreetly took his leave. He had not gone down a flight ere Mother Fetu's lamentations were renewed.

"Ah! he's such a clever doctor! Ah! if his medicine could do me some good! Dandelions and tallow make a good simple for removing water from the body. Yes, yes, you can say you know a clever doctor. Have you known him long? Gracious goodness, how thirsty I am! I feel burning hot. He has a wife, hasn't he? He deserves to have a good wife and beautiful children. Indeed, it's a pleasure to see kind-hearted people good acquaintances."

Helene had risen to give her a drink.

"I must go now, Mother Fetu," she said. "Good-bye till to-morrow."

"Ah! how good you are! If I only had some linen! Look at my chemise – it's torn in half; and this bed is so dirty. But that doesn't matter. God will requite you, my good lady!"

Next day, on Helene's entering Mother Fetu's room, she found Dr. Deberle already there. Seated on the chair, he was writing out a prescription, while the old woman rattled on with whimpering volubility.

"Oh, sir, it now feels like lead in my side – yes, just like lead! It's as heavy as a hundred-pound weight, and prevents me from turning round."

Then, having caught sight of Helene, she went on without a pause: "Ah! here's the good lady! I told the kind doctor you would come. Though the heavens might fall, said I, you would come all the same. You're a very saint, an angel from paradise, and, oh! so beautiful that people might fall on their knees in the streets to gaze on you as you pass! Dear lady, I am no better; just now I have a heavy feeling here. Oh, I have told the doctor what you did for me! The emperor could have done no more. Yes, indeed, it would be a sin not to love you – a great sin."

These broken sentences fell from her lips as, with eyes half closed, she rolled her head on the bolster, the doctor meantime smiling at Helene, who felt very ill at ease.

"Mother Fetu," she said softly, "I have brought you a little linen."

"Oh, thank you, thank you; God will requite you! You're just like this kind, good gentleman, who does more good to poor folks than a host of those who declare it their special work. You don't know what great care he has taken of me for four months past, supplying me with medicine and broth and wine. One rarely finds a rich person so kind to a poor soul! Oh, he's another of God's angels! Dear, dear, I seem to have quite a house in my stomach!"

In his turn the doctor now seemed to be embarrassed. He rose and offered his chair to Helene; but although she had come with the intention of remaining a quarter of an hour, she declined to sit down, on the plea that she was in a great hurry.

Meanwhile, Mother Fetu, still rolling her head to and fro, had stretched out her hand, and the parcel of linen had vanished in the bed. Then she resumed:

"Oh, what a couple of good souls you are! I don't wish to offend you; I only say it because it's true. When you have seen one, you have seen the other. Oh, dear Lord! give me a hand and help me to turn round. Kind-hearted people understand one another. Yes, yes, they understand one another."

"Good-bye, Mother Fetu," said Helene, leaving the doctor in sole possession. "I don't think I shall call to-morrow."

The next day, however, found her in the attic again. The old woman was sound asleep, but scarcely had she opened her eyes and recognized Helene in her black dress sitting on the chair than she exclaimed:

"He has been here – oh, I really don't know what he gave me to take, but I am as stiff as a stick. We were talking about you. He asked me all kinds of questions; whether you were generally sad, and whether your look was always the same. Oh, he's such a good man!"

Her words came more slowly, and she seemed to be waiting to see by the expression of Helene's face what effect her remarks might have on her, with that wheedling, anxious air of the poor who are desirous of pleasing people. No doubt she fancied she could detect a flush of displeasure mounting to her benefactress's brow, for her huge, puffed-up face, all eagerness and excitement, suddenly clouded over; and she resumed, in stammering accents:

"I am always asleep. Perhaps I have been poisoned. A woman in the Rue de l'Annonciation was killed by a drug which the chemist gave her in mistake for another."

That day Helene lingered for nearly half an hour in Mother Fetu's room, hearing her talk of Normandy, where she had been born, and where the milk was so good. During a silence she asked the old woman carelessly: "Have you known the doctor a long time?"

Mother Fetu, lying on her back, half-opened her eyes and again closed them.

"Oh, yes!" she answered, almost in a whisper. "For instance, his father attended to me before '48, and he accompanied him then."

"I have been told the father was a very good man."

"Yes, but a little cracked. The son is much his superior. When he touches you you would think his hands were of velvet."

Silence again fell.

"I advise you to do everything he tells you," at last said Helene. "He is very clever; he saved my daughter."

"To be sure!" exclaimed Mother Fetu, again all excitement. "People ought to have confidence in him. Why, he brought a boy to life again when he was going to be buried! Oh, there aren't two persons like him; you won't stop me from saying that! I am very lucky; I fall in with the pick of good-hearted people. I thank the gracious Lord for it every night. I don't forget either of you. You are mingled together in my prayers. May God in His goodness shield you and grant your every wish! May He load you with His gifts! May He keep you a place in Paradise!"

She was now sitting up in bed with hands clasped, seemingly entreating Heaven with devout fervor. Helene allowed her to go on thus for a considerable time, and even smiled. The old woman's chatter, in fact, ended by lulling her into a pleasant drowsiness, and when she went off she promised to give her a bonnet and gown, as soon as she should be able to get about again.

Throughout that week Helene busied herself with Mother Fetu. Her afternoon visit became an item in her daily life. She felt a strange fondness for the Passage des Eaux. She liked that steep lane for its coolness and quietness and its ever-clean pavement, washed on rainy days by the water rushing down from the heights. A strange sensation thrilled her as she stood at the top and looked at the narrow alley with its steep declivity, usually deserted, and only known to the few inhabitants of the neighboring streets. Then she would venture through an archway dividing a house fronting the Rue Raynouard, and trip down the seven flights of broad steps, in which lay the bed of a pebbly stream occupying half of the narrow way. The walls of the gardens on each side bulged out, coated with a grey, leprous growth; umbrageous trees drooped over, foliage rained down, here and there an ivy plant thickly mantled the stonework, and the chequered verdure, which only left glimpses of the blue sky above, made the light very soft and greeny. Halfway down Helene would stop to take breath, gazing at the street-lamp which hung there, and listening to the merry laughter in the gardens, whose doors she had never seen open. At times an old woman panted up with the aid of the black, shiny, iron handrail fixed in the wall to the right; a lady would come, leaning on her parasol as on a walking-stick; or a band of urchins would run down, with a great stamping of feet. But almost always Helene found herself alone, and this steep, secluded, shady descent was to her a veritable delight – like a path in the depths of a forest. At the bottom she would raise her eyes, and the sight of the narrow, precipitous alley she had just descended made her feel somewhat frightened.

She glided into the old woman's room with the quiet and coolness of the Passage des Eaux clinging to her garments. This woefully wretched den no longer affected her painfully. She moved about there as if in her own rooms, opening the round attic window to admit the fresh air, and pushing the table into a corner if it came in her way. The garret's bareness, its whitewashed walls and rickety furniture, realized to her mind an existence whose simplicity she had sometimes dreamt of in her girlhood. But what especially charmed her was the kindly emotion she experienced there. Playing the part of sick nurse, hearing the constant bewailing of the old woman, all she saw and felt within the four walls left her quivering with deep pity. In the end she awaited with evident impatience Doctor Deberle's customary visit. She questioned him as to Mother Fetu's condition; but from this they glided to other subjects, as they stood near each other, face to face. A closer acquaintance was springing up between them, and they were surprised to find they possessed similar tastes. They understood one another without speaking a word, each heart engulfed in the same overflowing charity. Nothing to Helene seemed sweeter than this mutual feeling, which arose in such an unusual way, and to which

she yielded without resistance, filled as she was with divine pity. At first she had felt somewhat afraid of the doctor; in her own drawing-room she would have been cold and distrustful, in harmony with her nature. Here, however, in this garret they were far from the world, sharing the one chair, and almost happy in the midst of the wretchedness and poverty which filled their souls with emotion. A week passed, and they knew one another as though they had been intimate for years. Mother Fetu's miserable abode was filled with sunshine, streaming from this fellowship of kindness.

The old woman grew better very slowly. The doctor was surprised, and charged her with coddling herself when she related that she now felt a dreadful weight in her legs. She always kept up her monotonous moaning, lying on her back and rolling her head to and fro; but she closed her eyes, as though to give her visitors an opportunity for unrestrained talk. One day she was to all appearance sound asleep, but beneath their lids her little black eyes continued watching. At last, however, she had to rise from her bed; and next day Helene presented her with the promised bonnet and gown. When the doctor made his appearance that afternoon the old woman's laggard memory seemed suddenly stirred. "Gracious goodness!" said she, "I've forgotten my neighbor's soup-pot; I promised to attend to it!"

Then she disappeared, closing the door behind her and leaving the couple alone. They did not notice that they were shut in, but continued their conversation. The doctor urged Helene to spend the afternoon occasionally in his garden in the Rue Vineuse.

"My wife," said he, "must return your visit, and she will in person repeat my invitation. It would do your daughter good."

"But I don't refuse," she replied, laughing. "I do not require to be fetched with ceremony. Only – only – I am afraid of being indiscreet. At any rate, we will see."

Their talk continued, but at last the doctor exclaimed in a tone of surprise: "Where on earth can Mother Fetu have gone? It must be a quarter of an hour since she went to see after her neighbor's soup-pot."

Helene then saw that the door was shut, but it did not shock her at the moment. She continued to talk of Madame Deberle, of whom she spoke highly to her husband; but noticing that the doctor constantly glanced towards the door, she at last began to feel uncomfortable.

"It's very strange that she does not come back!" she remarked in her turn.

Their conversation then dropped. Helene, not knowing what to do, opened the window; and when she turned round they avoided looking at one another. The laughter of children came in through the circular window, which, with its bit of blue sky, seemed like a full round moon. They could not have been more alone – concealed from all inquisitive looks, with merely this bit of heaven gazing in on them. The voices of the children died away in the distance; and a quivering silence fell. No one would dream of finding them in that attic, out of the world. Their confusion grew apace, and in the end Helene, displeased with herself, gave the doctor a steady glance.

"I have a great many visits to pay yet," he at once exclaimed. "As she doesn't return, I must leave."

He quitted the room, and Helene then sat down. Immediately afterwards Mother Fetu returned with many protestations:

"Oh! oh! I can scarcely crawl; such a faintness came over me! Has the dear good doctor gone? Well, to be sure, there's not much comfort here! Oh, you are both angels from heaven, coming to spend your time with one so unfortunate as myself! But God in His goodness will requite you. The pain has gone down into my feet to-day, and I had to sit down on a step. Oh, I should like to have some chairs! If I only had an easy-chair! My mattress is so vile too that I am quite ashamed when you come. The whole place is at your disposal, and I would throw myself into the fire if you required it. Yes. Heaven knows it; I always repeat it in my prayers! Oh, kind Lord, grant their utmost desires to these good friends of mine – in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost!"

