Title: The Works of Guy de Maupassant, Volume 2

Author: Guy de Maupassant

Release date: December 22, 2005 [eBook #17375]
Most recently updated: December 13, 2020

Language: English

E-text prepared by Juliet Sutherland, Mary Meehan,
and the Project Gutenberg Online Distributed Proofreading Team
(https://www.pgdp.net/)

The Works of Guy de Maupassant

VOLUME II

MONSIEUR PARENT AND OTHER STORIES

CONTENTS

MONSIEUR PARENT

I

Little George was making hills of sand in one of the walks; he took it up with both his hands, made it into a pyramid, and then put a chestnut leaf on the top, and his father, sitting on an iron chair was looking at him with concentrated and affectionate attention, and saw nobody but him in that small public garden which was full of people. All along the circular road other children were occupied in the same manner, or else were indulging in childish games, while nursemaids were walking two and two, with their bright cap ribbons floating behind them, and carrying something wrapped up in lace, on their arms, and little girls in short petticoats and bare legs were talking seriously together, during the intervals of trundling their hoops.

The sun was just disappearing behind the roofs of the *Rue Saint-Lazare*, but still shed its rays obliquely on that little over-dressed crowd. The chestnut trees were lighted up with its yellow rays, and the three fountains before the lofty porch of the church, had the appearance of liquid silver.

Monsieur Parent looked at his son sitting in the dusk, he followed his slightest movements with affection, but accidentally looking up at the church clock, he saw that he was five minutes late, so he got up, took the child by the arm and shook his dress which was covered with sand, wiped his hands and led him in the direction of the *Rue Blanche*, and he walked quickly, so as not to get in after his wife, but as the child could not keep up with him, he took him up and carried him, though it made him pant when he had to walk up the steep street. He was a man of forty, turning gray already, rather stout, and had married, a few years previously, a young woman whom he dearly loved, but who now treated him with the severity and authority of an all-powerful despot. She

found fault with him continually for everything that he did, or did not do, reproached him bitterly for his slightest acts, his habits, his simple pleasures, his tastes, his movements and walk, and for having a round stomach and a placid voice.

He still loved her, however, but above all he loved the child which he had had by her, and George, who was now three, had become the greatest joy, and had preoccupation of his heart. He himself had a modest private fortune, and lived without doing anything on his twenty thousand francs a year, and his wife, who had been quite portionless, was constantly angry at her husband's inactivity.

At last he reached his house, put down the child, wiped his forehead and walked upstairs, and when he got to the second floor, he rang. An old servant who had brought him up, one of those mistress-servants who are the tyrants of families, opened the door to him, and he asked her anxiously: "Has Madame come in yet?" The servant shrugged her shoulders: "When have you ever known Madame to come home at half past six, Monsieur?" And he replied with some embarrassment: "Very well; all the better; it will give me time to change my things, for I am very hot."

The servant looked at him with angry and contemptuous pity, and grumbled: "Oh! I can see that well enough, you are covered with perspiration, Monsieur. I suppose you walked quickly and carried the child, and only to have to wait until half past seven, perhaps, for Madame. I have made up my mind not to have it ready at the time. Shall get it for eight o'clock, and if you have to wait, I cannot help it; roast meat ought not to be burnt!" Monsieur Parent, however, pretended not to hear, but only said: "All right! all right. You must wash George's hands, for he has been making sand pits. I will go and change my clothes; tell the maid to give the child a good washing."

And he went into his own room, and as soon as he got in he locked the door, so as to be alone, quite alone. He was so used now to being abused and badly treated, that he never thought himself safe, except when he was locked in. He no longer ventured even to think, reflect and reason with himself, unless he had guarded himself against her looks and insinuations, by locking himself in. Having thrown himself into a chair, in order to rest for a few minutes before he put on clean linen, he remembered that Julie was beginning to be a fresh danger in the house. She hated his wife, that was quite plain, but she hated his friend Paul Limousin still more, who had continued to be the familiar and intimate friend of the house, after having been the inseparable companion of his bachelor days, which is very rare. It was Limousin who acted as a buffer between his wife and himself, and who defended him ardently, and even severely, against her undeserved reproaches, against crying scenes, and against all the daily miseries of his existence.

But now for six months, Julie had constantly been saying things against her mistress, and repeated twenty times a day: "If I were you, Monsieur, I should not allow myself to be led by the nose like that. Well, well... There, ... everyone according to his nature." And one day, she had even ventured to be insolent to Henriette, who, however, merely said to her husband, at night: "You know, the next time she speaks to me like that, I shall turn her out of doors." But she, who feared nothing; seemed to be afraid of the old servant, and Parent attributed her mildness to her consideration for the old domestic who had brought him up, and who had closed his mother's eyes. Now, however, it was finished, matters could not go on like that much longer, and he was frightened at the idea of what was going to happen. What could he do? To get rid of Julie seemed to him to be such a formidable thing to do, that he hardly ventured to think of it, but it was just as impossible to uphold her against his wife, and before another month now, the situation would become unbearable between the two. He remained sitting there, with his arms hanging down, vaguely trying to discover some means to set matters straight, but without success, and he said to himself: "It is only lucky that I have George ... without him I should be very miserable."

Then he thought he would consult Limousin, but the recollection of the hatred that existed between his friend and the servant made him fear lest the former should advise him to turn her away, and again he was lost in doubts and unhappy uncertainty. Just then the clock struck seven, and he started up. Seven o'clock, and he had not even changed his clothes yet! Then nervous and breathless, he undressed, put on a clean shirt, and hastily finished his toilet, as if he had been expected in the next room for some event of extreme importance, went into the drawing-room, happy at having nothing to fear. He glanced at the newspaper, went and looked out of the window, and then sat down on the sofa again, when the door opened, and the boy came in, washed, brushed and smiling, and Parent took him up in his arms and kissed him passionately; then he tossed him

into the air, and held him up to the ceiling, but soon sat down again, as he was tired with all his efforts, and taking George onto his knee, he made him ride a cock-horse, and the child laughed and clapped his hands, and shouted with pleasure, as his father did also, for he laughed until his big stomach shook, for it amused him almost more than it did the child.

He loved him with all the heart of a weak, resigned, ill-used man. He loved with mad bursts of affection, with caresses and with all the bashful tenderness which was hidden in him, and which had never found an outlet, even at the early period of his married life, for his wife had always shown herself cold and reserved. Just then, however, Julie came to the door, with a pale face and glistening eyes, and she said in a voice which trembled with exasperation: "It is half past seven, Monsieur." Parent gave an uneasy and resigned look at the clock and replied: "Yes, it certainly is half past seven." "Well, my dinner is quite ready, now."

Seeing the storm which was coming, he tried to turn it aside. "But did you not tell me when I came in that it would not be ready before eight?" "Eight! what are you thinking about? You surely do not mean to let the child dine at eight o'clock? It would ruin his stomach. Just suppose that he only had his mother to look after him! She cares a great deal about her child. Oh! yes, we will speak about her; she is a mother. What a pity it is that there should be any mothers like her!"

Parent thought it was time to cut short a threatened scene, and so he said: "Julie, I will not allow you to speak like that of your mistress. You understand me, do you not? Do not forget it for the future."

The old servant, who was nearly choked with surprise, turned round and went out, slamming the door so violently after her, that the lusters on the chandelier rattled, and for some seconds it sounded as if a number of little invisible bells were ringing in the drawing room.

George who was surprised at first, began to clap his hands merrily, and blowing out his cheeks, he gave a great *boum* with all the strength of his lungs, to imitate the noise of the door banging. Then his father began to tell him stories, but his mind was so preoccupied that he every moment lost the thread of his story, and the child, who could not understand him, opened his eyes wide, in astonishment.

Parent never took his eyes off the clock; he thought he could see the hands move, and he would have liked to have stopped them, until his wife's return. He was not vexed with her for being late, but he was frightened, frightened of her and of Julie, frightened at the thought of all that might happen. Ten minutes more, would suffice to bring about an irreparable catastrophe, explanations and acts of violence that he did not dare to picture to himself. The mere idea of a quarrel, of their loud voices, of insults flying through the air like bullets, the two women standing face to face, looking at each other and flinging abuse at one another, made his heart beat, and his tongue as parched as if he had been walking in the sun, and made him as limp as a rag, so limp that he no longer had the strength to lift up the child, and to dance him on his knee.

Eight o'clock struck, the door opened once more and Julie came in again. She had lost her look of exasperation, but now she put on an air of cold and determined resolution, which was still more formidable. "Monsieur," she said, "I served your mother until the day of her death, and I have attended to you from your birth until now, and I think it may be said that I am devoted to the family." She waited for a reply, and Parent stammered: "Why yes, certainly, my good Julie." She continued: "You know quite well that I have never done anything for the sake of money, but always for your sake; that I have never deceived you nor lied to you, that you have never had to find fault with me..." "Certainly, my good Julie." "Very well, then, Monsieur, it cannot go on any longer like this. I have said nothing, and left you in your ignorance, out of respect and liking for you, but it is too much, and everyone in the neighborhood is laughing at you. Everybody knows about it, and so I must tell you also, although I do not like to repeat it. The reason why Madame comes in at any time she chooses is, that she is doing abominable things."

He seemed stupefied, and not to understand, and could only stammer out: "Hold your tongue, you know I have forbidden you ..." But she interrupted him with irresistible resolution. "No, Monsieur, I must tell you everything, now. For a long time Madame has been doing wrong with Monsieur Limousin, I have seen them kiss scores of times behind the doors. Ah! you may be sure that if Monsieur Limousin had been rich, Madame would never have married Monsieur Parent. If you remember how the marriage was brought about, you would understand the matter from beginning to end." Parent had risen, and stammered out, deadly pale: "Hold your tongue hold your tongue or

..." She went on, however: "No, I mean to tell you everything. She married you from interest, and she deceived you from the very first day. It was all settled between them beforehand. You need only reflect for a few moments to understand it, and then, as she was not satisfied with having married you, as she did not love you, she has made your life miserable, so miserable that it has almost broken my heart when I have seen it ..."

He walked up and down the room with his hands clenched, repeating: "Hold your tongue ... hold your tongue ..." for he could find nothing else to say; the old servant, however, would not yield; she seemed resolved on everything, but George, who had been at first astonished, and then frightened at those angry voices, began to utter shrill screams, and remained behind his father, and he roared with his face puckered up and his mouth open.

His son's screams exasperated Parent and filled him with rage and courage. He rushed at Julie with both arms raised, ready to strike her, and exclaiming: "Ah! you wretch! you will send the child out of his senses." He was already touching her, when she said: "Monsieur, you may beat me if you like, me who reared you, but that will not prevent your wife from deceiving you, or alter the fact that your child is not yours ..." He stopped suddenly, and let his arms fall, and he remained standing opposite to her, so overwhelmed that he could understand nothing more, and she added: "You need only look at the child to know who is its father! He is the very image of Monsieur Limousin, you need only look at his eyes and forehead, why, a blind man could not be mistaken in him...."

But he had taken her by the shoulders, and was now shaking her with all his might, while he said: "Viper ... viper! Go out the room, viper! ... go out, or I shall kill you! ... Go out! Go out! ..."

And with a desperate effort he threw her into the next room. She fell onto the table which was laid for dinner, breaking the glasses, and then, getting up, she put it between her master and herself, and while he was pursuing her, in order to take hold of her again, she flung terrible words at him: "You need only go out this evening after dinner, and come in again immediately ... and you will see! ... you will see whether I have been lying! Just try it ... and you will see." She had reached the kitchen door and escaped, but he ran after her, up the back stairs to her bedroom into which she had locked herself, and knocking at the door, he said! "You will leave my house this very instant." "You may be certain of that, Monsieur," was her reply. "In an hour's time I shall not be here any longer."

He then went slowly downstairs again, holding on to the banister, so as not to fall, and went back to the drawing-room, where little George was sitting on the floor, crying; he fell into a chair, and looked at the child with dull eyes. He understood nothing, be knew nothing more, he felt dazed, stupefied, mad, as if he had just fallen on his head, and he scarcely even remembered the dreadful things the servant had told him. Then, by degrees his reason grew clearer like muddy water, and the abominable revelation began to work in his heart.

Julie had spoken so clearly, with so much force, assurance and sincerity, that he did not doubt her good faith, but he persisted in not believing her penetration. She might have been deceived, blinded by her devotion to him, carried away by unconscious hatred for Henriette. However, in measure as he tried to reassure and to convince himself, a thousand small facts recurred to his recollection, his wife's words, Limousin's looks, a number of unobserved, almost unseen trifles, her going out late, their simultaneous absence, and even some almost insignificant, but strange gestures, which he could not understand, now assumed an extreme importance for him and established a connivance between them. Everything that had happened since his engagement, surged through his over-excited brain, in his misery, and he obstinately went through his five years of married life, trying to recollect every detail month by month, day by day, and every disquieting circumstance that he remembered stung him to the quick like a wasp's sting.

He was not thinking of George any more, who was quiet now and on the carpet, but seeing that no notice was being taken of him the boy began to cry. Then his father ran up to him, took him into his arms, and covered him with kisses. His child remained to him at any rate! What did the rest matter? He held him in his arms and pressed his lips onto his light hair, and relieved and composed, he whispered: "George, ... my little George, ... my dear little George ..." But he suddenly remembered what Julie had said! ... Yes! she had said that he was Limousin's child... Oh! It could not be possible, surely! He could not believe it, could not doubt, even for a moment, that he was his own child. It was one of those low scandals which spring from servants' brains! And he

repeated: "George ... my dear little George." The youngster was quiet again, now that his father was fondling him.

Parent felt the warmth of the little chest penetrate to his through their clothes, and it filled him with love, courage and happiness; that gentle heat soothed him, fortified him and saved him. Then he put the small, curly head away from him a little and looked at it affectionately, still repeating: "George! ... Oh! my little George! ..." But suddenly he thought, "Suppose he were to resemble Limousin, ... after all!"

There was something strange working within him, a fierce feeling, a poignant and violent sensation of cold in his whole body, in all his limbs, as if his bones had suddenly been turned to ice. Oh! if he were to resemble Limousin and he continued to look at George, who was laughing now. He looked at him with haggard, troubled eyes, and he tried to discover whether there was any likeness in his forehead, in his nose, mouth or cheeks. His thoughts wandered like they do when a person is going mad, and his child's face changed in his eyes, and assumed a strange look, and unlikely resemblances.