As Helene listened she experienced a singular feeling of discomfort. Mother Fetu's bloated face filled her with disgust. Never before in this stifling attic had she been affected in a like way; its sordid misery seemed to stare her in the face; the lack of fresh air, the surrounding wretchedness, quite sickened her. So she made all haste to leave, feeling hurt by the blessings which Mother Fetu poured after her.

In the Passage des Eaux an additional sorrow came upon her. Halfway up, on the right-hand side of the path, the wall was hollowed out, and here there was an excavation, some disused well, enclosed by a railing. During the last two days when passing she had heard the wailings of a cat rising from this well, and now, as she slowly climbed the path, these wailings were renewed, but so pitifully that they seemed instinct with the agony of death. The thought that the poor brute, thrown into the disused well, was slowly dying there of hunger, quite rent Helene's heart. She hastened her steps, resolving that she would not venture down this lane again for a long time, lest the cat's death-call should reach her ears.

The day was a Tuesday. In the evening, on the stroke of seven, as Helene was finishing a tiny bodice, the two wonted rings at the bell were heard, and Rosalie opened the door.

"His reverence is first to-night!" she exclaimed. "Oh, here comes Monsieur Rambaud too!"

They were very merry at dinner. Jeanne was nearly well again now, and the two brothers, who spoiled her, were successful in procuring her permission to eat some salad, of which she was excessively fond, notwithstanding Doctor Bodin's formal prohibition. When she was going to bed, the child in high spirits hung round her mother's neck and pleaded:

"Oh! mamma, darling! let me go with you to-morrow to see the old woman you nurse!"

But the Abbe and Monsieur Rambaud were the first to scold her for thinking of such a thing. They would not hear of her going amongst the poor, as the sight affected her too grievously. The last time she had been on such an expedition she had twice swooned, and for three days her eyes had been swollen with tears, that had flowed even in her sleep.

"Oh! I will be good!" she pleaded. "I won't cry, I promise."

"It is quite useless, my darling," said her mother, caressing her. "The old woman is well now. I shall not go out any more; I'll stay all day with you!"

CHAPTER IV

During the following week Madame Deberle paid a return visit to Madame Grandjean, and displayed an affability that bordered on affection.

"You know what you promised me," she said, on the threshold, as she was going off. "The first fine day we have, you must come down to the garden, and bring Jeanne with you. It is the doctor's strict injunction."

"Very well," Helene answered, with a smile, "it is understood; we will avail ourselves of your kindness."

Three days later, on a bright February afternoon, she accompanied her daughter down to the garden. The porter opened the door connecting the two houses. At the near end of the garden, in a kind of greenhouse built somewhat in the style of a Japanese pavilion, they found Madame Deberle and her sister Pauline, both idling away their time, for some embroidery, thrown on the little table, lay there neglected.

"Oh, how good of you to come!" cried Juliette. "You must sit down here. Pauline, move that table away! It is still rather cool you know to sit out of doors, but from this pavilion we can keep a watch on the children. Now, little ones, run away and play; but take care not to fall!"

The large door of the pavilion stood open, and on each side were portable mirrors, whose covers had been removed so that they allowed one to view the garden's expanse as from the threshold of a tent. The garden, with a green sward in the centre, flanked by beds of flowers, was separated from the Rue Vineuse by a plain iron railing, but against this grew a thick green hedge, which prevented the curious from gazing in. Ivy, clematis, and woodbine clung and wound around the railings, and behind this first curtain of foliage came a second one of lilacs and laburnums. Even in the winter the ivy leaves and the close network of branches sufficed to shut off the view. But the great charm of the garden lay in its having at the far end a few lofty trees, some magnificent elms, which concealed the grimy wall of a five-story house. Amidst all the neighboring houses these trees gave the spot the aspect of a nook in some park, and seemed to increase the dimensions of this little Parisian garden, which was swept like a drawing-room. Between two of the elms hung a swing, the seat of which was green with damp.

Helene leaned forward the better to view the scene.

"Oh, it is a hole!" exclaimed Madame Deberle carelessly. "Still, trees are so rare in Paris that one is happy in having half a dozen of one's own."

"No, no, you have a very pleasant place," murmured Helene.

The sun filled the pale atmosphere that day with a golden dust, its rays streaming slowly through the leafless branches of the trees. These assumed a ruddier tint, and you could see the delicate purple gems softening the cold grey of the bark. On the lawn and along the walks the grass and gravel glittered amidst the haze that seemed to ooze from the ground. No flower was in blossom; only the happy flush which the sunshine cast upon the soil revealed the approach of spring.

"At this time of year it is rather dull," resumed Madame Deberle. "In June it is as cozy as a nest; the trees prevent any one from looking in, and we enjoy perfect privacy." At this point she paused to call: "Lucien, you must come away from that watertap!"

The lad, who was doing the honors of the garden, had led Jeanne towards a tap under the steps. Here he had turned on the water, which he allowed to splash on the tips of his boots. It was a game that he delighted in. Jeanne, with grave face, looked on while he wetted his feet.

"Wait a moment!" said Pauline, rising. "I'll go and stop his nonsense!"

But Juliette held her back.

"You'll do no such thing; you are even more of a madcap than he is. The other day both of you looked as if you had taken a bath. How is it that a big girl like you cannot remain two minutes seated? Lucien!" she continued directing her eyes on her son, "turn off the water at once!"

The child, in his fright, made an effort to obey her. But instead of turning the tap off, he turned it on all the more, and the water gushed forth with a force and a noise that made him lose his head. He recoiled, splashed up to the shoulders.

"Turn off the water at once!" again ordered his mother, whose cheeks were flushing with anger.

Jeanne, hitherto silent, then slowly, and with the greatest caution, ventured near the tap; while Lucien burst into loud sobbing at sight of this cold stream, which terrified him, and which he was powerless to stop. Carefully drawing her skirt between her legs, Jeanne stretched out her bare hands so as not to wet her sleeves, and closed the tap without receiving a sprinkle. The flow instantly ceased. Lucien, astonished and inspired with respect, dried his tears and gazed with swollen eyes at the girl.

"Oh, that child puts me beside myself!" exclaimed Madame Deberle, her complexion regaining its usual pallor, while she stretched herself out, as though wearied to death.

Helene deemed it right to intervene. "Jeanne," she called, "take his hand, and amuse yourselves by walking up and down."

Jeanne took hold of Lucien's hand, and both gravely paced the paths with little steps. She was much taller than her companion, who had to stretch his arm up towards her; but this solemn amusement, which consisted in a ceremonious circuit of the lawn, appeared to absorb them and invest them with a sense of great importance. Jeanne, like a genuine lady, gazed about, preoccupied with her own thoughts; Lucien every now and then would venture a glance at her; but not a word was said by either.

"How droll they are!" said Madame Deberle, smiling, and again at her ease. "I must say that your Jeanne is a dear, good child. She is so obedient, so well behaved – "

"Yes, when she is in the company of others," broke in Helene. "She is a great trouble at times. Still, she loves me, and does her best to be good so as not to vex me."

Then they spoke of children; how girls were more precocious than boys; though it would be wrong to deduce too much from Lucien's unintelligent face. In another year he would doubtless lose all his gawkiness and become quite a gallant. Finally, Madame Deberle resumed her embroidery, making perhaps two stitches in a minute. Helene, who was only happy when busy, begged permission to bring her work the next time she came. She found her companions somewhat dull, and whiled away the time in examining the Japanese pavilion. The walls and ceiling were hidden by tapestry worked in gold, with designs showing bright cranes in full flight, butterflies, and flowers and views in which blue ships were tossing upon yellow rivers. Chairs, and ironwood flower-stands were scattered about; on the floor some fine mats were spread; while the lacquered furnishings were littered with trinkets, small bronzes and vases, and strange toys painted in all the hues of the rainbow. At the far end stood a grotesque idol in Dresden china, with bent legs and bare, protruding stomach, which at the least movement shook its head with a terrible and amusing look.

"Isn't it horribly ugly?" asked Pauline, who had been watching Helene as she glanced round. "I say, sister, you know that all these purchases of yours are so much rubbish! Malignon calls your Japanese museum 'the sixpenny bazaar.' Oh, by the way, talking of him, I met him. He was with a lady, and such a lady – Florence, of the Varietes Theatre."

"Where was it?" asked Juliette immediately. "How I shall tease him!"

"On the boulevards. He's coming here to-day, is he not?"

She was not vouchsafed any reply. The ladies had all at once become uneasy owing to the disappearance of the children, and called to them. However, two shrill voices immediately answered:

"We are here!"

Half hidden by a spindle tree, they were sitting on the grass in the middle of the lawn.

"What are you about?"

"We have put up at an inn," answered Lucien. "We are resting in our room."

Greatly diverted, the women watched them for a time. Jeanne seemed quite contented with the game. She was cutting the grass around her, doubtless with the intention of preparing breakfast. A piece of wood, picked up among the shrubs, represented a trunk. And now they were talking. Jeanne, with great conviction in her tone, was declaring that they were in Switzerland, and that they would set out to see the glaciers, which rather astonished Lucien.

"Ha, here he is!" suddenly exclaimed Pauline.

Madame Deberle turned, and caught sight of Malignon descending the steps. He had scarcely time to make his bow and sit down before she attacked him.

"Oh," she said, "it is nice of you to go about everywhere saying that I have nothing but rubbishy ornaments about me!"

"You mean this little saloon of yours? Oh yes," said he, quite at his ease. "You haven't anything worth looking at here!"

"What! not my china figure?" she asked, quite hurt.

"No, no, everything is quite *bourgeois*. It is necessary for a person to have some taste. You wouldn't allow me to select the things – "

"Your taste, forsooth! just talk about your taste!" she retorted, flushing crimson and feeling quite angry. "You have been seen with a lady – "

"What lady?" he asked, surprised by the violence of the attack.

"A fine choice, indeed! I compliment you on it. A girl whom the whole of Paris knows – "

She suddenly paused, remembering Pauline's presence.

"Pauline," she said, "go into the garden for a minute."

"Oh no," retorted the girl indignantly. "It's so tiresome; I'm always being sent out of the way."

"Go into the garden," repeated Juliette, with increased severity in her tone.