Julie had said: "A blind man could not be mistaken in him." There must, therefore, be something striking, an undeniable likeness! But what? The forehead? Yes, perhaps, Limousin's forehead, however, was narrower. The mouth then? But Limousin wore a beard, and how could any one verify the likeness between the fat chin of the child, and the hairy chin of that man?

Parent thought: "I cannot see anything now, I am too much upset; I could not recognize anything at present ... I must wait; I must look at him well to-morrow morning, when I am getting up." And immediately afterwards he said to himself: "But if he is like me, I shall be saved! saved!" And he crossed the drawing-room in two strides, to examine the child's face by the side of his own in the looking-glass. He had George on his arm, so that their faces might be close together, and he spoke out loud almost without knowing it. "Yes ... we have the same nose ... the same nose ... perhaps, but that is not sure ... and the same look ... But no, he has blue eyes ... Then good heavens! I shall go mad ... I cannot see anything more ... I am going mad!..."

He went away from the glass to the other end of the drawing-room, and putting the child into an easy chair, he fell into another and began to cry; and he sobbed so violently that George, who was frightened at hearing him, immediately began to scream.

The hall bell rang, and Parent gave a bound as if a bullet had gone through him. "There she is," he said ... "What shall I do? ..." And he ran and locked himself up in his room, so at any rate to have time to bathe his eyes. But in a few moments another ring at the bell made him jump again, and he remembered that Julie had left, without the housemaid knowing it, and so nobody would go to open the door. What was he to do? He went himself, and suddenly he felt brave, resolute, ready for dissimulation and the struggle. The terrible blow had matured him in a few moments, and then he wished to know the truth, he wished it with the rage of a timid man, and with the tenacity of an easy-going man, who has been exasperated.

But nevertheless he trembled! Was it fear? Yes . . . Perhaps he was still frightened of her? Does one know how much excited cowardice there often is in boldness? He went to the door with furtive steps, and stopped to listen; his heart beat furiously, and he heard nothing but the noise of that dull throbbing in his chest, and George's shrill voice, who was still crying in the drawing room. Suddenly, however, the noise of the bell over his head startled him like an explosion; then he seized the lock, turned the key and opening the door, saw his wife and Limousin standing before him on the stairs.

With an air of astonishment, which also betrayed a little irritation she said: "So you open the door now? Where is Julie?" His throat felt tight, and his breathing was labored and he tried to reply, without being able to utter a word, so she continued: "Are you dumb? I asked you where Julie is?" And then he managed to say: "She ... she ... has ... gone ..." Whereupon his wife began to get angry. "What do you mean by *gone*? Where has she gone? Why?" By degrees he regained his coolness, and he felt immense hatred for that insolent woman who was standing before him, rise up in him: "Yes, she has gone altogether ... I sent her away ..." "You have sent away Julie?... Why you must be mad." "Yes, I have sent her away because she was insolent ... and because, because she was ill-using the child." "Julie?" "Yes ... Julie." "What was she insolent about?" "About you." "About me?" "Yes, because the dinner was burnt, and you did not come in." "And she said ...?" "She said ... offensive things about you ... which I ought not ... which I could not listen to ..."

"What did she say?" "It is no good repeating them." "I want to hear them." "She said it was unfortunate for a man like me to be married to a woman like you, unpunctual, careless, disorderly, a bad mother and a bad wife ..."

The young woman had gone into the anteroom followed by Limousin, who did not say a word at this unexpected position of things. She shut the door quickly, threw her cloak onto a chair, and going straight up to her husband, she stammered out: "You say? ... you say? ... that I am ...?"

He was very pale and calm and replied: "I say nothing, my dear. I am simply repeating what Julie said to me, as you wanted to know what it was, and I wish you to remark that I turned her off just on account of what she said."

She trembled with a violent longing to tear out his beard and scratch his face. In his voice and manner she felt that he was asserting his position as master, although she had nothing to say by way of reply, and she tried to assume the offensive, by saying something unpleasant: "I suppose you have had dinner?" she asked.

"No, I waited for you." She shrugged her shoulders impatiently. "It is very stupid of you to wait after half past seven," she said. "You might have guessed that I was detained, that I had a good many things to do, visits and shopping."

And then suddenly, she felt that she wanted to explain how she had spent her time, and she told him in abrupt, haughty words, that having to buy some furniture in a shop a long distance off, very far off, in the *Rue de Rennes*, she had met Limousin at past seven o'clock on the *Boulevard Saint-Germain*, and that then she had gone with him to have something to eat in a restaurant, as she did not like to go to one by herself, although she was faint with hunger. That was how she had dined, with Limousin, if it could be called dining, for they had only had some soup and half a fowl, as they were in a great hurry to get back, and Parent replied simply: "Well, you were quite right. I am not finding fault with you."

Then Limousin, who had not spoken till then, and who had been half hidden behind Henriette, came forward, and put out his hand, saying: "Are you very well?" Parent took his hand, and shaking it gently, replied: "Yes, I am very well." But the young woman had felt a reproach in her husband's last words. "Finding fault! ... Why do you speak of finding fault? ... One might think that you meant to imply something." "Not at all," he replied, by way of excuse. "I simply meant, that I was not at all anxious although you were late, and that I did not find fault with you for it." She, however, took the high hand, and tried to find a pretext for a quarrel. "Although I was late? ... One might really think that it was one o'clock in the morning, and that I spent my nights away from home." "Certainly not, my dear. I said *late*, because I could find no other word. You said you should be back at half past six, and you returned at half past eight. That was surely being late! I understand it perfectly well ... I am not at all surprised ... even. But ... but ... I can hardly use any other word." "But you pronounce them, as if I had been out all night." "Oh! no, ... oh! no ..."

She saw that he would yield on every point, and she was going into her own room, when at last she noticed that George was screaming, and then she asked, with some feeling: "Whatever is the matter with the child?" "I told you, that Julie had been rather unkind to him?" "What has the wretch been doing to him?" "Oh! Nothing much. She gave him a push, and he fell down."

She wanted to see her child, and ran into the dining-room but stopped short at the sight of the table covered with spilt wine, with broken decanters and glasses and overturned salt-cellars. "Who did all that mischief?" she asked. "It was Julie who ..." But she interrupted him furiously: "That is too much, really! Julie speaks of me as if I were a shameless woman, beats my child, breaks my plates and dishes, turns my house upside down, and it appears that you think it all quite natural." "Certainly not, as I have got rid of her!" "Really ... you have got rid of her! ... But you ought to have given her in charge. In such cases, one ought to call in the Commissary of Police!" "But ... my dear ... I really could not ... there was no reason ... It would have been very difficult." She shrugged her shoulders disdainfully.

"There, you will never be anything but a poor, wretched fellow, a man without a will, without any firmness or energy. Ah! she must have said some nice things to you, your Julie, to make you turn her off like that. I should like to have been here for a minute, only for a minute." Then she opened the drawing-room door and ran to George, took him into her arms and kissed him, and said: "Georgie, what is it, my darling, my pretty one, my treasure?" But as she was fondling him he did

not speak, and she repeated: "What is the matter with you?" And he having seen, with his child's eyes, that something was wrong, replied: "Julie beat papa."

Henriette turned towards her husband, in stupefaction at first, but then an irresistible desire to laugh shone in her eyes, passed like a slight shiver over her delicate cheeks, made her upper lip curl and her nostrils dilate, and at last a clear, bright burst of mirth came from her lips, a torrent of gayety which was lively and sonorous as the song of a bird. She repeated, with little mischievous exclamations which issued from between her white teeth, and hurt Parent as much as a bite would have done: "Ha!... ha!... ha!... ha! she beat ... she beat ... my husband ... ha!... ha! ha!... How funny!... Do you hear, Limousin? Julie has beaten ... has beaten ... my ... husband ... Oh! dear oh! dear ... how very funny!"

But Parent protested: "No ... no ... it is not true, it is not true ... It was I, on the contrary, who threw her into the dining room so violently that she knocked the table over. The child did not see clearly, I beat her!" "Here, my darling." Henriette said to her boy "did Julie beat papa?" "Yes, it was Julie," he replied. But then, suddenly turning to another idea, she said, "But the child has had no dinner? You have had nothing to eat, my pet?" "No, mamma." Then she again turned furiously onto her husband. "Why, you must be mad, utterly mad! It is half past eight, and George has had no dinner!"

He excused himself as best he could, for he had nearly lost his wits by the overwhelming scene and the explanation, and felt crushed by this ruin of his life. "But, my dear, we were waiting for you, as I did not wish to dine without you. As you come home late every day, I expected you every moment."

She threw her bonnet, which she had kept on till then, into an easy chair, and in an angry voice she said: "It is really intolerable to have to do with people who can understand nothing, who can divine nothing, and do nothing by themselves. So, I suppose, if I were to come in at twelve o'clock at night, the child would have had nothing to eat? Just as if you could not have understood that, as it was after half past seven, I was prevented from coming home, that I had met with some hindrance!..."

Parent trembled, for he felt that his anger was getting the upper hand, but Limousin interposed and turning towards the young woman, he said: "My dear friend, you are altogether unjust. Parent could not guess that you would come here so late, as you never do so, and then, how would you expect him to get over the difficulty all by himself, after having sent away Julie?"

But Henriette was very angry and replied "Well, at any rate, he must get over the difficulty himself, for I will not help him. Let him settle it". And she went into her own room, quite forgetting that her child had not had anything to eat.

Then Limousin immediately set to work to help his friend. He picked up the broken glass which strewed the table and took them out. He replaced the plates, knives and forks and put the child into his high chair. While Parent went to look for the lady's maid, to wait at table; who came in great astonishment. As she had heard nothing in George's room, where she had been working. She soon however, brought in the soup, a burnt leg of mutton, and mashed potatoes.

Parent sat by the side of the child, very much upset and distressed at all that had happened. He gave the boy his dinner, and endeavored to eat something him self. But he could only swallow with an effort, as if his throat had been paralyzed. By degrees, he was seized by an insane desire of looking at Limousin who was sitting opposite to him and making bread pellets, to see whether George was like him, but he did not venture to raise his eyes for some time; at last, however, he made up his mind to do so, and gave a quick, sharp look at the face which he knew so well, although he almost fancied that he had never looked at it carefully, as it looked so different to what he had fancied. From time to time he looked at him, trying to recognize a likeness in the smallest lines of his face, in the slightest features, and then he looked at his son, under the pretext of feeding him.

Two words were sounding in his ears "His father! his father! his father!" They buzzed in his temples at every beat of his heart. Yes, that man, that tranquil man who was sitting on the other side of the table was, perhaps, the father of his son, of George, of his little George. Parent left off eating; he could not manage any more; a terrible pain, one of those attacks of pain which make men scream, roll on the ground and bite the furniture, was tearing at his entrails, and he felt

inclined to take a knife and plunge it into his stomach. It would ease him and save him, and all would be over.

For could he live now? Could he get up in the morning, join in the meals, go out into the streets, go to bed at night and sleep with that idea dominating him: "Limousin is Little George's father!" No, he would not have the strength to walk a step, to dress himself, to think of anything, to speak to anybody! Every day, every hour, every moment, he should be trying to know, to guess, to discover this terrible secret. And the little boy, his dear little boy, he could not look at him any more without enduring the terrible pains of that doubt, of being tortured by it to the very marrow of his bones. He would be obliged to live there, to remain in that house, with that child whom he should love and hate! Yes, he should certainly end by hating him. What torture! Oh! If he were sure that Limousin was his father, he might, perhaps, grow calm, become accustomed to his misfortune and his pain, but not to know, was intolerable.

Not to know, to be always trying to find out, to be continually suffering, to kiss the child every moment, another man's child, to take him out for walks, to carry him, to caress him, to love him, and to think continually: "Perhaps he is not my child? Would it not be better not to see him, to abandon him,—to lose him in the streets, or to go away, far away, himself so far away that he should never hear anything more spoken about, never!"

He started when he heard the door open. His wife came. "I am hungry," she said; "are not you also, Limousin?" He hesitated a little, and then said: "Yes, I am, upon my word." And she had the leg of mutton brought in again, while Parent asked himself: "Have they had dinner? Or are they late because they have had a lovers' meeting?"

They both ate with a very good appetite. Henriette was very calm, but laughed and joked, and her husband watched her furtively. She had on a pink dressing gown trimmed with white lace, and her fair head, her white neck and her plump hands stood out from that coquettish and perfumed dress, like from a sea shell, edged with foam. What had she been doing all day with that man? Parent could see them kissing, and stammering out words of ardent love! How was it that he could not manage to know everything, to guess the whole truth, by looking at them, sitting side by side, opposite to him?

What fun they must be making of him, if he had been their dupe since the first day? Was it possible to make a fool of a man, of a worthy man, because his father had left him a little money? Why could one not see these things in people's souls, how was it that nothing revealed to upright hearts the deceits of infamous hearts, how was it that voices had the same sound for adoring as for lying, why was a false, deceptive look the same as a sincere one? And he watched them waiting to catch a gesture, a word, an intonation; then suddenly he thought: "I will surprise them this evening," and he said: "My dear, as I have dismissed Julie, I will see about getting another this very day, and I shall go out immediately to procure one by to-morrow morning, so I may not be in until late."

"Very well," she replied; "go, I shall not stir from here. Limousin will keep me company. We will wait for you." And then, turning to the maid, she said: "You had better put George to bed, and then you can clear away and go up to your own room."

Parent had got up; he was unsteady on his legs, dazed and giddy, and saying: "I shall see you again later on," he went out, holding onto the wall, for the floor seemed to roll, like a ship. George had been carried out by his nurse, whilst Henriette and Limousin went into the drawing-room, and as soon as the door was shut, he said: "You must be mad, surely, to torment your husband as you do?" She immediately turned on him: "Ah! Do you know that I think the habit you have got into lately, of looking upon Parent as a martyr, is very unpleasant?"

Limousin threw himself into an easy-chair, and crossed his legs: "I am not setting him up as a martyr in the least, but I think that, situated as we are, it is ridiculous to defy this man as you do, from morning till night." She took a cigarette from the mantel-piece, lighted it, and replied: "But I do not defy him, quite the contrary; only, he irritates me by his stupidity ... and I treat him as he deserves." Limousin continued impatiently: "What you are doing is very foolish! However, all women are alike. Look here: he is an excellent, kind fellow, stupidly confiding and good, who never interferes with us, who does not suspect us for a moment, who leaves us quite free and undisturbed, whenever we like, and you do all you can to put him into a rage and to spoil our life."