The girl stalked off with a sullen look, but stopped all at once, to exclaim: "Well, then, be quick over your talk!"

As soon as she was gone, Madame Deberle returned to the charge. "How can you, a gentleman, show yourself in public with that actress Florence? She is at least forty. She is ugly enough to frighten one, and all the gentlemen in the stalls thee and thou her on first nights."

"Have you finished?" called out Pauline, who was strolling sulkily under the trees. "I'm not amusing myself here, you know."

Malignon, however, defended himself. He had no knowledge of this girl Florence; he had never in his life spoken a word to her. They had possibly seen him with a lady: he was sometimes in the company of the wife of a friend of his. Besides, who had seen him? He wanted proofs, witnesses.

"Pauline," hastily asked Madame Deberle, raising her voice, "did you not meet him with Florence?"

"Yes, certainly," replied her sister. "I met them on the boulevards opposite Bignon's."

Thereupon, glorying in her victory over Malignon, whose face wore an embarrassed smile, Madame Deberle called out: "You can come back, Pauline; I have finished."

Malignon, who had a box at the Folies-Dramatiques for the following night, now gallantly placed it at Madame Deberle's service, apparently not feeling the slightest ill-will towards her; moreover, they were always quarreling. Pauline wished to know if she might go to see the play that was running, and as Malignon laughed and shook his head, she declared it was very silly; authors ought to write plays fit for girls to see. She was only allowed such entertainments as *La Dame Blanche* and the classic drama could offer.

Meantime, the ladies had ceased watching the children, and all at once Lucien began to raise terrible shrieks.

"What have you done to him, Jeanne?" asked Helene.

"I have done nothing, mamma," answered the little girl. "He has thrown himself on the ground."

The truth was, the children had just set out for the famous glaciers. As Jeanne pretended that they were reaching the mountains, they had lifted their feet very high, as though to step over the rocks. Lucien, however, quite out of breath with his exertions, at last made a false step, and fell sprawling in the middle of an imaginary ice-field. Disgusted, and furious with child-like rage, he no sooner found himself on the ground than he burst into tears.

"Lift him up," called Helene.

"He won't let me, mamma. He is rolling about."

And so saying, Jeanne drew back, as though exasperated and annoyed by such a display of bad breeding. He did not know how to play; he would certainly cover her with dirt. Her mouth curled, as though she were a duchess compromising herself by such companionship. Thereupon Madame Deberle, irritated by Lucien's continued wailing, requested her sister to pick him up and coax him into silence. Nothing loth, Pauline ran, cast herself down beside the child, and for a moment rolled on the ground with him. He struggled with her, unwilling to be lifted, but she at last took him up by the arms, and to appease him, said, "Stop crying, you noisy fellow; we'll have a swing!"

Lucien at once closed his lips, while Jeanne's solemn looks vanished, and a gleam of ardent delight illumined her face. All three ran towards the swing, but it was Pauline who took possession of the seat.

"Push, push!" she urged the children; and they pushed with all the force of their tiny hands; but she was heavy, and they could scarcely stir the swing.

"Push!" she urged again. "Oh, the big sillies, they can't!"

In the pavilion, Madame Deberle had just felt a slight chill. Despite the bright sunshine she thought it rather cold, and she requested Malignon to hand her a white cashmere burnous that was hanging from the handle of a window fastening. Malignon rose to wrap the burnous round her shoulders, and they began chatting familiarly on matters which had little interest for Helene. Feeling fidgety, fearing that Pauline might unwittingly knock the children down, she therefore stepped into the garden, leaving Juliette and the young man to wrangle over some new fashion in bonnets which apparently deeply interested them.

Jeanne no sooner saw her mother than she ran towards her with a wheedling smile, and entreaty in every gesture. "Oh, mamma, mamma!" she implored. "Oh, mamma!"

"No, no, you mustn't!" replied Helene, who understood her meaning very well. "You know you have been forbidden."

Swinging was Jeanne's greatest delight. She would say that she believed herself a bird; the breeze blowing in her face, the lively rush through the air, the continued swaying to and fro in a motion as rhythmic as the beating of a bird's wings, thrilled her with an exquisite pleasure; in her ascent towards cloudland she imagined herself on her way to heaven. But it always ended in some mishap. On one occasion she had been found clinging to the ropes of the swing in a swoon, her large eyes wide open, fixed in a vacant stare; at another time she had fallen to the ground, stiff, like a swallow struck by a shot.

"Oh, mamma!" she implored again. "Only a little, a very, very little!"

In the end her mother, in order to win peace, placed her on the seat. The child's face lit up with an angelic smile, and her bare wrists quivered with joyous expectancy. Helene swayed her very gently.

"Higher, mamma, higher!" she murmured.

But Helene paid no heed to her prayer, and retained firm hold of the rope. She herself was glowing all over, her cheeks flushed, and she thrilled with excitement at every push she gave to the swing. Her wonted sedateness vanished as she thus became her daughter's playmate.

"That will do," she declared after a time, taking Jeanne in her arms.

"Oh, mamma, you must swing now!" the child whispered, as she clung to her neck.

She took a keen delight in seeing her mother flying through the air; as she said, her pleasure was still more intense in gazing at her than in having a swing herself. Helene, however, asked her

laughingly who would push her; when she went in for swinging, it was a serious matter; why, she went higher than the treetops! While she was speaking it happened that Monsieur Rambaud made his appearance under the guidance of the doorkeeper. He had met Madame Deberle in Helene's rooms, and thought he would not be deemed presuming in presenting himself here when unable to find her. Madame Deberle proved very gracious, pleased as she was with the good-natured air of the worthy man; however, she soon returned to a lively discussion with Malignon.

"*Bon ami*[*] will push you, mamma! *Bon ami* will push you!" Jeanne called out, as she danced round her mother.

[*] Literally "good friend;" but there is no proper equivalent for the expression in English.

"Be quiet! We are not at home!" said her mother with mock gravity.

"Bless me! if it will please you, I am at your disposal," exclaimed Monsieur Rambaud. "When people are in the country – "

Helene let herself be persuaded. When a girl she had been accustomed to swing for hours, and the memory of those vanished pleasures created a secret craving to taste them once more. Moreover, Pauline, who had sat down with Lucien at the edge of the lawn, intervened with the boldness of a girl freed from the trammels of childhood.

"Of course he will push you, and he will swing me after you. Won't you, sir?"

This determined Helene. The youth which dwelt within her, in spite of the cold demureness of her great beauty, displayed itself in a charming, ingenuous fashion. She became a thorough school-girl, unaffected and gay. There was no prudishness about her. She laughingly declared that she must not expose her legs, and asked for some cord to tie her skirts securely round her ankles. That done, she stood upright on the swing, her arms extended and clinging to the ropes.

"Now, push, Monsieur Rambaud," she exclaimed delightedly. "But gently at first!"

Monsieur Rambaud had hung his hat on the branch of a tree. His broad, kindly face beamed with a fatherly smile. First he tested the strength of the ropes, and, giving a look at the trees, determined to give a slight push. That day Helene had for the first time abandoned her widow's weeds; she was wearing a grey dress set off with mauve bows. Standing upright, she began to swing, almost touching the ground, and as if rocking herself to sleep.

"Quicker! quicker!" she exclaimed.

Monsieur Rambaud, with his hands ready, caught the seat as it came back to him, and gave it a more vigorous push. Helene went higher, each ascent taking her farther. However, despite the motion, she did not lose her sedateness; she retained almost an austere demeanor; her eyes shone very brightly in her beautiful, impassive face; her nostrils only were inflated, as though to drink in the air.

Not a fold of her skirts was out of place, but a plait of her hair slipped down.

"Quicker! quicker!" she called.

An energetic push gave her increased impetus. Up in the sunshine she flew, even higher and higher. A breeze sprung up with her motion, and blew through the garden; her flight was so swift that they could scarcely distinguish her figure aright. Her face was now all smiles, and flushed with a rosy red, while her eyes sparkled here, then there, like shooting stars. The loosened plait of hair rustled against her neck. Despite the cords which bound them, her skirts now waved about, and you could divine that she was at her ease, her bosom heaving in its free enjoyment as though the air were indeed her natural place.

"Quicker! quicker!"

Monsieur Rambaud, his face red and bedewed with perspiration, exerted all his strength. A cry rang out. Helene went still higher.

"Oh, mamma! Oh, mamma!" repeated Jeanne in her ecstasy.

She was sitting on the lawn gazing at her mother, her little hands clasped on her bosom, looking as though she herself had drunk in all the air that was stirring. Her breath failed her; with a rythmical

movement of the shoulders she kept time with the long strokes of the swing. And she cried, "Quicker! quicker!" while her mother still went higher, her feet grazing the lofty branches of the trees.

"Higher, mamma! oh, higher, mamma!"

But Helene was already in the very heavens. The trees bent and cracked as beneath a gale. Her skirts, which were all they could see, flapped with a tempestuous sound. When she came back with arms stretched out and bosom distended she lowered her head slightly and for a moment hovered; but then she rose again and sank backwards, her head tilted, her eyes closed, as though she had swooned. These ascensions and descents which made her giddy were delightful. In her flight she entered into the sunshine – the pale yellow February sunshine that rained down like golden dust. Her chestnut hair gleamed with amber tints; and a flame seemed to have leaped up around her, as the mauve bows on her whitening dress flashed like burning flowers. Around her the springtide was maturing into birth, and the purple-tinted gems of the trees showed like delicate lacquer against the blue sky.

Jeanne clasped her hands. Her mother seemed to her a saint with a golden glory round her head, winging her way to paradise, and she again stammered: "Oh, mamma! oh! mamma!"

Madame Deberle and Malignon had now grown interested, and had stepped under the trees. Malignon declared the lady to be very bold.

"I should faint, I'm sure," said Madame Deberle, with a frightened air.

Helene heard them, for she dropped these words from among the branches: "Oh, my heart is all right! Give a stronger push, Monsieur Rambaud!"

And indeed her voice betrayed no emotion. She seemed to take no heed of the two men who were onlookers. They were doubtless nothing to her. Her tress of hair had become entangled, and the cord that confined her skirts must have given way, for the drapery flapped in the wind like a flag. She was going still higher.

All at once, however, the exclamation rang out:

"Enough, Monsieur Rambaud, enough!"

Doctor Deberle had just appeared on the house steps. He came forward, embraced his wife tenderly, took up Lucien and kissed his brow. Then he gazed at Helene with a smile.

"Enough, enough!" she still continued exclaiming.

"Why?" asked he. "Do I disturb you?"

She made no answer; a look of gravity had suddenly come over her face. The swing, still continuing its rapid flights, owing to the impetus given to it, would not stop, but swayed to and fro with a regular motion which still bore Helene to a great height. The doctor, surprised and charmed, beheld her with admiration; she looked so superb, so tall and strong, with the pure figure of an antique statue whilst swinging thus gently amid the spring sunshine. But she seemed annoyed, and all at once leaped down.

"Stop! stop!" they all cried out.

From Helene's lips came a dull moan; she had fallen upon the gravel of a pathway, and her efforts to rise were fruitless.

"Good heavens!" exclaimed the doctor, his face turning very pale. "How imprudent!"

They all crowded round her. Jeanne began weeping so bitterly that Monsieur Rambaud, with his heart in his mouth, was compelled to take her in his arms. The doctor, meanwhile, eagerly questioned Helene.

"Is it the right leg you fell on? Cannot you stand upright?" And as she remained dazed, without answering, he asked: "Do you suffer?"

"Yes, here at the knee; a dull pain," she answered, with difficulty.

He at once sent his wife for his medicine case and some bandages, and repeated:

"I must see, I must see. No doubt it is a mere nothing."

He knelt down on the gravel and Helene let him do so; but all at once she struggled to her feet and said: "No, no!"

"But I must examine the place," he said.

A slight quiver stole over her, and she answered in a yet lower tone:

"It is not necessary. It is nothing at all."

He looked at her, at first astounded. Her neck was flushing red; for a moment their eyes met, and seemed to read each other's soul; he was disconcerted, and slowly rose, remaining near her, but without pressing her further.

Helene had signed to Monsieur Rambaud. "Fetch Doctor Bodin," she whispered in his ear, "and tell him what has happened to me."

Ten minutes later, when Doctor Bodin made his appearance, she, with superhuman courage, regained her feet, and leaning on him and Monsieur Rambaud, contrived to return home. Jeanne followed, quivering with sobs.

"I shall wait," said Doctor Deberle to his brother physician. "Come down and remove our fears."

In the garden a lively colloquy ensued. Malignon was of opinion that women had queer ideas. Why on earth had that lady been so foolish as to jump down? Pauline, excessively provoked at this accident, which deprived her of a pleasure, declared it was silly to swing so high. On his side Doctor Deberle did not say a word, but seemed anxious.

"It is nothing serious," said Doctor Bodin, as he came down again – "only a sprain. Still, she will have to keep to an easy-chair for at least a fortnight."

Thereupon Monsieur Deberle gave a friendly slap on Malignon's shoulder. He wished his wife to go in, as it was really becoming too cold. For his own part, taking Lucien in his arms, he carried him into the house, covering him with kisses the while.

CHAPTER V

Both windows of the bedroom were wide open, and in the depths below the house, which was perched on the very summit of the hill, lay Paris, rolling away in a mighty flat expanse. Ten o'clock struck; the lovely February morning had all the sweetness and perfume of spring.

Helene reclined in an invalid chair, reading in front of one of the windows, her knee still in bandages. She suffered no pain; but she had been confined to her room for a week past, unable even to take up her customary needlework. Not knowing what to do, she had opened a book which she had found on the table – she, who indulged in little or no reading at any time. This book was the one she used every night as a shade for the night-lamp, the only volume which she had taken within eighteen months from the small but irreproachable library selected by Monsieur Rambaud. Novels usually seemed to her false to life and puerile; and this one, Sir Walter Scott's "Ivanhoe," had at first wearied her to death. However, a strange curiosity had grown upon her, and she was finishing it, at times affected to tears, and at times rather bored, when she would let it slip from her hand for long minutes and gaze fixedly at the far-stretching horizon.

That morning Paris awoke from sleep with a smiling indolence. A mass of vapor, following the valley of the Seine, shrouded the two banks from view. This mist was light and milky, and the sun, gathering strength, was slowly tinging it with radiance. Nothing of the city was distinguishable through this floating muslin. In the hollows the haze thickened and assumed a bluish tint; while over certain broad expanses delicate transparencies appeared, a golden dust, beneath which you could divine the depths of the streets; and up above domes and steeples rent the mist, rearing grey outlines to which clung shreds of the haze which they had pierced. At times cloudlets of yellow smoke would, like giant birds, heavy of wing, slowly soar on high, and then mingle with the atmosphere which seemed to absorb them. And above all this immensity, this mass of cloud, hanging in slumber over Paris, a sky of extreme purity, of a faint and whitening blue, spread out its mighty vault. The sun was climbing the heavens, scattering a spray of soft rays; a pale golden light, akin in hue to the flaxen tresses of a child, was streaming down like rain, filling the atmosphere with the warm quiver of its sparkle. It was like a festival of the infinite, instinct with sovereign peacefulness and gentle gaiety, whilst the city, chequered with golden beams, still remained lazy and sleepy, unwilling to reveal itself by casting off its coverlet of lace.

For eight days it had been Helene's diversion to gaze on that mighty expanse of Paris, and she never wearied of doing so. It was as unfathomable and varying as the ocean – fair in the morning, ruddy with fire at night, borrowing all the joys and sorrows of the heavens reflected in its depths. A flash of sunshine came, and it would roll in waves of gold; a cloud would darken it and raise a tempest. Its aspect was ever changing. A complete calm would fall, and all would assume an orange hue; gusts of wind would sweep by from time to time, and turn everything livid; in keen, bright weather there would be a shimmer of light on every housetop; whilst when showers fell, blurring both heaven and earth, all would be plunged in chaotic confusion. At her window Helene experienced all the hopes and sorrows that pertain to the open sea. As the keen wind blew in her face she imagined it wafted a saline fragrance; even the ceaseless noise of the city seemed to her like that of a surging tide beating against a rocky cliff.

The book fell from her hands. She was dreaming, with a far-away look in her eyes. When she stopped reading thus it was from a desire to linger and understand what she had already perused. She took a delight in denying her curiosity immediate satisfaction. The tale filled her soul with a tempest of emotion. Paris that morning was displaying the same vague joy and sorrow as that which disturbed her heart. In this lay a great charm – to be ignorant, to guess things dimly, to yield to slow initiation, with the vague thought that her youth was beginning again.

How full of lies were novels! She was assuredly right in not reading them. They were mere fables, good for empty heads with no proper conception of life. Yet she remained entranced, dreaming unceasingly of the knight Ivanhoe, loved so passionately by two women – Rebecca, the beautiful Jewess, and the noble Lady Rowena. She herself thought she could have loved with the intensity and patient serenity of the latter maiden. To love! to love! She did not utter the words, but they thrilled her through and through in the very thought, astonishing her, and irradiating her face with a smile. In the distance some fleecy cloudlets, driven by the breeze, now floated over Paris like a flock of swans. Huge gaps were being cleft in the fog; a momentary glimpse was given of the left bank, indistinct and clouded, like a city of fairydom seen in a dream; but suddenly a thick curtain of mist swept down, and the fairy city was engulfed, as though by an inundation. And then the vapors, spreading equally over every district, formed, as it were, a beautiful lake, with milky, placid waters. There was but one denser streak, indicating the grey, curved course of the Seine. And slowly over those milky, placid waters shadows passed, like vessels with pink sails, which the young woman followed with a dreamy gaze. To love! to love! She smiled as her dream sailed on.

However, she again took up her book. She had reached the chapter describing the attack on the castle, wherein Rebecca nurses the wounded Ivanhoe, and recounts to him the incidents of the fight, which she gazes at from a window. Helene felt that she was in the midst of a beautiful falsehood, but roamed through it as through some mythical garden, whose trees are laden with golden fruit, and where she imbibed all sorts of fancies. Then, at the conclusion of the scene, when Rebecca, wrapped in her veil, exhales her love beside the sleeping knight, Helene again allowed the book to slip from her hand; her heart was so brimful of emotion that she could read no further.

Heavens! could all those things be true? she asked, as she lay back in her easy-chair, numbed by her enforced quiescence, and gazing on Paris, shrouded and mysterious, beneath the golden sun. The events of her life now arose before her, conjured up by the perusal of the novel. She saw herself a young girl in the house of her father, Mouret, a hatter at Marseilles. The Rue des Petites-Maries was black and dismal, and the house, with its vat of steaming water ready to the hand of the hatter, exhaled a rank odor of dampness, even in fine weather. She also saw her mother, who was ever an invalid, and who kissed her with pale lips, without speaking. No gleam of the sun penetrated into her little room. Hard work went on around her; only by dint of toil did her father gain a workingman's competency. That summed up her early life, and till her marriage nothing intervened to break the monotony of days ever the same. One morning, returning from market with her mother, a basketful of vegetables on her arm, she jostled against young Grandjean. Charles turned round and followed them. The love-romance of her life was in this incident. For three months she was always meeting him, while he, bashful and awkward, could not pluck up courage to speak to her. She was sixteen years of age, and a little proud of her lover, who, she knew, belonged to a wealthy family. But she deemed him bad-looking, and often laughed at him, and no thought of him disturbed her sleep in the large, gloomy, damp house. In the end they were married, and this marriage yet filled her with surprise. Charles worshipped her, and would fling himself on the floor to kiss her bare feet. She beamed on him, her smile full of kindness, as she rebuked him for such childishness. Then another dull life began. During twelve years no event of sufficient interest had occurred for her to bear in mind. She was very quiet and very happy, tormented by no fever either of body or heart; her whole attention being given to the daily cares of a poor household. Charles was still wont to kiss her fair white feet, while she showed herself indulgent and motherly towards him. But other feeling she had none. Then there abruptly came before her the room in the Hotel du Var, her husband in his coffin, and her widow's robe hanging over a chair. She had wept that day as on the winter's night when her mother died. Then once more the days glided on; for two months with her daughter she had again enjoyed peace and happiness. Heaven! did that sum up everything? What, then, did that book mean when it spoke of transcendent loves which illumine one's existence?

While she thus reflected prolonged quivers were darting over the sleeping lake of mist on the horizon. Suddenly it seemed to burst, gaps appeared, a rending sped from end to end, betokening a complete break-up. The sun, ascending higher and higher, scattering its rays in glorious triumph, was victoriously attacking the mist. Little by little the great lake seemed to dry up, as though some invisible sluice were draining the plain. The fog, so dense but a moment before, was losing its consistency and becoming transparent, showing all the bright hues of the rainbow. On the left bank of the Seine all was of a heavenly blue, deepening into violet over towards the Jardin des Plantes. Upon the right bank a pale pink, flesh-like tint suffused the Tuileries district; while away towards Montmartre there was a fiery glow, carmine flaming amid gold. Then, farther off, the working-men's quarters deepened to a dusty brick-color, changing more and more till all became a slatey, bluish grey. The eye could not yet distinguish the city, which quivered and receded like those subaqueous depths divined through the crystalline waves, depths with awful forests of huge plants, swarming with horrible things and monsters faintly espied. However, the watery mist was quickly falling. It became at last no more than a fine muslin drapery; and bit by bit this muslin vanished, and Paris took shape and emerged from dreamland.