She turned to him: "I say, you worry me. You are a coward, like all other men are! You are frightened of that poor creature!" He immediately jumped up and said, furiously: "I should like to know what he does, and why you are so set against him? Does he make you unhappy? Does he beat you? Does he deceive you and go with another woman? No, it is really too bad to make him suffer, merely because he is too kind, and to hate him merely because you are unfaithful to him." She went up to Limousin, and looking him full in the face, she said: "And you reproach me with deceiving him? You? You? What a filthy heart you must have?"

He felt rather ashamed, and tried to defend himself: "I am not reproaching you, my dear; I am only asking you to treat your husband gently, because we both of us require him to trust us. I think that you ought to see that."

They were close together; he, tall, dark, with long whiskers, and the rather vulgar manners of a good-looking man, who is very well satisfied with himself; she, small, fair and pink, a little Parisian, half shopkeeper, half one of those of easy virtue, born behind a shop, brought up at its door to entice customers by her looks, and married, accidentally, in consequence to a simple, unsophisticated man, who saw her outside the door every morning when he went out, and every evening when he came home.

"But do you not understand, you great booby," she said, "that I hate him just because he married me, because he bought me; in fact, because everything that he says and does, everything that he thinks, acts on my nerves? He exasperates me every moment by his stupidity, which you call his kindness, by his dullness, which you call his confidence, and then, above all, because he is my husband, instead of you! I feel him between us, although he does not interfere with us much. And then?... and then?... No, it is, after all, too idiotic of him not to guess anything! I wish he would at any rate be a little jealous. There are moments when I feel inclined to say to him: 'Do you not see, you stupid creature, that Paul is my lover?'"

Limousin began to laugh: "Meanwhile, it would be a good thing if you were to keep quiet, and not disturb our life." "Oh! I shall not disturb it, you may be sure! There is nothing to fear, with such a fool. No; but it is quite incomprehensible that you cannot understand how hateful he is to me, how he irritates me. You always seem to like him, and you shake hands with him cordially. Men are very surprising at times."

"One must know how to dissimulate, my dear." "It is no question of dissimulation, but of feeling. One might think that, when you men deceive another, you liked him all the more on that account, while we women hate the man from the moment that we have betrayed him." "I do not see why one should hate an excellent fellow, because one has his wife." "You do not see it?... You do not see it?... You all of you are wanting in that fineness of feeling! However, that is one of those things which one feels, and which one cannot express. And then, moreover, one ought not.... No, you would not understand; it is quite useless. You men have no delicacy of feeling."

And smiling, with the gentle contempt of a debauched woman, she put both her hands onto his shoulders and held up her lips to him, and he stooped down and clasped her closely in his arms, and their lips met. And as they stood in front of the chimney glass, another couple exactly like them, embraced behind the clock.

They heard nothing, neither the noise of the key, nor the creaking of the door, but suddenly Henriette, with a loud cry, pushed Limousin away with both her arms, and they saw Parent, who was looking at them, livid with rage, without his shoes on, and his hat over his forehead. He looked at them, one after the other, with a quick glance of his eyes without moving his head. He appeared mad, and then, without saying a word, he threw himself on Limousin; he seized him as if he were going to strangle him, and flung him into the opposite corner of the room so violently that the other lost his balance, and beating the air with his hand, cracked against the wall with his head.

But when Henriette saw that her husband was going to murder her lover, she threw herself onto Parent, seized him by the neck and digging her ten delicate and rosy fingers into his neck, she squeezed him so tightly, with all the vigor of a desperate woman, that the blood spurted out under her nails, and she bit his shoulder, as if she wished to tear it with her teeth. Parent, half-strangled and choked, loosened his hold on Limousin, in order to shake off his wife, who was hanging onto his neck; and putting his arms around her waist, he flung her also to the other end of the drawing-room.

Then, as his passion was short-lived, like that of most good-tempered men, and his strength was soon exhausted, he remained standing between the two, panting, worn out, not knowing what to do next. His brutal fury had expended itself in that effort, like the froth of a bottle of champagne, and his unwonted energy ended in a want of breath. As soon as he could speak, however he said: "Go away ... both of you ... immediately ... go away!..."

Limousin remained motionless in his corner, against the wall, too startled to understand anything as yet, too frightened to move a finger, while Henriette, with her hands resting on a small, round table, her head bent forward, with her hair hanging down, the bodice of her dress unfastened and bosom bare, waited like a wild animal which is about to spring, and Parent went on, in a stronger voice: "Go away immediately.... Get out of the house!"

His wife, however, seeing that he had got over his first exasperation, grew bolder, drew herself up, took two steps towards him, and grown almost insolent already, she said: "Have you lost your head?... What is the matter with you?... What is the meaning of this unjustifiable violence?" But he turned towards her, and raising his fist to strike her, he stammered out: "Oh!... oh!... this is too much!... too much!... I ... heard everything! Everything!... do you understand?... Everything!... you wretch ... you wretch ... you are two wretches!... Get out of the house!... both of you!... Immediately ... or I shall kill you!... Leave the house!..."

She saw that it was all over, and that he knew everything, that she could not prove her innocence, and that she must comply, but all her impudence had returned to her, and her hatred for the man, which was exasperated now, drove her to audacity, made her feel the need of bravadoes, and of defying him, and so she said in a clear voice: "Come, Limousin, as he is going to turn me out of doors, I will go to your lodgings with you."

But Limousin did not move, and Parent, in a fresh access of rage, cried out: "Go, will you! go, you wretches!... or else!... or else!..." and he seized a chair and whirled it over his head.

Then Henriette walked quickly across the room, took her lover by the arm, dragged him from the wall to which he appeared fixed, and dragged him towards the door, saying: "Do come, my friend ... you see that the man is mad.... Do come!"

As she went out, she turned round to her husband, trying to think of something that she could do, something that she could invent to wound him to the heart as she left the house, and an idea struck her, one of those venomous, deadly ideas in which all a woman's perfidy shows itself, and she said resolutely: "I am going to take my child with me."

Parent was stupefied and stammered: "Your ... your ... child? You dare to talk of your child?... You venture ... you venture to ask for your child ... after ... after ... Oh! oh! that is too much!... Go, you horrid wretch!... Go!..." She went up to him again, almost smiling, almost avenged already, and defying him, standing close to him, and face to face, she said: "I want my child, and you have no right to keep him, because he is not yours ... do you understand?... he is not yours ... he is Limousin's." And Parent cried out in bewilderment: "You lie ... you lie you wretch!"

But she continued: "You fool! Everybody knows it, except you. I tell you, this is his father. You need only look at him, to see it...."

Parent staggered back from her, and then he suddenly turned round, took a candle and rushed into the next room; almost immediately, however, he returned, carrying little George, wrapped up in his bed clothes, and the child, who had been suddenly awakened, was crying with fright. Parent threw him into his wife's arms, and then, without saying anything more, he pushed her roughly out, towards the stairs, where Limousin was waiting, from motives of prudence.

Then he shut the door again, double-locked it, and bolted it, and he had scarcely got into the drawing-room, when he fell onto the floor at full length.

II

Parent lived alone, quite alone. During the five weeks that followed their separation, the feeling of surprise at his new life, prevented him from thinking much. He had resumed his bachelor life, his habits of lounging about, and he took his meals at a restaurant, as he had done formerly. As he had wished to avoid any scandal, he made his wife an allowance, which was settled by their lawyers.

By degrees, however, the thoughts of the child began to haunt him. Often, when he was at home alone at night, he suddenly thought he heard George calling out *papa*, and his heart used to begin to beat, and he got up quickly and opened the door to see whether, by chance, the child might have returned, like dogs or pigeons do. Why should a child have less instinct than an animal?

After finding that he was mistaken, he went and sat down in his armchair again and thought of the boy, and he thought of him for hours, and whole days. It was not only a moral, but still more a physical obsession, a nervous longing to kiss him, to hold and fondle him, to take him onto his knees and dance him. He felt the child's little arms round his neck, his little mouth pressing a kiss on his beard, his soft hair tickling his cheeks, and the remembrance of all those childish ways, made him suffer like the desire for some beloved woman, who has run away, and then twenty or a hundred times a day he asked himself the question, whether he was or was not George's father, and at night, especially, he indulged in interminable speculations on the point, and almost before he was in bed, he every night recommenced the same series of despairing arguments.

After his wife's departure, he had at first not felt the slightest doubt; certainly the child was Limousin's, but by degrees he began to waver. Henriette's words could not be of any value. She had merely braved him, and tried to drive him to desperation, and calmly weighing the *pros* and *cons*, there seemed to be every chance that she had lied, though perhaps only Limousin could tell the truth. But how was he to find it out, how could he question him or persuade him to confess the real facts?

Sometimes Parent would get up in the middle of the night, fully determined to go and see Limousin and to beg him, to offer him anything he wanted, to put an end to this intolerable misery. Then he went back to bed in despair, reflecting that her lover would also lie, no doubt! He would be even sure to lie, in order to prevent him from taking away the child, if he were really his father. What could he do, then? Absolutely nothing!

And he was sorry that he had thus suddenly brought about the crisis, that he had not taken time for reflection, that he had not waited and dissimulated for a month or two, so as to find out for himself. He ought to have pretended to suspect nothing, and have allowed them to betray themselves at their leisure. It would have been enough for him, to see the other kiss the child, to guess and to understand. A friend does not kiss a child as a father does. He should have watched them behind the doors. Why had he not thought of that? If Limousin, when left alone with George, had not at once taken him up, clasped him in his arms and kissed him passionately; if he had looked on indifferently while he was playing, without taking any notice of him, no doubt or hesitation could have been possible; in that case he would not have been the father, he would not have thought that he was, would not have felt that he was. Thus Parent would have kept the child, while he got rid of the mother, and he would have been happy, perfectly happy.

He tossed about in bed, hot and unhappy, trying to recollect Limousin's ways with the child. But he could not remember anything suspicious, not a gesture, not a look, neither word nor caress. And the child's mother took very little notice of him, and if she had had him by her lover, she would, no doubt, have loved him more.

They had, therefore, separated him from his son, from vengeance, from cruelty, to punish him for having surprised them, and he made up his mind to go the next morning and obtain the magistrate's assistance to gain possession of George, but almost as soon as he had formed that resolution, he felt assured of the contrary. From the moment that Limousin had been Henriette's lover, her adored lover, she would certainly have given herself up to him, from the very first, with that ardor of self-abandonment which makes women conceive. The cold reserve which she had always shown in her intimate relations with him, Parent, was surely also an obstacle to her having been fecundated by his embrace.

In that case he would be claiming, he would take with him, constantly keep and look after, the child of another man. He would not be able to look at him, kiss him, hear him say "Papa" without being struck and tortured by the thought, "he is not my child." He was going to condemn himself to that torture, and that wretched life every moment! No, it would be better to live alone, to grow old alone, and to die alone.

And every day and every night, these dreadful doubts and sufferings, which nothing could calm or end, recommenced. He especially dreaded the darkness of the evening, the melancholy feeling of the twilight. Then a flood of sorrow invaded his heart, a torrent of despair, which seemed to

overwhelm him and drive him mad. He was as frightened of his own thoughts as men are of criminals, and he fled before them as one does from wild beasts. Above all things he feared his empty, dark, horrible dwelling, and the deserted streets, in which, here and there, a gas lamp flickers, where the isolated foot passenger whom one hears in the distance seems to be a night-prowler, and makes one walk faster or slower, according to whether he is coming towards you or following you.

And in spite of himself, and by instinct, Parent went in the direction of the broad, well-lighted, populous streets. The light and the crowd attracted him, occupied his mind and distracted his thoughts, and when he was tired of walking aimlessly about amongst the moving crowd, when he saw the foot passengers becoming more scarce, and the pavements less crowded, the fear of solitude and silence drove him into some large *café* full of drinkers and of light. He went there like flies go to a candle, and he used to sit down at one of the little round tables, and ask for a *bock*[1], which he used to drink slowly, feeling uneasy every time that a customer got up to go. He would have liked to take him by the arm, hold him back and beg him to stay a little longer, so much did he dread the time when the waiter would come up to him and say angrily: "Come, Monsieur, it is closing time!"

For every evening he stopped last. He saw them carry in the tables, turn out the gas jets one by one, except his and that at the counter. He looked unhappily at the cashier counting the money and locking it up in the drawer, and then he went, being usually pushed out by the waiters, who murmured: "Another one who has too much! One might think he had no place to sleep in."

As soon as he was alone in the dark street, he began to think of George again, and to rack his brains in trying to discover whether or not he was this child's father.

He thus became in the habit of going to the beer houses, where the continual elbowing of the drinkers brings you in contact with a familiar and silent public, where the heavy clouds of tobacco smoke lulls disquietude, while the heavy beer dulls the mind and calms the heart. He almost lived there. He was scarcely up, before he went there to find people to occupy his looks and his thoughts, and soon, as he felt too idle to move, he took his meals there. About twelve o'clock he used to rap on the marble table, and the waiter quickly brought a plate, a glass, a table napkin, and his lunch when he had ordered it. When he had done, he slowly drank his cup of black coffee, with his eyes fixed on the decanter of brandy, which would soon procure him an hour or two of forgetfulness. First of all he dipped his lips into the cognac, as if to get the flavor of it with the tip of his tongue. Then he threw his head back and poured it into his mouth, drop by drop, and turned the strong liquor over on his palate, his gums and the mucous membrane of his cheeks, and then he swallowed it slowly, and felt it going down his throat, and into his stomach.

After every meal he thus during more than an hour, sipped three or four small glasses of brandy, which stupefied him by degrees, and then his head dropped onto his chest, he shut his eyes and went to sleep: then, having drunk it, he raised himself on the seat covered with red velvet, pulled his trousers up, and his waistcoat down, so as to cover the linen which appeared between the two, drew down his shirt sleeves and took up the newspapers again, which he had already read in the morning, and read them all through again, from beginning to end, and between four and five o'clock he went for a walk on the boulevards, to get a little fresh air, as he used to say, and then came back to the seat which had been reserved for him, and asked for his absinthe. He used to talk to the regular customers, whose acquaintance he had made. They discussed the news of the day, and political events, and that carried him on till dinner-time, and he spent the evening like he had the afternoon, until it was time to close. That was a terrible moment for him, when he was obliged to go out into the dark, into the empty room full of dreadful recollections, of horrible thoughts and of mental agony. He no longer saw any of his old friends, none of his relations, nobody who might remind him of his past life. But as his apartments were a hell to him, he took a room in a large hotel, a good room on the ground floor, so as to see the passers-by. He was no longer alone in that great building, he felt people swarming round him, he heard voices in the adjoining rooms, and when his former sufferings tormented him too much at the sight of his bed which was turned back, and of his solitary fire-place, he went out into the wide passages and walked up and down them like a sentinel, before all the closed doors, and looked sadly at the shoes standing in couples outside each, women's little boots by the side of men's thick ones, and he thought that no doubt all these people were happy, and were sleeping sweetly side by side or in each other's arms, in their warm bed.