To love! to love! Why did these words ring in Helene's ears with such sweetness as the darkness of the fog gave way to light? Had she not loved her husband, whom she had tended like a child? But a bitter memory stirred within her – the memory of her dead father, who had hung himself three weeks after his wife's decease in a closet where her gowns still dangled from their hooks. There he had gasped out his last agony, his body rigid, and his face buried in a skirt, wrapped round by the clothes which breathed of her whom he had ever worshipped. Then Helene's reverie took a sudden leap. She began thinking of her own home-life, of the month's bills which she had checked with Rosalie that very morning; and she felt proud of the orderly way in which she regulated her household. During more than thirty years she had lived with self-respect and strength of mind. Uprightness alone impassioned her. When she questioned her past, not one hour revealed a sin; in her mind's eye she saw herself ever treading a straight and level path. Truly, the days might slip by; she would walk on peacefully as before, with no impediment in her way. The very thought of this made her stern, and her spirit rose in angry contempt against those lying lives whose apparent heroism disturbs the heart. The only true life was her own, following its course amidst such peacefulness. But over Paris there now only hung a thin smoke, a fine, quivering gauze, on the point of floating away; and emotion suddenly took possession of her. To love! to love! everything brought her back to that caressing phrase – even the pride born of her virtue. Her dreaming became so light, she no longer thought, but lay there, steeped in springtide, with moist eyes.

At last, as she was about to resume her reading, Paris slowly came into view. Not a breath of wind had stirred; it was as if a magician had waved his wand. The last gauzy film detached itself, soared and vanished in the air; and the city spread out without a shadow, under the conquering sun. Helene, with her chin resting on her hand, gazed on this mighty awakening.

A far-stretching valley appeared, with a myriad of buildings huddled together. Over the distant range of hills were scattered close-set roofs, and you could divine that the sea of houses rolled afar off behind the undulating ground, into the fields hidden from sight. It was as the ocean, with all the infinity and mystery of its waves. Paris spread out as vast as the heavens on high. Burnished with the sunshine that lovely morning, the city looked like a field of yellow corn; and the huge picture was all simplicity, compounded of two colors only, the pale blue of the sky, and the golden reflections of the housetops. The stream of light from the spring sun invested everything with the beauty of a new birth. So pure was the light that the minutest objects became visible. Paris, with its chaotic maze of stonework, shone as though under glass. From time to time, however, a breath of wind passed athwart this bright, quiescent serenity; and then the outlines of some districts grew faint, and quivered as if they were being viewed through an invisible flame.

Helene took interest at first in gazing on the large expanse spread under her windows, the slope of the Trocadero, and the far-stretching quays. She had to lean out to distinguish the deserted square of the Champ-de-Mars, barred at the farther end by the sombre Military School. Down below, on thoroughfare and pavement on each side of the Seine, she could see the passers-by – a busy cluster of black dots, moving like a swarm of ants. A yellow omnibus shone out like a spark of fire; drays and cabs crossed the bridge, mere child's toys in the distance, with miniature horses like pieces of mechanism; and amongst others traversing the grassy slopes was a servant girl, with a white apron which set a bright spot in all the greenery. Then Helene raised her eyes; but the crowd scattered and passed out of sight, and even the vehicles looked like mere grains of sand; there remained naught but the gigantic carcass of the city, seemingly untenanted and abandoned, its life limited to the dull trepidation by which it was agitated. There, in the foreground to the left, some red roofs were shining, and the tall chimneys of the Army Bakehouse slowly poured out their smoke; while, on the other side of the river, between the Esplanade and the Champ-de-Mars, a grove of lofty elms clustered, like some patch of a park, with bare branches, rounded tops, and young buds already bursting forth, quite clear to the eye. In the centre of the picture, the Seine spread out and reigned between its grey banks, to which rows of casks, steam cranes, and carts drawn up in line, gave a seaport kind of aspect. Helene's eyes were always turning towards this shining river, on which boats passed to and fro like birds with inky plumage. Her looks involuntarily followed the water's stately course, which, like a silver band, cut Paris atwain. That morning the stream rolled liquid sunlight; no greater resplendency could be seen on the horizon. And the young woman's glance encountered first the Pont des Invalides, next the Pont de la Concorde, and then the Pont Royal. Bridge followed bridge, they appeared to get closer, to rise one above the other like viaducts forming a flight of steps, and pierced with all kinds of arches; while the river, wending its way beneath these airy structures, showed here and there small patches of its blue robe, patches which became narrower and narrower, more and more indistinct. And again did Helene raise her eyes, and over yonder the stream forked amidst a jumble of houses; the bridges on either side of the island of La Cite were like mere films stretching from one bank to the other; while the golden towers of Notre-Dame sprang up like boundary-marks of the horizon, beyond which river, buildings, and clumps of trees became naught but sparkling sunshine. Then Helene, dazzled, withdrew her gaze from this the triumphant heart of Paris, where the whole glory of the city appeared to blaze.

On the right bank, amongst the clustering trees of the Champs-Elysees she saw the crystal buildings of the Palace of Industry glittering with a snowy sheen; farther away, behind the roof of the Madeleine, which looked like a tombstone, towered the vast mass of the Opera House; then there were other edifices, cupolas and towers, the Vendome Column, the church of Saint-Vincent de Paul, the tower of Saint-Jacques; and nearer in, the massive cube-like pavilions of the new Louvre and the Tuileries, half-hidden by a wood of chestnut trees. On the left bank the dome of the Invalides shone with gilding; beyond it the two irregular towers of Saint-Sulpice paled in the bright light; and yet farther in the rear, to the right of the new spires of Sainte-Clotilde, the bluish Pantheon, erect on a height, its fine colonnade showing against the sky, overlooked the city, poised in the air, as it were, motionless, with the silken hues of a captive balloon.

Helene's gaze wandered all over Paris. There were hollows, as could be divined by the lines of roofs; the Butte des Moulins surged upward, with waves of old slates, while the line of the principal boulevards dipped downward like a gutter, ending in a jumble of houses whose tiles even could no longer be seen. At this early hour the oblique sun did not light up the house-fronts looking towards the Trocadero; not a window-pane of these threw back its rays. The skylights on some roofs alone sparkled with the glittering reflex of mica amidst the red of the adjacent chimney-pots. The houses were mostly of a sombre grey, warmed by reflected beams; still rays of light were transpiercing certain districts, and long streets, stretching in front of Helene, set streaks of sunshine amidst the shade. It was only on the left that the far-spreading horizon, almost perfect in its circular sweep, was broken by

the heights of Montmartre and Pere-Lachaise. The details so clearly defined in the foreground, the innumerable denticles of the chimneys, the little black specks of the thousands of windows, grew less and less distinct as you gazed farther and farther away, till everything became mingled in confusion – the pell-mell of an endless city, whose faubourgs, afar off, looked like shingly beaches, steeped in a violet haze under the bright, streaming, vibrating light that fell from the heavens.

Helene was watching the scene with grave interest when Jeanne burst gleefully into the room.

"Oh, mamma! look here!"

The child had a big bunch of wall-flowers in her hand. She told, with some laughter, how she had waylaid Rosalie on her return from market to peep into her basket of provisions. To rummage in this basket was a great delight to her.

"Look at it, mamma! It lay at the very bottom. Just smell it; what a lovely perfume!"

From the tawny flowers, speckled with purple, there came a penetrating odor which scented the whole room. Then Helene, with a passionate movement, drew Jeanne to her breast, while the nosegay fell on her lap. To love! to love! Truly, she loved her child. Was not that intense love which had pervaded her life till now sufficient for her wants? It ought to satisfy her; it was so gentle, so tranquil; no lassitude could put an end to its continuance. Again she pressed her daughter to her, as though to conjure away thoughts which threatened to separate them. In the meantime Jeanne surrendered herself to the shower of kisses. Her eyes moist with tears, she turned her delicate neck upwards with a coaxing gesture, and pressed her face against her mother's shoulder. Then she slipped an arm round her waist and thus remained, very demure, her cheek resting on Helene's bosom. The perfume of the wall-flowers ascended between them.

For a long time they did not speak; but at length, without moving, Jeanne asked in a whisper:

"Mamma, you see that rosy-colored dome down there, close to the river; what is it?"

It was the dome of the Institute, and Helene looked towards it for a moment as though trying to recall the name.

"I don't know, my love," she answered gently.

The child appeared content with this reply, and silence again fell. But soon she asked a second question.

"And there, quite near, what beautiful trees are those?" she said, pointing with her finger towards a corner of the Tuileries garden.

"Those beautiful trees!" said her mother. "On the left, do you mean? I don't know, my love."

"Ah!" exclaimed Jeanne; and after musing for a little while she added with a pout: "We know nothing!"

Indeed they knew nothing of Paris. During eighteen months it had lain beneath their gaze every hour of the day, yet they knew not a stone of it. Three times only had they gone down into the city; but on returning home, suffering from terrible headaches born of all the agitation they had witnessed, they could find in their minds no distinct memory of anything in all that huge maze of streets.

However, Jeanne at times proved obstinate. "Ah! you can tell me this!" said she: "What is that glass building which glitters there? It is so big you must know it."

She was referring to the Palais de l'Industrie. Helene, however, hesitated.

"It's a railway station," said she. "No, I'm wrong, I think it is a theatre."

Then she smiled and kissed Jeanne's hair, at last confessing as before: "I do not know what it is, my love."

So they continued to gaze on Paris, troubling no further to identify any part of it. It was very delightful to have it there before them, and yet to know nothing of it; it remained the vast and the unknown. It was as though they had halted on the threshold of a world which ever unrolled its panorama before them, but into which they were unwilling to descend. Paris often made them anxious when it wafted them a hot, disturbing atmosphere; but that morning it seemed gay and innocent, like a child, and from its mysterious depths only a breath of tenderness rose gently to their faces.

Helene took up her book again while Jeanne, clinging to her, still gazed upon the scene. In the dazzling, tranquil sky no breeze was stirring. The smoke from the Army Bakehouse ascended perpendicularly in light cloudlets which vanished far aloft. On a level with the houses passed vibrating waves of life, waves of all the life pent up there. The loud voices of the streets softened amidst the sunshine into a languid murmur. But all at once a flutter attracted Jeanne's notice. A flock of white pigeons, freed from some adjacent dovecot, sped through the air in front of the window; with spreading wings like falling snow, the birds barred the line of view, hiding the immensity of Paris.

With eyes again dreamily gazing upward, Helene remained plunged in reverie. She was the Lady Rowena; she loved with the serenity and intensity of a noble mind. That spring morning, that great, gentle city, those early wall-flowers shedding their perfume on her lap, had little by little filled her heart with tenderness.

CHAPTER VI

One morning Helene was arranging her little library, the various books of which had got out of order during the past few days, when Jeanne skipped into the room, clapping her hands.

"A soldier, mamma! a soldier!" she cried.

"What? a soldier?" exclaimed her mother. "What do you want, you and your soldier?"

But the child was in one of her paroxysms of extravagant delight; she only jumped about the more, repeating: "A soldier! a soldier!" without deigning to give any further explanation. She had left the door wide open behind her, and so, as Helene rose, she was astonished to see a soldier – a very little soldier too – in the ante-room. Rosalie had gone out, and Jeanne must have been playing on the landing, though strictly forbidden to do so by her mother.

"What do you want, my lad?" asked Helene.

The little soldier was very much confused on seeing this lady, so lovely and fair, in her dressing-gown trimmed with lace; he shuffled one foot to and fro over the floor, bowed, and at last precipitately stammered: "I beg pardon – excuse –"

But he could get no further, and retreated to the wall, still shuffling his feet. His retreat was thus cut off, and seeing the lady awaited his reply with an involuntary smile, he dived into his right-hand pocket, from which he dragged a blue handkerchief, a knife, and a hunk of bread. He gazed on each in turn, and thrust them all back again. Then he turned his attention to the left-hand pocket, from which were produced a twist of cord, two rusty nails, and some pictures wrapped in part of a newspaper. All these he pushed back to their resting-place, and began tapping his thighs with an anxious air. And again he stammered in bewilderment:

"I beg pardon – excuse –"

But all at once he raised his finger to his nose, and exclaimed with a loud laugh: "What a fool I am! I remember now!"

He then undid two buttons of his greatcoat, and rummaged in his breast, into which he plunged his arm up to the elbow. After a time he drew forth a letter, which he rustled violently before handing to Helene, as though to shake some dust from it.

"A letter for me! Are you sure?" said she.

On the envelope were certainly inscribed her name and address in a heavy rustic scrawl, with pothooks and hangers tumbling over one another. When at last she made it all out, after being repeatedly baffled by the extraordinary style and spelling, she could not but smile again. It was a letter from Rosalie's aunt, introducing Zephyrin Lacour, who had fallen a victim to the conscription, "in spite of two masses having been said by his reverence." However, as Zephyrin was Rosalie's "intended" the aunt begged that madame would be so good as to allow the young folks to see each other on Sundays. In the three pages which the letter comprised this question was continually cropping up in the same words, the confusion of the epistle increasing through the writer's vain efforts to say something she had not said before. Just above the signature, however, she seemed to have hit the nail on the head, for she had written: "His reverence gives his permission"; and had then broken her pen in the paper, making a shower of blots.

Helene slowly folded the letter. Two or three times, while deciphering its contents, she had raised her head to glance at the soldier. He still remained close to the wall, and his lips stirred, as though to emphasize each sentence in the letter by a slight movement of the chin. No doubt he knew its contents by heart.

"Then you are Zephyrin Lacour, are you not?" asked Helene.

He began to laugh and wagged his head.

"Come in, my lad; don't stay out there."

He made up his mind to follow her, but he continued standing close to the door, while Helene sat down. She had scarcely seen him in the darkness of the ante-room. He must have been just as tall as Rosalie; a third of an inch less, and he would have been exempted from service. With red hair, cut very short, he had a round, freckled, beardless face, with two little eyes like gimlet holes. His new greatcoat, much too large for him, made him appear still more dumpy, and with his red-trousered legs wide apart, and his large peaked cap swinging before him, he presented both a comical and pathetic sight – his plump, stupid little person plainly betraying the rustic, although he wore a uniform.

Helene desired to obtain some information from him.

"You left Beauce a week ago?" she asked.

"Yes, madame!"

"And here you are in Paris. I suppose you are not sorry?"

"No, madame."

He was losing his bashfulness, and now gazed all over the room, evidently much impressed by its blue velvet hangings.

"Rosalie is out," Helene began again, "but she will be here very soon. Her aunt tells me you are her sweetheart."

To this the little soldier vouchsafed no reply, but hung his head, laughing awkwardly, and scraping the carpet with the tip of his boot.

"Then you will have to marry her when you leave the army?" Helene continued questioning.

"Yes, to be sure!" exclaimed he, his face turning very red. "Yes, of course; we are engaged!" And, won over by the kindly manners of the lady, he made up his mind to speak out, his fingers still playing with his cap. "You know it's an old story. When we were quite children, we used to go thieving together. We used to get switched; oh yes, that's true! I must tell you that the Lacours and the Pichons lived in the same lane, and were next-door neighbors. And so Rosalie and myself were almost brought up together. Then her people died, and her aunt Marguerite took her in. But she, the minx, was already as strong as a demon."

He paused, realizing that he was warming up, and asked hesitatingly:

"But perhaps she has told you all this?"

"Yes, yes; but go on all the same," said Helene, who was greatly amused.

"In short," continued he, "she was awfully strong, though she was no bigger than a tomtit. It was a treat to see her at her work! How she did get through it! One day she gave a slap to a friend of mine – by Jove! such a slap! I had the mark of it on my arm for a week! Yes, that was the way it all came about. All the gossips declared we must marry one another. Besides, we weren't ten years old before we had agreed on that! And, we have stuck to it, madame, we have stuck to it!"

He placed one hand upon his heart, with fingers wide apart. Helene, however, had now become very grave. The idea of allowing a soldier in her kitchen somewhat worried her. His reverence, no doubt, had given his sanction, but she thought it rather venturesome. There is too much license in the country, where lovers indulge in all sorts of pleasantries. So she gave expression to her apprehensions. When Zephyrin at last gathered her meaning, his first inclination was to laugh, but his awe for Helene restrained him.

"Oh, madame, madame!" said he, "you don't know her, I can see! I have received slaps enough from her! Of course young men like to laugh! isn't that so? Sometimes I pinched her, and she would turn round and hit me right on the nose. Her aunt's advice always was, 'Look here, my girl, don't put up with any nonsense!' His reverence, too, interfered in it, and maybe that had a lot to do with our keeping up sweethearting. We were to have been married after I had drawn for a soldier. But it was all my eye! Things turned out badly. Rosalie declared she would go to service in Paris, to earn a dowry while she was waiting for me. And so, and so – "

He swung himself about, dangling his cap, now from one hand now from the other. But still Helene never said a word, and he at last fancied that she distrusted him. This pained him dreadfully.

"You think, perhaps, that I shall deceive her?" he burst out angrily. "Even, too, when I tell you we are betrothed? I shall marry her, as surely as the heaven shines on us. I'm quite ready to pledge my word in writing. Yes, if you like, I'll write it down for you."

Deep emotion was stirring him. He walked about the room gazing around in the hope of finding pen and ink. Helene quickly tried to appease him, but he still went on:

"I would rather sign a paper for you. What harm would it do you? Your mind would be all the easier with it."

However, just at that moment Jeanne, who had again run away, returned, jumping and clapping her hands.

"Rosalie! Rosalie! Rosalie!" she chanted in a dancing tune of her own composition.

Through the open doorway one could hear the panting of the maid as she climbed up the stairs laden with her basket. Zephyrin started back into a corner of the room, his mouth wide agape from ear to ear in silent laughter, and the gimlet holes of his eyes gleaming with rustic roguery. Rosalie came straight into the room, as was her usual practice, to show her mistress her morning's purchase of provisions.

"Madame," said she, "I've brought some cauliflowers. Look at them! Only eighteen sous for two; it isn't dear, is it?"

She held out the basket half open, but on lifting her head noticed Zephyrin's grinning face. Surprise nailed her to the carpet. Two or three seconds slipped away; she had doubtless at first failed to recognize him in his uniform. But then her round eyes dilated, her fat little face blanched, and her coarse black hair waved in agitation.

"Oh!" she simply said.

But her astonishment was such that she dropped her basket. The provisions, cauliflowers, onions, apples, rolled on to the carpet. Jeanne gave a cry of delight, and falling on her knees, began hunting for the apples, even under the chairs and the wardrobe. Meanwhile Rosalie, as though paralyzed, never moved, though she repeated:

"What! it's you! What are you doing here? what are you doing here? Say!"

Then she turned to Helene with the question: "Was it you who let him come in?"

Zephyrin never uttered a word, but contented himself with winking slyly. Then Rosalie gave vent to her emotion in tears; and, to show her delight at seeing him again, could hit on nothing better than to quiz him.

"Oh! go away!" she began, marching up to him. "You look neat and pretty I must say in that guise of yours! I might have passed you in the street, and not even have said: 'God bless you.' Oh! you've got a nice rig-out. You just look as if you had your sentry-box on your back; and they've cut your hair so short that folks might take you for the sexton's poodle. Good heavens! what a fright you are; what a fright!"

Zephyrin, very indignant, now made up his mind to speak. "It's not my fault, that's sure! Oh! if you joined a regiment we should see a few things."

They had quite forgotten where they were; everything had vanished – the room, Helene and Jeanne, who was still gathering the apples together. With hands folded over her apron, the maid stood upright in front of the little soldier.

"Is everything all right down there?" she asked.

"Oh, yes, excepting Guignard's cow is ill. The veterinary surgeon came and said she'd got the dropsy."

"If she's got the dropsy, she's done for. Excepting that, is everything all right?"

"Yes, yes! The village constable has broken his arm. Old Canivet's dead. And, by the way, his reverence lost his purse with thirty sous in it as he was a-coming back from Grandval. But otherwise, things are all right."