Five years passed thus; five miserable years with no other events except from time to time a passing love affair which lasted a couple of hours at the cost of forty francs. But one day when he was taking his usual walk between the *Madeleine* and the *Rue Drouot*, he suddenly saw a lady, whose bearing struck him. A tall gentleman and a child were with her, and all three were walking in front of him. He asked himself where he had seen them before, when suddenly he recognized a movement of her hand: it was his wife, his wife with Limousin and his child, his little George.

His heart beat as if it would suffocate him, but he did not stop, for he wished to see them and he followed them. They looked like a family of the better middle class. Henriette was leaning on Paul's arm and speaking to him in a low voice and looking at him sideways occasionally. Parent saw her side face, and recognized its graceful outlines, the movements of her lips, her smile and her caressing looks, but the child chiefly took up his attention. How tall and strong he was! Parent could not see his face, but only his long, fair curls. That tall boy with bare legs, who was walking by his mother's side like a little man, was George.

He saw them suddenly, all three, as they stopped in front of a shop. Limousin had grown very gray, had aged, and was thinner; his wife, on the contrary, was as young looking as ever, and had grown stouter; George he would not have recognized, he was so different to what he had been formerly.

They went on again, and Parent followed them, then walked on quickly, passed them and then turned round, so as to meet them face to face. As he passed the child he felt a mad longing to take him into his arms and run off with him, and he knocked against him as if it were accidentally. The boy turned round and looked at the clumsy man angrily, and Parent went off hastily, struck and hurt by the look. He went off like a thief, seized by a horrible fear lest he should have been seen and recognized by his wife and her lover, and he went to his *café* without stopping, and fell breathless into his chair, and that evening he drank three absinthes.

For four months he felt the pain of that meeting in his heart. Every night he saw the three again, happy and tranquil, father, mother and child walking on the boulevard before going in to dinner, and that new vision effaced the old one. It was another matter, another hallucination now, and also a fresh pain. Little George, his little George, the child he had so much loved and so often kissed formerly, disappeared in the far distance, and he saw a new one, like a brother of the first, a little boy with bare legs, who did not know him! He suffered terribly at that thought. The child's love was dead; there was no bond between them; the child would not have held out his arms when he saw him. He had even looked at him angrily.

Then, by degrees he grew calmer, his mental torture diminished, the image that had appeared to his eyes and which haunted his nights became more indistinct and less frequent. He began once more to live nearly like everybody else, like all those idle people who drink beer off marble topped tables and wear out the seats of their trousers on the threadbare velvet of the couches.

He grew old amidst the smoke from the pipes, lost his hair under the gas lights, looked upon his weekly bath, on his fortnightly visit to the barber's to have his hair cut, and on the purchase of a new coat or hat, as an event. When he got to his *café* in a new hat covering he used to look at himself in the glass for a long time before sitting down, and took it off and put it on again several times following, and at last asked his friend, the lady at the bar, who was watching him with interest, whether she thought it suited him.

Two or three times a year he went to the theater, and in the summer he sometimes spent his evenings at one of the open air concerts in the *Champs-Elysées*. He brought back from them some airs which ran in his head for several weeks, and which he even hummed, beating time with his foot, while he was drinking his beer, and so the years followed each other, slow, monotonous and short, because they were quite uneventful.

He did not feel them glide past him. He went on towards death without fear or agitation, sitting at a table in a *café*, and only the great glass against which he rested his head, which was every day becoming balder, reflected the ravages of time which flies and devours men, poor men.

He only very rarely now thought of the terrible drama which had wrecked his life, for twenty years had passed since that terrible evening, but the life he had led since then had worn him out, and the landlord of his café would often say to him: "You ought to pull yourself together a little, Monsieur Parent; you should get some fresh air and go into the country; I assure you that you have changed very much within the last few months." And when his customer had gone out, he used to say to the

barmaid: "That poor Monsieur Parent is booked for another world; it is no good never to go out of Paris. Advise him to go out of town for a day occasionally; he has confidence in you. It is nice weather, and will do him good." And she, full of pity and good will for such a regular customer, said to Parent every day: "Come, Monsieur, make up your mind to get a little fresh air; it is so charming in the country when the weather is fine. Oh! If I could, I would spend my life there."

And she told him her dreams, the simple and poetical dreams of all the poor girls who are shut up from one year's end to the other in a shop and who see the noisy life of the streets go while they think of the calm and pleasant life in the country, of life under the trees, under the bright sun shining on the meadows, of deep woods and clear rivers, of cows lying in the grass, and of all the different flowers, blue, red, yellow, purple, lilac, pink and white, which are so pretty, so fresh, so sweet, all the wild flowers which one picks as one walks, and makes into large nosegays.

She liked to speak to him frequently of her continual, unrealized and unrealizable longing, and he, an old man without hope, was fond of listening to her, and used to go and sit near the counter to talk to Mademoiselle Zoé and to discuss the country with her. Then, by degrees he was seized by a vague desire to go just once and see whether it was really so pleasant there, as she said, outside the walls of the great city, and so one morning he said to her: "Do you know where one can get a good lunch in the neighborhood of Paris?" "Go to the Terrace at Saint-Germain; it is delightful there!"

He had been there formerly, just when he had got engaged, and so he made up his mind to go there again, and he chose a Sunday without any special reason, but merely because people generally do go out on Sundays, even when they have nothing to do all the week, and so one Sunday morning he went to Saint-Germain. It was at the beginning of July, on a very bright and hot day. Sitting by the door of the railway-carriage, he watched the trees and the strangely built little houses in the outskirts of Paris fly past. He felt low-spirited, and vexed at having yielded to that new longing, and at having broken through his usual habits. The view, which was continually changing, and always the same, wearied him. He was thirsty; he would have liked to get out at every station and sit down in the *café* which he saw outside and drink a *bock* or two, and then take the first train back to Paris. And then, the journey seemed very long to him. He used to remain sitting for whole days, as long as he had the same motionless objects before his eyes, but he found it very trying and fatiguing to remain sitting while he was being whirled along, and to see the whole country fly by, while he himself was motionless.

However, he found the Seine interesting, every time he crossed it. Under the bridge at Chatou he saw some skiffs going at great pace under the vigorous strokes of the bare-armed oarsmen, and he thought: "There are some fellows who are certainly enjoying themselves!" And then the train entered the tunnel just before you get to the station at Saint-Germain, and soon stopped at the arrival platform, where Parent got out, and walked slowly, for he already felt tired, towards the *Terrace*, with his hands behind his back, and when he got to the iron balustrade, he stopped to look at the distant horizon. The vast plain spread out before him like the sea, green, and studded with large villages, almost as populous as towns. White roads crossed it, and it was well wooded in places; the ponds at Vesinet glistened like plates of silver, and the distant ridges of Sannois and Argenteuil were covered with light, bluish mist, so that they could scarcely be distinguished. The sun bathed the whole landscape in its full, warm light, and the Seine, which twined like an endless serpent through the plain, flowed round the villages and along the slopes, and Parent inhaled the warm breeze which seemed to make his heart young again, to enliven his spirits and to vivify his blood, and said to himself: "It is very nice here."

Then he went on a few steps, and stopped again to look about him, and the utter misery of his existence seemed to be brought out into full relief, by the intense light which inundated the country. He saw his twenty years of *café*-life, dull, monotonous, heart-breaking. He might have traveled like others did, have gone amongst foreigners, to unknown countries beyond the sea, have interested himself somewhat in everything which other men are passionately devoted to, in arts and sciences, he might have enjoyed life in a thousand forms, that mysterious life which is either charming or painful, constantly changing, always inexplicable and strange. Now, however, it was too late. He would go on drinking *bock* after *bock* until he died, without any family, without friends, without hope, without any curiosity about anything, and he was seized with a feeling of misery and a wish to run away, to hide himself in Paris, in his *café* and his befuddlement! All the thoughts, all the dreams, all the desires which are dormant in the sloth of stagnating hearts, had reawakened, being brought to life by those rays of sunlight on the plain.

He felt that if he were to remain there any longer, he should lose his head, and so he made haste to get to the *Pavillon Henri IV* for lunch, to try and forget his troubles under the influence of wine and alcohol, and at any rate to have someone to speak to.

He took a small table in one of the arbors, from which one can see all the surrounding country, ordered his lunch and asked to be served at once. Then some more people arrived and sat down at tables near him and he felt more comfortable; he was no longer alone. Three persons were lunching near him, and he had looked at them two or three times without seeing them clearly, as one looks at total strangers, but suddenly a woman's voice sent a shiver through him, which seemed to penetrate to his very marrow. "George," it had said, "will you carve the chicken?" And another replied: "Yes, Mamma."

Parent looked up, and he understood, he guessed immediately who those people were! He should certainly not have known them again. His wife had grown quite white and very stout, an old, serious, respectable lady, and she held her head forwards as she ate, for fear of spotting her dress, although she had a table napkin tucked under her chin. George had become a man; he had a slight beard, that unequal and almost colorless beard which becurls the cheeks of youths. He wore a high hat, a white waistcoat and a single eyeglass, because it looked dandified, no doubt. Parent looked at him in astonishment! Was that George, his son? No, he did not know that young man; there could be nothing in common between them. Limousin had his back to him, and was eating, with his shoulders rather bent.

Well, all three of them seemed happy and satisfied; they came and dined in the country, at well-known restaurants. They had had a calm and pleasant existence, a family existence in a warm and comfortable house, filled with all those trifles which make life agreeable, with affection, with all those tender words which people exchange continually when they love each other. They had lived thus, thanks to him, Parent, on his money, after having deceived him, robbed him, ruined him! They had condemned him, the innocent, the simple-minded, the jovial man to all the miseries of solitude, to that abominable life which he had led between the pavement and the counter, every moral torture and every physical misery! They had made him a useless being, who was lost and wretched amongst other people, a poor old man without any pleasures, or anything to look forward to, and who hoped for nothing from anyone. For him, the world was empty, because he loved nothing in the world. He might go among other nations or go about the streets, go into all the houses in Paris, open every room, but he would not find the beloved face, the face of wife or child, that he was in search of, and which smiles when it sees you, behind any door. And that idea worked upon him more than any other, the idea of a door which one opens, to see and to embrace somebody behind it.

And that was the fault of those three wretches! the fault of that worthless woman, of that infamous friend and of that tall, light-haired lad who put on insolent airs. Now, he felt as angry with the child as he did with the other two! Was he not Limousin's son? Would Limousin have kept him and loved him, otherwise would not Limousin very quickly have got rid of the mother and of the child if he had not felt sure that it was his, certainly his? Does anybody bring up other people's children? And now they were there, quite close to him, those three who had made him suffer so much.

Parent looked at them, irritated and excited at the recollection of all his sufferings and of his despair, and was especially exasperated at their placid and satisfied looks. He felt inclined to kill them, to throw his syphon of Seltzer water at them, to split open Limousin's head, which he every moment bent over his plate and raised it up again immediately. And they continued to live like that, without cares or anxiety of any kind. No! no! That was really too much, after all! He would avenge himself, he would have his revenge now, on the spot, as he had them under his hand. But how? He tried to think of some means, he pictured such dreadful things as one reads of in the newspapers occasionally, but could not hit on anything practical. And he went on drinking to excite himself, to give himself courage not to allow such an occasion to escape him, as he should certainly not meet with it again.

Suddenly an idea struck him, a terrible idea, and he left off drinking to mature it. A smile rose to his lips, and he murmured: "I have got them, I have got them. We will see; we will see." A waiter asked him: "What would you like now, Monsieur?" "Nothing. Coffee and cognac. The best." And he looked at them, as he sipped his brandy. There were too many people in the restaurant for what he wanted to do, so he would wait and follow them, for they would be sure to walk on the terrace or in the forest. When they had got a little distance off, he would join them, and then he would

have his revenge, yes, he would have his revenge! It was certainly not too soon, after twenty-three years of suffering. Ah! They little guessed what was to happen to them.

They finished their luncheon slowly, and they talked in perfect security. Parent could not hear what they were saying, but he saw their calm movements, and his wife's face, especially, exasperated him. She had assumed a haughty air, the air of a stout, devout woman, of an irreproachably devout woman, sheathed in principles, iron-clad in virtue. Then they paid the bill and got up, and then he saw Limousin. He might have been taken for a retired diplomatist, for he looked a man of great importance with his soft, white whiskers, the tips of which fell onto the facings of his coat.

They went out. George was smoking a cigar and had his hat on one side, and Parent followed them. First of all they went up and down the terrace, and calmly admired the landscape, like people who have well satisfied their hunger, and then they went into the forest, and Parent rubbed his hands and followed them at a distance, hiding himself, so as not to excite their suspicion too soon. They walked slowly, enjoying the fresh green, and the warm air. Henriette was holding Limousin's arm and walked upright at his side, like a wife who is sure, and proud of herself. George was cutting off the leaves with his stick, and occasionally jumped over the ditches by the road side, like a fiery young horse ready to gallop off through the trees.

Parent came up to them by degrees, panting rather from excitement and fatigue, for he never walked now. He soon came up to them, but he was seized by fear, an inexplicable fear, and he passed them, so as to turn round and meet them face to face. He walked on, his heart beating, for he knew that they were just behind him now, and he said to himself: "Come, now is the time. Courage! courage! Now is the moment!"

He turned round. They were all three sitting on the grass, at the foot of a huge tree, and they were still talking, and he made up his mind, and came back rapidly, and then stopping in front of them in the middle of the road, he said abruptly, in a voice broken by emotion: "It is I! Here I am! I suppose you did not expect me?" They all three looked at him carefully, for they thought that he was mad, and he continued: "One might think that you did not know me again. Just look at me! I am Parent, Henri Parent. You did not expect me, eh? You thought it was all over, and that you would never see me again. Ah! But here I am once more, you see, and now we will have an explanation."

Henriette was terrified and hid her face in her hands, murmuring: "Oh! Good Heavens!" And seeing this stranger who seemed to be threatening his mother, George sprang up, ready to seize him by the collar, while Limousin, who was thunderstruck, looked at this specter in horror, who, after panting for a few moments, continued: "So now we will have an explanation; the proper moment for it has come! Ah! you deceived me, you condemned me to the life of a convict, and you thought that I should never catch you!"

But the young man took him by the shoulders and pushed him back: "Are you mad?" he asked. "What do you want? Go on your way immediately, or I shall give you a thrashing!" But Parent replied: "What do I want? I want to tell you who these people are." George, however, was in a rage and shook him; was even going to strike him, but the other said: "Just let me go. I am your father ... There, look whether they recognize me now, the wretches!" And the alarmed young man, removed his hands, and turned to his mother, while Parent, as soon as he was released, went towards her.

"Well," he said, "tell him who I am, you! Tell him that my name is Henri Parent, that I am his father because his name is George Parent, because you are my wife, because you are all three living on my money, on the allowance of ten thousand francs which I have made you, since I drove you out of my house. Will you tell him also why I drove you out? Because I surprised you with this beggar, this wretch, your lover! Tell him what I was, an honorable man, whom you married for my money, and whom you deceived from the very first day. Tell him who you are, and who I am ..."

He stammered and panted for breath, in his rage, and the woman exclaimed in a heartrending voice: "Paul, Paul, stop him; make him be quiet; do not let him say this before my son!" Limousin had also got up, and he said in a quite low voice: "Hold your tongue! Hold your tongue! Do understand what you are doing!" But Parent continued furiously: "I quite know what I am doing, and that is not all. There is one thing that I will know, something that has tormented me for twenty years." And then turning to George, who was leaning against a tree in consternation, he said:

"Listen to me. When she left my house, she thought it was not enough to have deceived me, but she also wanted to drive me to despair. You were my only consolation, and she took you with her, swearing that I was not your father, but that he was your father! Was she lying? I do not know, and I have been asking myself the question for the last twenty years."

He went close up to her, tragic and terrible, and pulling away her hands with which she had covered her face, he continued: "Well, I call upon you now to tell me which of us two is the father of this young man; he or I, your husband or your lover. Come! Come! tell us." Limousin rushed at him, but Parent pushed him back, and sneering in his fury, he said: "Ah! you are brave now! You are braver than you were that day when you ran downstairs because I was going to half murder you. Very well! If she will not reply, tell me yourself. You ought to know as well as she. Tell me, are you this young fellow's father? Come! Come! Tell me!"

Then he turned to his wife again: "If you will not tell me, at any rate tell your son. He is a man, now, and he has the right to know who is his father. I do not know, and I never did know, never, never! I cannot tell you, my boy." He seemed to be losing his senses, his voice grew shrill and he worked his arms about as if he had an epileptic attack. "Come!... Give me an answer.... She does not know.... I will make a bet that she does not know ... No ... she does not know, by Jove!... She used to go to bed with both of us! Ha! ha! ha!... nobody knows ... nobody.... How can any one know such things?... You will not know, either, my boy, you will not know any more than I do.... never.... Look here.... Ask her ... you will find that she does not know.... I do not know either.... You can choose ... yes, you can choose ... him or me.... Choose.... Good evening.... It is all over.... If she makes up her mind to tell you, come and let me know, will you? I am living at the *Hôtel des Continents*.... I should be glad to know.... Good evening.... I hope you will enjoy yourselves very much...."

And he went away gesticulating, and talking to himself under the tall trees, into the empty, cool air, which was full of the smell of the sap. He did not turn round to look at them, but went straight on, walking under the stimulus of his rage, under a storm of passion, with that one fixed idea in his mind, and presently he found himself outside the station. A train was about to start and he got in. During the journey, his anger calmed down, he regained his senses and returned to Paris, astonished at his own boldness, and feeling as aching and knocked up, as if he had broken some bones, but nevertheless he went to have a *bock* at his brewery.

When she saw him come in, Mademoiselle Zoé was surprised and said: "What! back already? are you tired?" "I am tired ... very tired.... You know, when one is not used to going out.... But I have done with it. I shall not go into the country again. I had better have stopped here. For the future, I shall not stir out again."

But she could not persuade him to tell her about his little excursion, although she wanted very much to hear all about it, and for the first time in his life he got thoroughly drunk that night, and had to be carried home.

THE FATHER

I

As he lived at Batignolles and was a clerk in the Public Education Office, he took the omnibus every morning, when he went to the center of Paris, sitting opposite a girl with whom he fell in love.

She went to the shop where she was employed, at the same time every day. She was a little brunette, one of those dark girls whose eyes are so dark that they look like spots, and whose complexion has a look like ivory. He always saw her coming at the corner of the same street, and she generally had to run to catch the heavy vehicle, and sprang upon the steps before the horses had quite stopped. Then she got inside, rather out of breath, and sitting down, she looked round her.

The first time that he saw her, François Tessier felt that her face pleased him extremely. One sometimes meets one of those women whom one longs to clasp madly in one's arms immediately, without even knowing her. That girl answered to his inward desires, to his secret hopes, to that sort of ideal of love which one cherishes in the depths of the heart, without knowing it.

He looked at her intently, in spite of himself, and she grew embarrassed at his looks and blushed. He saw it and tried to turn away his eyes; but he involuntarily fixed them upon her again every moment, although he tried to look in another direction, and in a few days they knew each other without having spoken. He gave up his place to her when the omnibus was full, and got outside, though he was very sorry to do it. By this time, she had got so far as to greet him with a little smile; and although she always dropped her eyes under his looks, which she felt were too ardent, yet she did not appear offended at being looked at in such a manner.

They ended by speaking. A kind of rapid intimacy had become established between them, a daily intimacy of half an hour, and that was certainly one of the most charming half hours in his life, to him. He thought of her all the rest of the time, saw her continually during the long office hours, for he was haunted and bewitched by that floating and yet tenacious recollection which the image of a beloved woman leaves in us, and it seemed to him that the entire possession of that little person would be maddening happiness to him, almost above human realization.

Every morning now she shook hands with him, and he preserved the feeling of that touch, and the recollection of the gentle pressure of her little fingers, until the next day, and he almost fancied that he preserved the imprint of it, on his skin, and he anxiously waited for this short omnibus ride, all the rest of the time, while Sundays seemed to him heart-breaking days. However, there was no doubt that she loved him, for one Saturday, in spring, she promised to go and lunch with him at Maisons-Laffitte the next day.

II

She was at the railway station first, which surprised him, but she said: "Before going, I want to speak to you. We have twenty minutes, and that is more than I shall take for what I have to say."

She trembled as she hung onto his arm, and she looked down, while her cheeks were pale, but she continued: "I do not want to be deceived in you, and I shall not go there with you, unless you promise, unless you swear ... not to do ... not to do anything ... that is at all improper ..."

She had suddenly become as red as a poppy, and said no more. He did not know what to reply, for he was happy and disappointed at the same time. At the bottom of his heart, he perhaps preferred that it should be so, and yet ... yet during the night he had indulged in anticipations that sent the hot blood flowing through his veins. He should love her less, certainly, if he knew that her conduct was light, but then it would be so charming, so delicious for him! And he made all a man's usual selfish calculations in love affairs.

As he did not say anything, she began to speak again in an agitated voice, and with tears in her eyes. "If you do not promise to respect me altogether, I shall return home." And so he squeezed her arm tenderly and replied: "I promise, you shall only do what you like." She appeared relieved in mind, and asked with a smile: "Do you really mean it?" And he looked into her eyes and replied: "I swear it." "Now you may take the tickets," she said.

During the journey they could hardly speak, as the carriage was full, and when they got to Maison-Laffitte they went towards the Seine. The sun, which shone full onto the river, onto the leaves and onto the turf seemed to be reflected in them in his brightness, and they went, hand in hand, along the bank, looking at the shoals of little fish swimming near the bank, and they went on brimming over with happiness, as if they were raised from the earth in their lightness of heart.

At last she said: "How foolish you must think me!"

"Why?" he asked. "To come out like this, all alone with you?" "Certainly not; it is quite natural." "No, no; it is not natural for me—because I do not wish to commit a fault, and yet this is how girls fall. But if you only knew how wretched it is, every day the same thing, every day in the month, and every month in the year. I live quite alone with Mamma, and as she has had a great deal of trouble, she is not very cheerful. I do the best I can, and try to laugh in spite of everything, but I do

not always succeed. But all the same, it was wrong in me to come, though you, at any rate, will not be sorry."

By way of an answer he kissed her ardently on her ear that was nearest him, but she moved from him with an abrupt movement, and getting suddenly angry, she exclaimed: "Oh! Monsieur François, after what you swore to me!" And they went back to Maison-Laffitte.

They had lunch at the *Petit-Havre*, a low house, buried under four enormous poplar trees, by the side of the river. The air, the heat, the light wine, and the sensation of being so close together, made them red and silent, with a feeling of oppression, but after the coffee, they regained all their high spirits, and having crossed the Seine, they started off along the bank, towards the village of La Frette, and suddenly he asked: "What is your name?" "Louise." "Louise," he repeated, and said nothing more.

The river, which described a long curve, bathed a row of white houses in the distance, which were reflected in the water. The girl picked the daisies and made them into a great bunch, whilst he sang vigorously, as intoxicated as a colt that has been turned into a meadow. On their left, a vine-covered slope followed the river, but suddenly François stopped motionless with astonishment: "Oh! look there!" he said.

The vines had come to an end, and the whole slope was covered with lilac bushes in flower. It was a violet colored wood! A kind of great carpet stretched over the earth, reaching as far as the village, more than two miles off. She also stood, surprised and delighted, and murmured: "Oh! how pretty!" And crossing a meadow they ran towards that curious low hill, which every year furnishes all the lilac which is drawn through Paris on the carts of the street sellers.

A narrow path went beneath the trees, so they took it, and when they came to a small clearing, they sat down.

Swarms of flies were buzzing around them and making a continuous, gentle sound, and the sun, the bright sun of a perfectly still day, shone over the bright slopes, and from that wood of flowers, a powerful aroma was borne towards them, a breath of perfume, of that sweat of the flowers.

A church clock struck in the distance, and they embraced gently, then clasped each other close, lying on the grass, without the knowledge of anything except of that kiss. She had closed her eyes and held him in her arms, pressing him to her closely, without a thought, with her reason bewildered, and from head to foot in passionate expectation. And she surrendered herself altogether, without knowing that she had given herself to him. But she soon came to herself with the feeling of a great misfortune, and she began to cry and sob with grief, with her face buried in her hands.

He tried to console her, but she wanted to start, to return, and to go home immediately, and she kept saying as she walked along quickly: "Good heavens! good heavens!" He said to her: "Louise! Louise! Please let us stop here." But now her cheeks were red and her eyes hollow, and as soon as they got to the railway station in Paris, she left him, without even saying good-bye.

III

When he met her in the omnibus next day, she appeared to him to be changed and thinner, and she said to him: "I want to speak to you; we will get down at the Boulevard."

As soon as they were on the pavement, she said: "We must bid each other good-bye; I cannot meet you again after what has happened." "But why?" he asked. "Because I cannot; I have been culpable, and I will not be so again."

Then he implored her, tortured by desire, maddened by the wish of having her entirely, in the absolute freedom of nights of love, but she replied firmly: "No, I cannot, I cannot." He, however, only grew all the more excited, and promised to marry her, but she said again: "No." And left him.

For a week he did not see her. He could not manage to meet her, and as he did not know her address, he thought that he had lost her altogether. On the ninth day, however, there was a ring at his bell, and when he opened it, she was there. She threw herself into his arms, and did not resist any longer, and for three months she was his mistress. He was beginning to grow tired of her,

when she told him she was pregnant, and then he had one idea and wish: To break with her at any price. As, however, he could not do that, not knowing how to begin or what to say, full of anxiety through the fear of that child which was growing, he took a decisive step: One night he changed his lodgings, and disappeared.

The blow was so heavy that she did not look for the man who had abandoned her, but threw herself at her mother's knees and confessed her misfortune, and some months after, she gave birth to a boy.

IV

Years passed, and François Tessier grew old without there having been any alteration in his life. He led the dull, monotonous life of *bureaucrates*, without hopes and without expectations. Every day he got up at the same time, went through the same streets, went through the same door, passed the same porter, went into the same office, sat in the same chair, and did the same work. He was alone in the world, alone, during the day in the midst of his colleagues, and alone at night in his bachelor's lodgings, and he laid by a hundred francs a month, against old age.

Every Sunday he went to the *Champs-Elysées*, to watch the elegant people, the carriages and the pretty women, and the next day he used to say to one of his colleagues: "The return of the carriages from the *Bois de Boulogne* was very brilliant yesterday." One fine Sunday morning, however, he went into the *Parc Monceau*, where the mothers and nurses, sitting on the sides of the walks, watched the children playing, and suddenly François Tessier started. A woman passed by, holding two children by the hand; a little boy of about ten and a little girl of four. It was she.

He walked another hundred yards, and then fell into a chair, choking with emotion. She had not recognized him, and so he came back, wishing to see her again. She was sitting down now, and the boy was standing by her side very quietly, while the little girl was making sand castles. It was she, it was certainly she, but she had the serious looks of a lady, was dressed simply, and looked self-possessed and dignified. He looked at her from a distance, for he did not venture to go near, but the little boy raised his head, and François Tessier felt himself tremble. It was his own son, there could be no doubt of that. And as he looked at him, he thought he could recognize himself as he appeared in an old photograph taken years ago. He remained hidden behind a tree, waiting for her to go, that he might follow her.

He did not sleep that night. The idea of the child especially harrassed him. His son! Oh! If he could only have known, have been sure? But what could he have done? However, he went to the house where she had lived, and asked about her. He was told that a neighbor, an honorable man of strict morals, had been touched by her distress, and had married her; he knew the fault she had committed and had married her, and had even recognized the child, his, François Tessier's child, as his own.

He returned to the *Parc Monceau* every Sunday, for then he always saw her, and each time he was seized with a mad, an irresistible longing, to take his son into his arms, cover him with kisses and to steal him, to carry him off.

He suffered horribly in his wretched isolation as an old bachelor, with nobody to care for him, and he also suffered atrocious mental torture, torn by paternal tenderness springing from remorse, longing and jealousy, and from that need of loving one's own children, which nature has implanted into all, and so at last he determined to make a despairing attempt, and going up to her, as she entered the park, he said, standing in the middle of the path, pale and with trembling lips: "You do not recognize me." She raised her eyes, looked at him, uttered an exclamation of horror, of terror, and, taking the two children by the hand she rushed away, dragging them after her, whilst he went home and wept, inconsolably.