Then silence fell on them, and they looked at one another with sparkling eyes, their compressed lips slowly making an amorous grimace. This, indeed, must have been the manner in which they expressed their love, for they had not even stretched out their hands in greeting. Rosalie, however, all at once ceased her contemplation, and began to lament at sight of the vegetables on the floor. Such a nice mess! and it was he who had caused it all! Madame ought to have made him wait on the stairs! Scolding away as fast as she could, she dropped on her knees and began putting the apples, onions, and cauliflowers into the basket again, much to the disgust of Jeanne, who would fain have done it all herself. And as she turned, with the object of betaking herself into her kitchen, never deigning another look in Zephyrin's direction, Helene, conciliated by the healthy tranquillity of the lovers, stopped her to say:

"Listen a moment, my girl. Your aunt has asked me to allow this young man to come and see you on Sundays. He will come in the afternoon, and you will try not to let your work fall behind too much."

Rosalie paused, merely turning her head. Though she was well pleased, she preserved her doleful air.

"Oh, madame, he will be such a bother," she declared. But at the same time she glanced over her shoulder at Zephyrin, and again made an affectionate grimace at him. The little soldier remained for a minute stock-still, his mouth agape from ear to ear with its silent laugh. Then he retired backwards, with his cap against his heart as he thanked Helene profusely. The door had been shut upon him, when on the landing he still continued bowing.

"Is that Rosalie's brother, mamma?" asked Jeanne.

Helene was quite embarrassed by the question. She regretted the permission which she had just given in a sudden impulse of kindness which now surprised her. She remained thinking for some seconds, and then replied, "No, he is her cousin."

"Ah!" said the child gravely.

Rosalie's kitchen looked out on the sunny expanse of Doctor Deberle's garden. In the summer the branches of the elms swayed in through the broad window. It was the cheeriest room of the suite, always flooded with light, which was sometimes so blinding that Rosalie had put up a curtain of blue cotton stuff, which she drew of an afternoon. The only complaint she made about the kitchen was its smallness; and indeed it was a narrow strip of a place, with a cooking-range on the right-hand side, while on the left were the table and dresser. The various utensils and furnishings, however, had all been so well arranged that she had contrived to keep a clear corner beside the window, where she worked in the evening. She took a pride in keeping everything, stewpans, kettles, and dishes, wonderfully clean; and so, when the sun veered round to the window, the walls became resplendent, the copper vessels sparkled like gold, the tin pots showed bright discs like silver moons, while the white-and-blue tiles above the stove gleamed pale in the fiery glow.

On the evening of the ensuing Saturday Helene heard so great a commotion in the kitchen that she determined to go and see what was the matter.

"What is it?" asked she: "are you fighting with the furniture?"

"I am scouring, madame," replied Rosalie, who, sweating and dishevelled, was squatting on the tiled floor and scrubbing it with all the strength of her arms.

This over, she sponged it with clear water. Never had the kitchen displayed such perfection of cleanliness. A bride might have slept in it; all was white as for a wedding. So energetically had she exerted her hands that it seemed as if table and dresser had been freshly planed. And the good order of everything was a sight to see; stewpans and pots taking rank by their size, each on its own hook, even the frying-pan and gridiron shining brightly without one grimy stain. Helene looked on for a moment in silence, and then with a smile disappeared.

Every Saturday afterwards there was a similar furbishing, a tornado of dust and water lasting for four hours. It was Rosalie's wish to display her neatness to Zephyrin on the Sunday. That was

her reception day. A single cobweb would have filled her with shame; but when everything shone resplendent around her she became amiable, and burst into song. At three o'clock she would again wash her hands and don a cap gay with ribbons. Then the curtain being drawn halfway, so that only the subdued light of a boudoir came in, she awaited Zephyrin's arrival amidst all this primness, through which a pleasant scent of thyme and laurel was borne.

At half-past three exactly Zephyrin made his appearance; he would walk about the street until the clocks of the neighborhood had struck the half-hour. Rosalie listened to the beat of his heavy shoes on the stairs, and opened the door the moment he halted on the landing. She had forbidden him to ring the bell. At each visit the same greeting passed between them.

"Is it you?"

"Yes, it's me!"

And they stood face to face, their eyes sparkling and their lips compressed. Then Zephyrin followed Rosalie; but there was no admission vouchsafed to him till she had relieved him of shako and sabre. She would have none of these in her kitchen; and so the sabre and shako were hidden away in a cupboard. Next she would make him sit down in the corner she had contrived near the window, and thenceforth he was not allowed to budge.

"Sit still there! You can look on, if you like, while I get madame's dinner ready."

But he rarely appeared with empty hands. He would usually spend the morning in strolling with some comrades through the woods of Meudon, lounging lazily about, inhaling the fresh air, which inspired him with regretful memories of his country home. To give his fingers something to do he would cut switches, which he tapered and notched with marvelous figurings, and his steps gradually slackening he would come to a stop beside some ditch, his shako on the back of his head, while his eyes remained fixed on the knife with which he was carving the stick. Then, as he could never make up his mind to discard his switches, he carried them in the afternoon to Rosalie, who would throw up her hands, and exclaim that they would litter her kitchen. But the truth was, she carefully preserved them; and under her bed was gathered a bundle of these switches, of all sorts and sizes.

One day he made his appearance with a nest full of eggs, which he had secreted in his shako under the folds of a handkerchief. Omelets made from the eggs of wild birds, so he declared, were very nice – a statement which Rosalie received with horror; the nest, however, was preserved and laid away in company with the switches. But Zephyrin's pockets were always full to overflowing. He would pull curiosities from them, transparent pebbles found on the banks of the Seine, pieces of old iron, dried berries, and all sorts of strange rubbish, which not even a rag-picker would have cared for. His chief love, however, was for pictures; as he sauntered along he would seize on all the stray papers that had served as wrappers for chocolate or cakes of soap, and on which were black men, palm-trees, dancing-girls, or clusters of roses. The tops of old broken boxes, decorated with figures of languid, blonde ladies, the glazed prints and silver paper which had once contained sugar-sticks and had been thrown away at the neighboring fairs, were great windfalls that filled his bosom with pride. All such booty was speedily transferred to his pockets, the choicer articles being enveloped in a fragment of an old newspaper. And on Sunday, if Rosalie had a moment's leisure between the preparation of a sauce and the tending of the joint, he would exhibit his pictures to her. They were hers if she cared for them; only as the paper around them was not always clean he would cut them out, a pastime which greatly amused him. Rosalie got angry, as the shreds of paper blew about even into her plates; and it was a sight to see with what rustic cunning he would at last gain possession of her scissors. At times, however, in order to get rid of him, she would give them up without any asking.

Meanwhile some brown sauce would be simmering on the fire. Rosalie watched it, wooden spoon in hand; while Zephyrin, his head bent and his breadth of shoulder increased by his epaulets, continued cutting out the pictures. His head was so closely shaven that the skin of his skull could be seen; and the yellow collar of his tunic yawned widely behind, displaying his sunburnt neck. For a quarter of an hour at a time neither would utter a syllable. When Zephyrin raised his head, he watched

Rosalie while she took some flour, minced some parsley, or salted and peppered some dish, his eyes betraying the while intense interest. Then, at long intervals, a few words would escape him:

"By Jove! that does smell nice!"

The cook, busily engaged, would not vouchsafe an immediate reply; but after a lengthy silence she perhaps exclaimed: "You see, it must simmer properly."

Their talk never went beyond that. They no longer spoke of their native place even. When a reminiscence came to them a word sufficed, and they chuckled inwardly the whole afternoon. This was pleasure enough, and by the time Rosalie turned Zephyrin out of doors both of them had enjoyed ample amusement.

"Come, you will have to go! I must wait on madame," said she; and restoring him his shako and sabre, she drove him out before her, afterwards waiting on madame with cheeks flushed with happiness; while he walked back to barracks, dangling his arms, and almost intoxicated by the goodly odors of thyme and laurel which still clung to him.

During his earlier visits Helene judged it right to look after them. She popped in sometimes quite suddenly to give an order, and there was Zephyrin always in his corner, between the table and the window, close to the stone filter, which forced him to draw in his legs. The moment madame made her appearance he rose and stood upright, as though shouldering arms, and if she spoke to him his reply never went beyond a salute and a respectful grunt. Little by little Helene grew somewhat easier; she saw that her entrance did not disturb them, and that their faces only expressed the quiet content of patient lovers.

At this time, too, Rosalie seemed even more wide awake than Zephyrin. She had already been some months in Paris, and under its influence was fast losing her country rust, though as yet she only knew three streets – the Rue de Passy, the Rue Franklin, and the Rue Vineuse. Zephyrin, soldier though he was, remained quite a lubber. As Rosalie confided to her mistress, he became more of a blockhead every day. In the country he had been much sharper. But, added she, it was the uniform's fault; all the lads who donned the uniform became sad dolts. The fact is, his change of life had quite muddled Zephyrin, who, with his staring round eyes and solemn swagger, looked like a goose. Despite his epaulets he retained his rustic awkwardness and heaviness; the barracks had taught him nothing as yet of the fine words and victorious attitudes of the ideal Parisian fire-eater. "Yes, madame," Rosalie would wind up by saying, "you don't need to disturb yourself; it is not in him to play any tricks!"

Thus the girl began to treat him in quite a motherly way. While dressing her meat on the spit she would preach him a sermon, full of good counsel as to the pitfalls he should shun; and he in all obedience vigorously nodded approval of each injunction. Every Sunday he had to swear to her that he had attended mass, and that he had solemnly repeated his prayers morning and evening. She strongly inculcated the necessity of tidiness, gave him a brush down whenever he left her, stitched on a loose button of his tunic, and surveyed him from head to foot to see if aught were amiss in his appearance. She also worried herself about his health, and gave him cures for all sorts of ailments. In return for her kindly care Zephyrin professed himself anxious to fill her filter for her; but this proposal was long-rejected, through the fear that he might spill the water. One day, however, he brought up two buckets without letting a drop of their contents fall on the stairs, and from that time he replenished the filter every Sunday. He would also make himself useful in other ways, doing all the heavy work and was extremely handy in running to the greengrocer's for butter, had she forgotten to purchase any. At last, even, he began to share in the duties of kitchen-maid. First he was permitted to peel the vegetables; later on the mincing was assigned to him. At the end of six weeks, though still forbidden to touch the sauces, he watched over them with wooden spoon in hand. Rosalie had fairly made him her helpmate, and would sometimes burst out laughing as she saw him, with his red trousers and yellow collar, working busily before the fire with a dishcloth over his arm, like some scullery-servant.

One Sunday Helene betook herself to the kitchen. Her slippers deadened the sound of her footsteps, and she reached the threshold unheard by either maid or soldier. Zephyrin was seated in

his corner over a basin of steaming broth. Rosalie, with her back turned to the door, was occupied in cutting some long sippets of bread for him.