Months passed without his seeing her again, but he suffered, day and night, for he was a prey to his paternal love. He would gladly have died, if he could only have kissed his son, he would have committed murder, performed any task, braved any danger, ventured anything. He wrote to her, but she did not reply, and after writing her some twenty letters he saw that there was no hope of altering her determination, and then he formed the desperate resolution of writing to her husband, being quite prepared to receive a bullet from a revolver, if need be. His letter only consisted of a few lines, as follows:

"Monsieur,

"You must have a perfect horror of my name, but I am so miserable, so overcome by misery, that my only hope is in you, and therefore I venture to request you to grant me an interview of only five minutes."

"I have the honor, etc."

The next day he received the reply:

"Monsieur,

"I shall expect you to-morrow, Tuesday, at five o'clock."

V

As he went up the staircase, François Tessier's heart beat so violently that he had to stop several times. There was a dull and violent noise in his breast, the noise as of some animal galloping, and he could only breathe with difficulty, and had to hold on to the banisters in order not to fall.

He rang the bell on the third floor, and when a maidservant had opened the door, he asked "Does Monsieur Flamel live here?" "Yes. Monsieur. Kindly come in."

He was shown into the drawing-room; he was alone and waited, feeling bewildered, as in the midst of a catastrophe, until a door opened and a man came in. He was tall, serious, and rather stout, and wore a black frock-coat, and pointed to a chair with his hand. François Tessier sat down, and then said, panting: "Monsieur ... Monsieur ... I do not know whether you know my name ... whether you know ..."

Monsieur Flamel interrupted him. "You need not tell it me, Monsieur, I know it. My wife has spoken to me about you." He spoke in the dignified tone of voice of a good man who wishes to be severe, and with the common-place stateliness of an honorable man, and François Tessier continued: "Well, Monsieur, I want to say this: I am dying of grief, of remorse, of shame, and I would like once, only once to kiss ... the child ..."

Monsieur Flamel got up and rang the bell, and when the servant came in, he said: "Will you bring Louis here." When she had gone out, they remained face to face, without speaking, as they had nothing more to say to one another, and waited. Then, suddenly, a little boy of ten rushed into the room, and ran up to the man whom he believed to be his father, but he stopped when he saw a stranger, and Monsieur Flamel kissed him and said: "Now go and kiss that gentleman, my dear." And the child went up to him nicely, and looked at the stranger.

François Tessier had risen, he let his hat fall, and was ready to fall himself as he looked at his son, while Monsieur Flamel had turned away, from a feeling of delicacy, and was looking out of the window.

The child waited in surprise, but he picked up the hat and gave it to the stranger. Then François, taking the child up in his arms, began to kiss him wildly all over his face, on his eyes, his cheeks, on his mouth, on his hair, and the youngster, frightened at the shower of kisses tried to avoid them, turned away his head and pushed away the man's face with his little hands. But suddenly, François Tessier put him down, and cried: "Good-bye! Good-bye!" And he rushed out of the room as if he had been a thief.

A VAGABOND

For more than a month he had been walking, seeking for work everywhere. He had left his native place, Ville-Avary, in the department of la Manche, because there was no work to be had. He was a journeyman carpenter, twenty-seven years old, a steady fellow and good workman, but for two months, he, the eldest son, had been obliged to live on his family, with nothing to do but to cross his arms in the general stoppage of work. Bread was getting scarce with them; the two sisters went

out as charwomen, but earned little, and he, Jacques Randel, the strongest of them all, did nothing because he had nothing to do, and ate the others' soup.

Then he went and inquired at the town-hall, and the mayor's secretary told him that he would find work at the Labor-center, and so he started, well provided with papers and certificates, and carrying another pair of shoes, a pair of trousers and a shirt, in a blue handkerchief at the end of his stick.

And he had walked almost without stopping, day and night, along interminable roads, in the sun and rain, without ever reaching that mysterious country where workmen find work. At first he had the fixed idea that he must only work because he was a carpenter, but at every carpenter's shop where he applied he was told that they had just dismissed men on account of work being so slack, and finding himself at the end of his resources, he made up his mind to undertake any job that he might come across on the road. And so by turns he was a navvy, stableman, stone sawer; he split wood, lopped the branches of trees, dug wells, mixed mortar, tied up faggots, tended goats on a mountain, and all for a few pence, for he only obtained two or three days work occasionally, by offering himself at a shamefully low price, in order to tempt the avarice of employers and peasants.

And now, for a week he had found nothing, and he had no money left, and was eating a piece of bread, thanks to the charity of some women from whom he had begged at house doors, on the road. It was getting dark, and Jacques Randel, jaded, his legs failing him, his stomach empty, and with despair in his heart, was walking barefoot on the grass by the side of the road, for he was taking care of his last pair of shoes, as the other pair had already ceased to exist for a long time. It was a Saturday, towards the end of autumn. The heavy gray clouds were being driven rapidly through the sky by the gusts of wind which whistled among the trees, and one felt that it would rain soon. The country was deserted at that time of the evening, and on the eve of Sunday. Here and there in the fields there rose up stacks of thrashed out corn, like huge yellow mushrooms, and the fields looked bare, as they had already been sown for the next year.

Randel was hungry, with the hunger of some wild animal, such a hunger as drives wolves to attack men. Worn out and weakened with fatigue, he took longer strides, so as not to take so many steps, and with heavy head, the blood throbbing in his temples, with red eyes and dry mouth, he grasped his stick tightly in his hand, with a longing to strike the first passer-by whom he should meet, and who might be going home to supper, with all his force.

He looked at the sides of the road with the image of potatoes dug up and lying on the ground before his eyes; if he had found any, he would have gathered some dead wood, made a fire in the ditch, and have had a capital supper off the warm, round vegetables, which he would first of all have held burning hot, in his cold hands. But it was too late in the year, and he would have to gnaw a raw beetroot, as he had done the day before, which he picked up in a field.

For the last two days he had spoken aloud as he quickened his steps, under the influence of his thoughts. He had never thought, hitherto, as he had given all his mind, all his simple faculties, to his industrial requirements. But now, fatigue, and this desperate search for work which he could not get, refusals and rebuffs, nights spent in the open-air, lying on the grass, long fasting, the contempt which he knew people with a settled abode felt for a vagabond, and that question which he was continually asked: "Why do you not remain at home?" Now, distress at not being able to use his strong arms which he felt so full of vigor, the recollection of his relations who had remained at home and who also had not a half-penny, filled him by degrees with rage, which had been accumulating every day, every hour, every minute, and which now escaped his lips in spite of himself in short growling sentences.

As he stumbled over the stones which rolled beneath his bare feet, he grumbled, "How wretched! how miserable!... A set of hogs ... to let a man die of hunger ... a carpenter ... a set of hogs ... not two pence ... not two pence ... and now it is raining ... a set of hogs!..."

He was indignant at the injustice of fate, and cast the blame on men, on all men, because nature, that great, blind mother, is unjust, cruel and perfidious, and he repeated through his clenched teeth: "A set of hogs," as he looked at the thin gray smoke which rose from the roofs, for it was the dinner hour. And without thinking about that other injustice, which is human, and which is called robbery and violence, he felt inclined to go into one of those houses to murder the inhabitants, and to sit down to table, in their stead.

He said to himself: "I have a right to live, now ... as they are letting me die of hunger ... and yet I only ask for work ... a set of hogs!" And the pain in his limbs, the gnawing in his heart rose to his head like terrible intoxication, and gave rise to this simple thought in his brain: "I have the right to live because I breathe, and because the air is the common property of everybody, and so nobody has a right to leave me without bread!"

A fine, thick, icy cold rain was coming down and he stopped and murmured: "How miserable!... another month of walking before I get home...." He was indeed returning home then; for he saw that he should more easily find work in his native town where he was known,—and he did not mind what he did,—than on the high roads, where everybody suspected him. As the carpentering business was not going well he would turn day-laborer, be a mason's hodman, ditcher, break stones on the road. If he only earned tenpence a day, that would at any rate find him something to eat.

He tied the remains of his last pocket handkerchief round his neck, to prevent the cold water from running down his back and chest; but he soon found that it was penetrating the thin material of which his clothes were made, and he glanced round him with the agonized look of a man who does not know where to hide his body and to rest his head, and has no place of shelter in the whole world.

Night came on, and wrapped the country in obscurity, and in the distance, in a meadow, he saw a dark spot on the grass; it was a cow, and so he got over the ditch by the roadside and went up to her, without exactly knowing what he was doing. When he got close to her, she raised her great head to him, and he thought: "If I only had a jug, I could get a little milk." He looked at the cow, and the cow looked at him, and then suddenly giving her a violent kick in the side, he said: "Get up!"

The animal got up slowly, letting her heavy udders hang down below her; then the man lay down on his back between the animal's legs, and he drank for a long time, squeezing her warm swollen teats which tasted of the cow stall, with both hands, and he drank as long as any milk remained in that living well. But the icy rain began to fall more heavily, and he saw no place of shelter on the whole of that bare plain. He was cold, and he looked set a light which was shining among the trees, in the window of a house.

The cow had lain down again, heavily, and he sat down by her side and stroked her head, grateful for the nourishment she had given him. The animal's strong, thick breath, which came out of her nostrils like two jets of steam in the evening air, blew onto the workman's face, who said: "You are not cold, inside there!" He put his hands onto her chest and under her legs to find some warmth there, and then the idea struck him, that he might pass the night against that large, warm stomach. So he found a comfortable place and laid his forehead against the great udder which had quenched his thirst just previously, and then, as he was worn-out with fatigue, he fell asleep immediately.

He woke up, however, several times, with his back or his stomach half frozen, according as he put one or the other to the animal's flank. Then he turned over to warm and dry that part of his body which had remained exposed to the night air, and he soon went soundly to sleep again.

The crowing of a cock woke him; the day was breaking, it was no longer raining and the sky was bright. The cow was resting, with her muzzle on the ground, and he stooped down, resting on his hands, to kiss those wide nostrils of moist flesh, and said: "Good-bye, my beauty ... until next time ... you are a nice animal ... Good-bye ..." Then he put on his shoes and went off, and for two hours he walked straight on before him, always following the same road, and then he felt so tired that he sat down on the grass. It was broad daylight by that time, and the church bells were ringing; men in blue blouses, women in white caps, some on foot, some in carts, began to pass along the road, going to the neighboring villages to spend Sunday with friends or relations.

A stout peasant came in sight, drawing a score of frightened, bleating sheep in front of him, whom an active dog kept together, so Randel got up and raising his cap, he said: "You do not happen to have any work for a man who is dying of hunger?" But the other giving an angry look at the vagabond, replied: "I have no work for fellows whom I meet on the road."

And the carpenter went back, and sat down by the side of the ditch again. He waited there for a long time, watching the country people pass, and looking for a kind compassionate face, before he renewed his request, and finally selected a man in an overcoat, whose stomach was adorned with a gold chain. "I have been looking for work," he said, "for the last two months and cannot find any,

and I have not a half-penny in my pocket." But the semi-gentleman replied: "You should have read the notice which is stuck up at the beginning of the village: *Begging is prohibited within the boundaries of this parish.* Let me tell you I am the mayor, and if you do not get out of here pretty quickly, I shall have you arrested."

Randel, who was getting angry, replied: "Have me arrested if you like; I should prefer it, for at any rate I should not die of hunger." And he went back and sat down by the side of his ditch again, and in about a quarter of an hour two gendarmes appeared on the road. They were walking slowly, side by side, well in sight, glittering in the sun with their shining hats, their yellow accouterments and their metal buttons, as if to frighten evildoers, and to put them to flight at a distance. He knew that they were coming after him, but he did not move, for he was seized with a sudden desire to defy them, to be arrested by them, and to have his revenge later.

They came on without appearing to have seen him, walking with military steps, heavily and balancing themselves as if they were doing *the goose* steps; and then suddenly as they passed him, they appeared to have noticed him, and stopped and looked at him angrily and threateningly, and the brigadier came up to him and asked: "What are you doing here?" "I am resting," the man replied, calmly. "Where do you come from?" "If I had to tell you all the places I have been to, it would take me more than an hour." "Where are you going to?" "To Ville-Avary." "Where is that?" "In La Manche." "Is that where you belong to?" "It is." "Why did you leave it?" "To try for work."

The brigadier turned to his gendarme, and said, in the angry voice of a man who is exasperated at last by the same trick: "They all say that, these scamps. I know all about it." And then he continued: "Have you any papers?" "Yes, I have some." "Give them to me."

Randel took his papers out of his pockets; his certificates, those poor worn-out, dirty papers which were falling to pieces, and gave them to the soldier, who spelled them through, hemming and hawing and then having seen that they were all in order, he gave them back to Randel with the dissatisfied look of a man whom someone cleverer than himself has tricked.

After a few moments' further reflection, he asked him: "Have you any money on you?" "No." "None whatever?" "None." "Not even a sou?" "Not even a sou!" "How do you live then?" "On what people give me." "Then you beg?" And Randel answered resolutely: "Yes, when I can."

Then the gendarme said: "I have caught you on the highroad in the act of vagabondage and begging, without any resources or trade, and so I command you to come with me." The carpenter got up and said: "Wherever you please." And placing himself between the two soldiers, even before he had received the order to do so, he added: "Come, lock me up; that will at any rate put a roof over my head when it rains."

And they set off towards the village, whose red tiles could be seen through the leafless trees a quarter of a league off. Service was just going to begin when they went through the village. The square was full of people, who immediately formed two hedges to see the criminal, who was being followed by a crowd of excited children, pass. Male and female peasants looked at the prisoner between the two gendarmes, with hatred in their eyes, and a longing to throw stones at him, to tear his skin with their nails, to trample him under their feet. They asked each other whether he had committed murder or robbery. The butcher, who was an ex-Spahl, declared that he was a deserter. The tobacconist thought that he recognized him as the man who had that very morning passed a bad half franc piece off on him, and the ironmonger declared that he was the murderer of widow Malet, whom the police had been looking for, for six months.

In the hall of the municipal council, into which his custodians took him, Randel saw the mayor again, sitting on the magisterial bench, with the schoolmaster by his side. "Ah! ah!" the magistrate exclaimed, "so here you are again, my fine fellow. I told you I should have you locked up. Well, brigadier, what is he charged with?"

"He is a vagabond without house or home, Monsieur le Maire, without any resources or money, so he says, who was arrested in the act of begging, but he is provided with good testimonials, and his papers are all in order."

"Show me his papers," the mayor said. He took them, read them, reread, returned them, and then said: "Search him;" so they searched him, but found nothing, and the Mayor seemed perplexed, and asked the workman:

"What were you doing on the road this morning?" "I was looking for work." "Work?... On the highroad?" "How do you expect me to find any, if I hid in the woods?"

They looked at each other, with the hatred of two wild beasts which belong to different, hostile species, and the magistrate continued: "I am going to have you set at liberty but do not be brought up before me again." To which the carpenter replied: "I would rather you locked me up; I have had enough running about the country." But the magistrate replied severely: "Be silent." And then he said to the two gendarmes: "You will conduct this man two hundred yards from the village, and let him continue his journey."

"At any rate, give me something to eat," the workman said; but the other grew indignant: "It only remains for us to feed you! Ah! ah! ah! that is rather strong!" But Randel went on firmly: "If you let me nearly die of hunger again, you will force me to commit a crime, and then, so much the worse for you other fat fellows."

The Mayor had risen, and he repeated: "Take him away immediately, or I shall end by getting angry."

The two gendarmes thereupon seized the carpenter by the arms and dragged him out. He allowed them to do it without resistance, passed through the village again, and found himself on the highroad once more; and when the men had accompanied him two hundred yards beyond the village, the brigadier said: "Now off with you, and do not let me catch you about here again, for if I do you will know it."

Randel went off without replying, or knowing where he was going. He walked on for a quarter of an hour or twenty minutes, so stupefied that he no longer thought of anything. But suddenly, as he was passing a small house, where the window was half open, the smell of the soup and boiled meat stopped him suddenly in front of it, and hunger, fierce, devouring, maddening hunger seized him, and almost drove him against the walls of the house, like a wild beast.

He said aloud, in a grumbling voice: "In heaven's name! they must give me some, this time." And he began to knock at the door vigorously with his stick, and as nobody came he knocked louder and called out: "He! he! you people in there, open the door!" And then, as nothing moved, he went up to the window, and pushed it open with his hand, and the close warm air of the kitchen, full of the smell of hot soup, meat and cabbage escaped into the cold, outer air, and with a bound the carpenter was in the house. Two covers were laid on the table, and no doubt the proprietors of the house, on going to church, had left their dinner on the fire, their nice, Sunday boiled beef and vegetable soup, while there was a loaf of new bread on the chimney-piece, between two bottles which seemed full.

Randel seized the bread first of all, and broke it with as much violence as if he were strangling a man, and then he began to eat it voraciously, swallowing great mouthfuls quickly. But almost immediately the smell of the meat attracted him to the fire-place, and having taken off the lid of the saucepan, he plunged a fork into it and brought out a large piece of beef tied with a string. Then he took more cabbage, carrots and onions until his plate was full, and having put it onto the table, he sat down before it, cut the meat into four pieces, and dined as if he had been at home. When he had eaten nearly all the meat besides a quantity of vegetables, he felt thirsty, and took one of the bottles off the mantel-piece.

Scarcely had he poured the liquor into his glass, than he saw it was brandy. So much the better; it was warming and would instill some fire into his veins, and that would be all right, after being so cold; and he drank some. He found it very good, certainly, for he had grown unaccustomed to it, and he poured himself out another glassful, which he drank at two gulps. And then, almost immediately he felt quite merry and light-hearted from the effect of the alcohol, just as if some great happiness were flowing through his system.

He continued to eat, but more slowly, and dipping his bread into the soup. His skin had become burning, and especially his forehead, where the veins were throbbing. But suddenly the church bells began to ring; Mass was over, and instinct rather than fear, the instinct of prudence which guides all beings, and makes them clear-sighted in danger, made the carpenter get up. He put the remains of the loaf into one pocket, and the brandy bottle into the other, and he furtively went to the window and looked out into the road. It was still deserted, so he jumped out and set off

walking again, but instead of following the highroad, he ran across the fields towards a wood which he saw a little way off.

He felt alert, strong, light-hearted, glad of what he had done, and so nimble that he sprang over the enclosures of the fields at a single bound and as soon as he was under the trees, he took the bottle out of his pocket again and began to drink once more, swallowing it down as he walked, and then his ideas began to get confused, his eyes grew dim and his legs as elastic as springs and he started singing the old popular song.

Oh! how nice, how nice it is,
To pick the sweet, wild strawberries.

He was now walking on thick, damp, cool moss and that soft carpet under his feet made him feel absurdly inclined to turn head over heels, like he used to do as a child, so he took a run, turned a somersault, got up and began over again. And between each time, he began to sing again:

Oh! how nice, how nice it is,
To pick the sweet, wild strawberries.

Suddenly he found himself on the edge of a deep road and in the road he saw a tall girl, a servant who was returning to the village with two pails of milk. He watched, stooping down and with his eyes as bright as those of a dog who scents a quail, but she saw him, raised her head and said: "Was that you singing like that?" He did not reply, however, but jumped down into the road, although it was at least six feet down, and when she saw him suddenly standing in front of her, she exclaimed: "Oh! dear, how you frightened me!"

But he did not hear her for he was drunk, he was mad, excited by another requirement which was more imperative than hunger, more feverish than alcohol; by the irresistible fury of the man who has been in want of everything for two months, and who is drunk; who is young, ardent and inflamed by all the appetites which nature has implanted in the vigorous flesh of men.

The girl started back from him, frightened at his face, his eyes, his half open mouth, his outstretched hands, but he seized her by the shoulders, and without a word, threw her down in the road.

She let her two pails fall and they rolled over noisily, all the milk was spilt and then she screamed, but comprehending that it would be of no use to call for help in that lonely spot and seeing that he was not going to make an attempt on her life, she yielded without much difficulty, and not very angry neither, for he was a strong young fellow, but really not too rough.

When she got up, the thought of her overturned pails suddenly filled her with fury and taking off one of her wooden clogs, she threw it, in her turn, at the man to break his head, if he did not pay her for her milk.

But he, mistaking the reason for this sudden violent attack, somewhat sobered, and frightened at what he had done, ran off as fast as he could while she threw stones at him, some of which hit him in the back.

He ran for a long time, very long, until he felt more tired than he had ever done before. His legs were so weak that they could scarcely carry him; all his ideas were confused, he lost the recollection of everything, and could no longer think about anything; and so he sat down at the foot of a tree, and in five minutes was fast asleep. He was soon awakened, however, by a rough shake and on opening his eyes he saw two cocked hats of polished leather bending over him, and the two gendarmes of the morning, who were holding him and binding his arms.

"I knew I should catch you again," said the brigadier, jeeringly. But Randel got up without replying. The two men shook him, quite ready to ill treat him if he made a movement, for he was their prey now, he had become a jail-bird, caught by those hunters of criminals who would not let him go again.

"Now start!" the brigadier said, and they set off, It was getting evening and the autumn twilight was settling heavy and dark over the land, and in half an hour they reached the village, where every door was open, for the people had heard what had happened. Peasants and peasant women

and girls, excited with anger as if every man had been robbed and every woman violated, wished to see the wretch brought back so that they might overwhelm him with abuse. They hooted him from the first house in the village until they reached the Mansion-house, where the Mayor was waiting for him, being himself avenged on this vagabond and as soon as he saw him, he cried from far:

"Ah! my fine fellow! here we are!" And he rubbed his hands, more pleased than he usually was and he continued: "I said so. I said so the moment I saw him in the road."

And then with increased satisfaction:

"Oh! you blackguard! Oh! you dirty blackguard! You will get your twenty years, my fine fellow!"

USELESS BEAUTY

I

A very elegant victoria with two beautiful black horses was drawn up in front of the mansion. It was the end of June at about half past five in the afternoon, and the sun shone warm and bright into the large courtyard.

The Countess de Mascaret came down just as her husband, who was coming home, appeared in the carriage entrance. He stopped for a few moments to look at his wife and grew rather pale. She was very beautiful, graceful and distinguished looking, with her long oval face, her complexion like gilt ivory, her large gray eyes and her black hair; and she got into her carriage without looking at him, without even seeming to have noticed him, with such a particularly high-bred air, that the furious jealousy by which he had been devoured for so long, again gnawed at his heart. He went up to her and said: "You are going for a drive?" She merely replied disdainfully: "You see I am!" "In the Bois de Boulogne?" "Most probably." "May I come with you?" "The carriage belongs to you."

Without being surprised at the tone of voice in which she answered him, he got in and sat down by his wife's side, and said: "Bois de Boulonge." The footman jumped up by the coachman's side, and the horses as usual pawed the ground and shook their heads until they were in the street. Husband and wife sat side by side, without speaking. He was thinking how to begin a conversation, but she maintained such an obstinately hard look, that he did not venture to make the attempt. At last, however, he cunningly, accidentally as it were, touched the Countess's gloved hand with his own, but she drew her arm away with a movement which was so expressive of disgust, that he remained thoughtful, in spite of his usual authoritative and despotic character, and he said: "Gabrielle!" "What do you want?" "I think you are looking adorable."

She did not reply, but remained lying back in the carriage, looking like an irritated queen. By that time they were driving up the *Champs Elysées*, towards the *Arc de Triomphe*. That immense monument, at the end of the long avenue, raised its colossal arch against the red sky, and the sun seemed to be descending onto it, showering fiery dust on it from the sky.

The stream of carriages, with the sun reflecting from the bright, plated harness and the shining lamps, caused a double current to flow towards the town and towards the wood, and the Count de Mascaret continued: "My dear Gabrielle!"

But then, unable to bear it any longer, she replied in an exasperated voice: "Oh! do leave me in peace, pray; I am not even at liberty to have my carriage to myself, now." He, however, pretended not to hear her, and continued: "You have never looked so pretty as you do to-day."

Her patience was decidedly at an end, and she replied with irrepressible anger: "You are wrong to notice it, for I swear to you, that I will never have anything to do with you in that way again." He was decidedly stupefied and agitated, and his violent nature gaining the upper hand, he exclaimed: "What do you mean by that?" in such a manner as revealed rather the brutal master, than the amorous man. But she replied in a low voice, so that the servants might not hear amidst the

deafening noise of the wheels: "Ah! What do I mean by that? What do I mean by that? Now I recognize you again! Do you want me to tell everything?" "Yes." "Everything that has been on my heart, since I have been the victim of your terrible selfishness?"

He had grown red with surprise and anger, and he growled between his closed teeth: "Yes, tell me everything."

He was a tall, broad-shouldered man, with a big, red beard, a handsome man, a nobleman, a man of the world, who passed as a perfect husband and an excellent father, and now for the first time since they had started she turned towards him, and looked him full in the face: "Ah! You will hear some disagreeable things, but you must know that I am prepared for everything, that I fear nothing, and you less than anyone, to-day."

He also was looking into her eyes, and already he was shaking with passion, and he said in a low voice: "You are mad." "No, but I will no longer be the victim of the hateful penalty of maternity, which you have inflicted on me for eleven years! I wish to live like a woman of the world, as I have a right to do, as all women have the right to do."

He suddenly grew pale again, and stammered: "I do not understand you." "Oh! yes; you understand me well enough. It is now three months since I had my last child, and as I am still very beautiful, and as, in spite of all your efforts you cannot spoil my figure, as you just now perceived, when you saw me on the outside flight of steps, you think it is time that I should become pregnant again." "But you are talking nonsense!" "No, I am not. I am thirty, and I have had seven children, and we have been married eleven years, and you hope that this will go on for ten years longer, after which you will leave off being jealous."

He seized her arm and squeezed it, saying: "I will not allow you to talk to me like that, for long." "And I shall talk to you till the end, until I have finished all I have to say to you, and if you try to prevent me, I shall raise my voice so that the two servants, who are on the box, may hear. I only allowed you to come with me for that object, for I have these witnesses who will oblige you to listen to me, and to contain yourself; so now, pay attention to what I say. I have always felt an antipathy for you, and I have always let you see it, for I have never lied, Monsieur. You married me in spite of myself; you forced my parents, who were in embarrassed circumstances, to give me to you, because you were rich, and they obliged me to marry you, in spite of my tears.

"So you bought me, and as soon as I was in your power, as soon as I had become your companion, ready to attach myself to you, to forget your coercive and threatening proceedings, in order that I might only remember that I ought to be a devoted wife and to love you as much as it might be possible for me to love you, you became jealous, you, as no man has ever been before, with the base, ignoble jealousy of a spy, which was as degrading for you as it was for me. I had not been married eight months, when you suspected me of every perfidiousness, and you even told me so. What a disgrace! And as you could not prevent me from being beautiful, and from pleasing people, from being called in drawing-rooms, and also in the newspapers, one of the most beautiful women in Paris, you tried everything you could think of to keep admirers from me, and you hit upon the abominable idea of making me spend my life in a constant state of pregnancy, until the time when I should disgust every man. Oh! do not deny it! I did not understand it for some time, but then I guessed it. You even boasted about it to your sister, who told me of it, for she is fond of me and was disgusted at your boorish coarseness.

"Ah! Remember our struggles, doors smashed in, and locks forced! For eleven years you have condemned me to the existence of a brood mare on a studfarm. Then as soon as I was pregnant, you grew disgusted with me, and I saw nothing of you for months, and I was sent into the country, to the family mansion, among fields and meadows, to bring forth my child. And when I reappeared, fresh, pretty and indestructible, still seductive and constantly surrounded by admirers, hoping that at last I should live a little like a young rich woman who belongs to society, you were seized by jealousy again, and you recommenced to persecute me with that infamous and hateful desire from which you are suffering at this moment, by my side. And it is not desire of possessing me, for I should never have refused myself to you, but it is the wish to make me unsightly.

"Besides this, that abominable and mysterious circumstance took place, which I was a long time in penetrating (but I grew acute by dint of watching your thoughts and actions): You attached yourself to your children with all the security which they gave you while I bore them in my womb.

You felt affection for them, with all your aversion for me, and in spite of your ignoble fears, which were momentarily allayed by your pleasure in seeing me grow stouter.

"Oh! How often have I noticed that joy in you! I have seen it in your eyes and guessed it. You loved your children as victories, and not because they were of your own blood. They were victories over me, over my youth, over my beauty, over my charms, over the compliments which were paid me, and over those who whispered round me, without paying them to me. And you are proud of them, you make a parade of them, you take them out for drives in your break in the Bois de Boulogne, and you give them donkey rides at Montmorency. You take them to theatrical matinees so that you may be seen in the midst of them, so that people may say: 'What a kind father,' and that it may be repeated...."

He had seized her wrist with savage brutality, and he squeezed it so violently that she was quiet, and nearly cried out with the pain, and he said to her in a whisper:

"I love my children. Do you hear? What you have just told me is disgraceful in a mother. But you belong to me; I am master ... your master ... I can exact from you what I like and when I like ... and I have the law ... on my side."