"There, eat away, my dear!" she said. "You walk too much; it is that which makes you feel so empty! There! have you enough? Do you want any more?"

Thus speaking, she watched him with a tender and anxious look. He, with his round, dumpy figure, leaned over the basin, devouring a sippet with each mouthful of broth. His face, usually yellow with freckles, was becoming quite red with the warmth of the steam which circled round him.

"Heavens!" he muttered, "what grand juice! What do you put in it?"

"Wait a minute," she said; "if you like leeks –"

However, as she turned round she suddenly caught sight of her mistress. She raised an exclamation, and then, like Zephyrin, seemed turned to stone. But a moment afterwards she poured forth a torrent of excuses.

"It's my share, madame – oh, it's my share! I would not have taken any more soup, I swear it! I told him, 'If you would like to have my bowl of soup, you can have it.' Come, speak up, Zephyrin; you know that was how it came about!"

The mistress remained silent, and the servant grew uneasy, thinking she was annoyed. Then in quavering tones she continued:

"Oh, he was dying of hunger, madame; he stole a raw carrot for me! They feed him so badly! And then, you know, he had walked goodness knows where all along the river-side. I'm sure, madame, you would have told me yourself to give him some broth!"

Gazing at the little soldier, who sat with his mouth full, not daring to swallow, Helene felt she could no longer remain stern. So she quietly said:

"Well, well, my girl, whenever the lad is hungry you must keep him to dinner – that's all. I give you permission"

Face to face with them, she had again felt within her that tender feeling which once already had banished all thoughts of rigor from her mind. They were so happy in that kitchen! The cotton curtain, drawn half-way, gave free entry to the sunset beams. The burnished copper pans set the end wall all aglow, lending a rosy tint to the twilight lingering in the room. And there, in the golden shade, the lovers' little round faces shone out, peaceful and radiant, like moons. Their love was instinct with such calm certainty that no neglect was even shown in keeping the kitchen utensils in their wonted good order. It blossomed amidst the savory odors of the cooking-stove, which heightened their appetites and nourished their hearts.

"Mamma," asked Jeanne, one evening after considerable meditation, "why is it Rosalie's cousin never kisses her?"

"And why should they kiss one another?" asked Helene in her turn. "They will kiss on their birthdays."

CHAPTER VII

The soup had just been served on the following Tuesday evening, when Helene, after listening attentively, exclaimed:

"What a downpour! Don't you hear? My poor friends, you will get drenched to-night!"

"Oh, it's only a few drops," said the Abbe quietly, though his old cassock was already wet about the shoulders.

"I've got a good distance to go," said Monsieur Rambaud. "But I shall return home on foot all the same; I like it. Besides, I have my umbrella."

Jeanne was reflecting as she gazed gravely on her last spoonful of vermicelli; and at last her thoughts took shape in words: "Rosalie said you wouldn't come because of the wretched weather; but mamma said you would come. You are very kind; you always come."

A smile lit up all their faces. Helene addressed a nod of affectionate approval to the two brothers. Out of doors the rain was falling with a dull roar, and violent gusts of wind beat angrily against the window-shutters. Winter seemed to have returned. Rosalie had carefully drawn the red repp curtains; and the small, cosy dining-room, illumined by the steady light of the white hanging-lamp, looked, amidst the buffeting of the storm, a picture of pleasant, affectionate intimacy. On the mahogany sideboard some china reflected the quiet light; and amidst all this indoor peacefulness the four diners leisurely conversed, awaiting the good pleasure of the servant-maid, as they sat round the table, where all, if simple, was exquisitely clean.

"Oh! you are waiting; so much the worse!" said Rosalie familiarly, as she entered with a dish. "These are fillets of sole *au gratin* for Monsieur Rambaud; they require to be lifted just at the last moment."

Monsieur Rambaud pretended to be a gourmand, in order to amuse Jeanne, and give pleasure to Rosalie, who was very proud of her accomplishments as a cook. He turned towards her with the question: "By the way, what have you got for us to-day? You are always bringing in some surprise or other when I am no longer hungry."

"Oh," said she in reply, "there are three dishes as usual, and no more. After the sole you will have a leg of mutton and then some Brussels sprouts. Yes, that's the truth; there will be nothing else."

From the corner of his eye Monsieur Rambaud glanced towards Jeanne. The child was boiling over with glee, her hands over her mouth to restrain her laughter, while she shook her head, as though to insinuate that the maid was deceiving them. Monsieur Rambaud thereupon clacked his tongue as though in doubt, and Rosalie pretended great indignation.

"You don't believe me because Mademoiselle Jeanne laughs so," said she. "Ah, very well! believe what you like. Stint yourself, and see if you won't have a craving for food when you get home."

When the maid had left the room, Jeanne, laughing yet more loudly, was seized with a longing to speak out.

"You are really too greedy!" she began. "I myself went into the kitchen – " However, she left her sentence unfinished: "No, no, I won't tell; it isn't right, is it, mamma? There's nothing more – nothing at all! I only laughed to cheat you."

This interlude was re-enacted every Tuesday with the same unvarying success. Helene was touched by the kindness with which Monsieur Rambaud lent himself to the fun; she was well aware that, with Provencal frugality, he had long limited his daily fare to an anchovy and half-a-dozen olives. As for Abbe Jouve, he never knew what he was eating, and his blunders and forgetfulness supplied an inexhaustible fund of amusement. Jeanne, meditating some prank in this respect, was even now stealthily watching him with her glittering eyes.

"How nice this whiting is!" she said to him, after they had all been served.

"Very nice, my dear," he answered. "Bless me, you are right – it is whiting; I thought it was turbot."

And then, as every one laughed, he guilelessly asked why. Rosalie, who had just come into the room again, seemed very much hurt, and burst out:

"A fine thing indeed! The priest in my native place knew much better what he was eating. He could tell the age of the fowl he was carving to a week or so, and didn't require to go into the kitchen to find out what there was for dinner. No, the smell was quite sufficient. Goodness gracious! had I been in the service of a priest like your reverence, I should not know yet even how to turn an omelet."

The Abbe hastened to excuse himself with an embarrassed air, as though his inability to appreciate the delights of the table was a failing he despaired of curing. But, as he said, he had too many other things to think about.

"There! that is a leg of mutton!" exclaimed Rosalie, as she placed on the table the joint referred to.

Everybody once more indulged in a peal of laughter, the Abbe Jouve being the first to do so. He bent forward to look, his little eyes twinkling with glee.

"Yes, certainly," said he; "it is a leg of mutton. I think I should have known it."

Despite this remark, there was something about the Abbe that day which betokened unusual absent-mindedness. He ate quickly, with the haste of a man who is bored by a long stay at table, and lunches standing when at home. And, having finished, himself, he would wait the convenience of the others, plunged in deep thought, and simply smiling in reply to the questions put to him. At every moment he cast on his brother a look in which encouragement and uneasiness were mingled. Nor did Monsieur Rambaud seem possessed of his wonted tranquillity that evening; but his agitation manifested itself in a craving to talk and fidget on his chair, which seemed rather inconsistent with his quiet disposition. When the Brussels sprouts had disappeared, there was a delay in the appearance of the dessert, and a spell of silence ensued. Out of doors the rain was beating down with still greater force, rattling noisily against the house. The dining-room was rather close, and it suddenly dawned on Helene that there was something strange in the air – that the two brothers had some worry of which they did not care to speak. She looked at them anxiously, and at last spoke:

"Dear, dear! What dreadful rain! isn't it? It seems to be influencing both of you, for you look out of sorts."

They protested, however, that such was not the case, doing their utmost to clear her mind of the notion. And as Rosalie now made her appearance with an immense dish, Monsieur Rambaud exclaimed, as though to veil his emotion: "What did I say! Still another surprise!"

The surprise of the day was some vanilla cream, one of the cook's triumphs. And thus it was a sight to see her broad, silent grin, as she deposited her burden on the table. Jeanne shouted and clapped her hands.

"I knew it, I knew it! I saw the eggs in the kitchen!"

"But I have no more appetite," declared Monsieur Rambaud, with a look of despair. "I could not eat any of it!"

Thereupon Rosalie became grave, full of suppressed wrath. With a dignified air, she remarked: "Oh, indeed! A cream which I made specially for you! Well, well! just try not to eat any of it – yes, try!"

He had to give in and accept a large helping of the cream. Meanwhile the Abbe remained thoughtful. He rolled up his napkin and rose before the dessert had come to an end, as was frequently his custom. For a little while he walked about, with his head hanging down; and when Helene in her turn quitted the table, he cast at Monsieur Rambaud a look of intelligence, and led the young woman into the bedroom.[*] The door being left open behind them, they could almost immediately afterwards be heard conversing together, though the words which they slowly exchanged were indistinguishable.

[*] Helene's frequent use of her bedroom may seem strange to the English reader who has never been in France. But in the *petite bourgeoisie* the bedchamber is often the cosiest of the whole suite of rooms, and whilst indoors, when not superintending her servant, it is in the bedroom that madame will spend most of her time. Here, too, she will receive friends of either sex, and, the French being far less prudish than ourselves, nobody considers that there is anything wrong or indelicate in the practice.

"Oh, do make haste!" said Jeanne to Monsieur Rambaud, who seemed incapable of finishing a biscuit. "I want to show you my work."

However, he evinced no haste, though when Rosalie began to clear the table it became necessary for him to leave his chair.

"Wait a little! wait a little!" he murmured, as the child strove to drag him towards the bedroom, And, overcome with embarrassment and timidity, he retreated from the doorway. Then, as the Abbe raised his voice, such sudden weakness came over him that he had to sit down again at the table. From his pocket he drew a newspaper.

"Now," said he, "I'm going to make you a little coach."

Jeanne at once abandoned her intention of entering the adjoining room. Monsieur Rambaud always amazed her by his skill in turning a sheet of paper into all sorts of playthings. Chickens, boats, bishops' mitres, carts, and cages, were all evolved under his fingers. That day, however, so tremulous were his hands that he was unable to perfect anything. He lowered his head whenever the faintest sound came from the adjacent room. Nevertheless, Jeanne took interest in watching him, and leaned on the table at his side.

"Now," said she, "you must make a chicken to harness to the carriage."

Meantime, within the bedroom, Abbe Jouve remained standing in the shadow thrown by the lamp-shade upon the floor. Helene had sat down in her usual place in front of the round table; and, as on Tuesdays she refrained from ceremony with her friends, she had taken up her needlework, and, in the circular glare of light, only her white hands could be seen sewing a child's cap.

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