He was trying to crush her fingers in the strong grip of his large, muscular hand, and she, livid with pain, tried in vain to free them from that vice which was crushing them; the agony made her pant, and the tears came into her eyes. "You see that I am the master, and the stronger," he said. And when he somewhat loosened his grasp, she asked him: "Do you think that I am a religious woman?"

He was surprised and stammered: "Yes." "Do you think that I could lie if I swore to the truth of anything to you, before an altar on which Christ's body is?" "No." "Will you go with me to some church?" "What for?" "You shall see. Will you?" "If you absolutely wish it, yes."

She raised her voice and said: "Philip!" And the coachman, bending down a little, without taking his eyes from his horses, seemed to turn his ear alone towards his mistress, who went on: "Drive to St. Philip-du-Roule's." And the victoria, which had got to the entrance of the Bois de Boulogne, returned to Paris.

Husband and wife did not exchange a word during the drive, and when the carriage stopped before the church, Madame de Mascaret jumped out, and entered it, followed by the count, a few yards behind her. She went, without stopping, as far as the choir-screen, and falling on her knees at a chair, she buried her face in her hands. She prayed for a long time, and he, standing behind her, could see that she was crying. She wept noiselessly, like women do weep when they are in great, poignant grief. There was a kind of undulation in her body, which ended in a little sob, which was hidden and stifled by her fingers.

But Count de Mascaret thought that the situation was lasting too long, and he touched her on the shoulder. That contact recalled her to herself, as if she had been burnt, and getting up, she looked straight into his eyes. "This is what I have to say to you. I am afraid of nothing, whatever you may do to me. You may kill me if you like. One of your children is not yours, and one only; that I swear to you before God, who hears me here. That is the only revenge which was possible for me, in return for all your abominable tyrannies of the male, in return for the penal servitude of childbearing to which you have condemned me. Who was my lover? That you will never know! You may suspect everyone, but you will never find out. I gave myself up to him, without love and without pleasure, only for the sake of betraying you, and he also made me a mother. Which is his child? That also you will never know. I have seven; try and find out! I intended to tell you this later, for one has not avenged oneself on a man by deceiving him, unless he knows it. You have driven me to confess it to-day. I now have finished."

She hurried through the church, towards the open door, expecting to hear behind her the quick steps of her husband whom she had defied, and to be knocked to the ground by a blow of his fist, but she heard nothing, and reached her carriage. She jumped into it at a bound, overwhelmed with anguish, and breathless with fear; so she called out to the coachman: "Home!" and the horses set off at a quick trot.

II

Countess de Mascaret was waiting in her room for dinner time, like a criminal sentenced to death, awaits the hour of his execution. What was he going to do? Had he come home? Despotic, passionate, ready for any violence as he was, what was he meditating, what had he made up his mind to do? There was no sound in the house, and every moment she looked at the clock. Her lady's maid had come and dressed her for the evening, and had then left the room again. Eight o'clock struck and almost at the same moment there were two knocks at the door, and the butler came in and told her that dinner was ready.

"Has the Count come in?" "Yes, Madame la Comtesse; he is in the dining-room."

For a little moment she felt inclined to arm herself with a small revolver which she had bought some time previously, foreseeing the tragedy which was being rehearsed in her heart. But she remembered that all the children would be there, and she took nothing except a smelling bottle. He rose somewhat ceremoniously from his chair. They exchanged a slight bow, and sat down. The three boys, with their tutor, Abbé Martin, were on her right, and the three girls, with Miss Smith, their English governess, were on her left. The youngest child, who was only three months old, remained upstairs with his nurse.

The Abbé said grace as usual, when there was no company, for the children did not come down to dinner when there were guests present; then they began dinner. The Countess, suffering from emotion, which she had not at all calculated upon, remained with her eyes cast down, while the Count scrutinized, now the three boys, and now the three girls, with uncertain, unhappy looks, which traveled from one to the other. Suddenly, pushing his wine-glass from him, it broke, and the wine was spilt on the tablecloth, and at the slight noise caused by this little accident, the Countess started up from her chair, and for the first time they looked at each other. Then, almost every moment, in spite of themselves, in spite of the irritation of their nerves caused by every glance, they did not cease to exchange looks, rapid as pistol shots.

The Abbé, who felt that there was some cause for embarrassment which he could not divine, tried to get up the conversation, and he started various subjects, but his useless efforts gave rise to no ideas and did not bring out a word. The Countess, with feminine tact and obeying her instincts of a woman of the world, tried to answer him two or three times, but in vain. She could not find words, in the perplexity of her mind, and her own voice almost frightened her in the silence of the large room, where nothing else was heard except the slight sound of plates and knives and forks.

Suddenly, her husband said to her, bending forward: "Here, amidst your children, will you swear to me that what you told me just now, is true?"

The hatred which was fermenting in her veins, suddenly roused her, and replying to that question with the same firmness with which she had replied to his looks, she raised both her hands, the right pointing towards the boys and the left towards the girls, and said in a firm, resolute voice, and without any hesitation: "On the head of my children, I swear that I have told you the truth."

He got up, and throwing his table napkin onto the table with an exasperated movement, he turned round and flung his chair against the wall, and then went out without another word, while she, uttering a deep sigh, as if after a first victory, went on in a calm voice: "You must not pay any attention to what your father has just said, my darlings; he was very much upset a short time ago, but he will be all right again, in a few days."

Then she talked with the Abbé and with Miss Smith, and had tender, pretty words for all her children; those sweet spoiling mother's ways which unfold little hearts.

When dinner was over, she went into the drawing-room with all her little following. She made the elder ones chatter, and when their bedtime came she kissed them for a long time, and then went alone into her room.

She waited, for she had no doubt that he would come, and she made up her mind then, as her children were not with her, to defend her human skin, as she defended her life as a woman of the world; and in the pocket of her dress she put the little loaded revolver, which she had bought a few days previously. The hours went by, the hours struck, and every sound was hushed in the house. Only the cabs continued to rumble through the streets, but their noise was only heard vaguely through the shuttered and curtained windows.

She waited, energetic and nervous, without any fear of him now, ready for anything, and almost triumphant, for she had found means of torturing him continually, during every moment of his life.

But the first gleams of dawn came in through the fringe at the bottom of her curtains, without his having come into her room, and then she awoke to the fact, much to her stupefaction, that he was not coming. Having locked and bolted her door, for greater security, she went to bed at last, and remained there, with her eyes open, thinking, and barely understanding it all, without being able to guess what he was going to do.

When her maid brought her tea, she at the same time gave her a letter from her husband. He told her that he was going to undertake a long journey, and in a postscript he added that his lawyer would provide her with any sums of money she might require for all her expenses.

III

It was at the Opéra, between two of the acts in *Robert the Devil*. In the stalls, the men were standing up, with their hats on, their waistcoats cut very low so as to show a large amount of white shirt front, in which the gold and precious stones of their studs glistened, and were looking at the boxes full of ladies in low dresses, covered with diamonds and pearls, and who were expanding like flowers in that illuminated hothouse, where the beauty of the faces and the whiteness of their shoulders seemed to bloom in order to be looked at, in the midst of the music and of human voices.

Two friends, with their backs to the orchestra were scanning those rows of elegance, that exhibition of real or false charms, of jewels, of luxury and of pretensions which showed itself off all round the Grand-Théâtre, and one of them Roger de Salnis, said to his companion, Bernard Grandin: "Just look how beautiful Countess de Mascaret still is."

Then the older, in turn, looked through his opera glasses at a tall lady in a box opposite, who appeared to be still very young, and whose striking beauty seemed to appeal to the eyes in every corner of the house. Her pale complexion, of an ivory tint, gave her the appearance of a statue, while a small, diamond coronet glistened on her black hair like a milky way.

When he had looked at her for some time, Bernard Grandin replied with a jocular accent of sincere conviction: "You may well call her beautiful." "How old do you think she is?" "Wait a moment. I can tell you exactly, for I have known her since she was a child, and I saw her make her *debut* into society when she was quite a girl. She is ... she is ... thirty ... thirty-six." "Impossible!" "I am sure of it." "She looks twenty-five." "She has had seven children." "It is incredible." "And what is more, they are all seven alive, as she is a very good mother. I go to the house, which is a very quiet and pleasant one, occasionally, and she realizes the phenomenon of the family in the midst of the world." "How very strange! And have there never been any reports about her?" "Never." "But what about her husband? He is peculiar, is he not?"

"Yes, and no. Very likely there has been a little drama between them, one of those little domestic dramas which one suspects, which one never finds out exactly, but which one guesses pretty nearly." "What is it?" "I do not know anything about it. Mascaret leads a very fast life now, after having been a model husband. As long as he remained a good spouse, he had a shocking temper and was crabbed and easily took offense, but since he has been leading his present, rackety life, he has become quite indifferent; but one would guess that he has some trouble, a worm gnawing somewhere, for he has aged very much."

Thereupon the two friends talked philosophically for some minutes about the secret, unknowable troubles, which differences of character or perhaps physical antipathies, which were not perceived at first, give rise to in families, and then Roger de Salnis, who was still looking at Madame de Mascaret through his opera-glasses, said: "It is almost incredible that that woman has had seven children!" "Yes, in eleven years; after which, when she was thirty, she put a stop to her period of production in order to enter into the brilliant period of representation, which does not seem near coming to an end." "Poor women!" "Why do you pity them?"

"Why? Ah! my dear fellow, just consider! eleven years of pregnancy, for such a woman! What a hell! All her youth, all her beauty, every hope of success, every poetical ideal of a bright life, sacrificed to that abominable law of reproduction which turns the normal woman into a mere machine for reproduction." "What would you have? It is only nature!"

"Yes, but I say that nature is our enemy, that we must always fight against nature, for she is continually bringing us back to an animal state. You may be sure that God has not put anything onto this earth that is clean, pretty, elegant, or accessory to our ideal, but the human brain has done it. It is we who have introduced a little grace, beauty, unknown charm and mystery into creation by singing about it, interpreting it, by admiring it as poets, idealizing it as artists, and by explaining it as learned men who make mistakes, but who find ingenious reasons, some grace and beauty, some unknown charm and mystery in the various phenomena of nature. God only created coarse beings, full of the germs of disease, and who, after a few years of bestial enjoyment, grow old and infirm, with all the ugliness and all the want of power of human decrepitude. He only seems to have made them in order that they may reproduce their species in a dirty manner, and then die like ephemeral insects. I said, *reproduce their species in a dirty manner*, and I adhere to that expression. What is there, as a matter of fact, more ignoble and more repugnant than that filthy and ridiculous act of the reproduction of living beings, against which all delicate minds always have revolted, and always will revolt? Since all the organs which have been invented by this economical and malicious Creator serve two purposes, why did he not choose others that were not dirty and sullied, in order to entrust them with that sacred mission, which is the noblest and the most exalted of all human functions? The mouth, which nourishes the body by means of material food, also diffuses abroad speech and thought. Our flesh revives itself by means of itself, and at the same time, ideas are communicated by it. The sense of smell, which gives the vital air to the lungs, imparts all the perfumes of the world to the brain: the smell of flowers, of woods, of trees, of the sea. The ear, which enables us to communicate with our fellow men, has also allowed us to invent music, to create dreams, happiness, the infinite and even physical pleasure, by means of sounds! But one might say that the cynical and cunning Creator wished to prohibit man from ever ennobling and idealizing his commerce with women. Nevertheless, man has found love, which is not a bad reply to that sly Deity, and he has ornamented it so much with literary poetry, that woman often forgets the contact she is obliged to submit to. Those among us who are powerless to deceive themselves, have invented vice and refined debauchery, which is another way of laughing at God, and of paying homage, immodest homage, to beauty.

"But the normal man makes children; just a beast that is coupled with another by law.

"Look at that woman! Is it not abominable to think that such a jewel, such a pearl, born to be beautiful, admired, fêted and adored, has spent eleven years of her life in providing heirs for the Count de Mascaret?"

Bernard Grandin replied with a laugh: "There is a great deal of truth in all that, but very few people would understand you."

Salnis got more and more animated. "Do you know how I picture God myself?" he said. "As am enormous creative organ, unknown to us, who scatters millions of worlds into space, just as one single fish would deposit its spawn in the sea. He creates, because it is His function as God to do so, but He does not know what He is doing, and is stupidly prolific in His work, and is ignorant of the combinations of all kinds which are produced by his scattered germs. Human thought is a lucky little local, passing accident, which was totally unforeseen and condemned to disappear with this earth, and to recommence perhaps here or elsewhere, the same or different, with fresh combinations of eternally new beginnings. We owe it to this slight accident which has happened to His intellect, that we are very uncomfortable in this world, which was not made for us, which had not been prepared to receive us, to lodge and feed us or to satisfy reflecting beings, and we owe it to Him also that we have to struggle without ceasing against what are still called the designs of Providence, when we are really refined and civilized beings."

Grandin, who was listening to him attentively, as he had long known the surprising outbursts of his fancy, asked him: "Then you believe that human thought is the spontaneous product of blind, divine parturition?" "Naturally? A fortuitous function of the nerve-centers of our brain, like some unforeseen chemical action which is due to new mixtures, and which also resemble a product of electricity, caused by friction, or the unexpected proximity of some substance, which lastly resemble the phenomena caused by the infinite and fruitful fermentations of living matter.

"But, my dear fellow, the truth of this must be evident to any one who looks about him. If human thought, ordained by an omniscient Creator, had been intended to be what it has become, altogether different from mechanical thoughts and resignation, so exacting, inquiring, agitated, tormented, would the world which was created to receive the beings which we now are, have been

this unpleasant little dwelling place for poor fools, this salad plot, this rocky wooded and spherical kitchen garden where your improvident Providence had destined us to live naked, in caves or under trees, nourished on the flesh of slaughtered animals, our brethren, or on raw vegetables nourished by the sun and the rain?

"But it is sufficient to reflect for a moment, in order to understand that this world was not made for such creatures as we are. Thought, which is developed by a miracle in the nerves of the cells in our brain, powerless, ignorant and confused as it is, and as it will always remain, makes all of us, who are intellectual beings, eternal and wretched exiles on earth.

"Look at this earth, as God has given it to those who inhabit it. Is it not visibly and solely made, planted and covered with forests, for the sake of animals? What is there for us? Nothing. And for them, everything, and they have nothing to do but to eat, or go hunting and eat each other, according to their instincts, for God never foresaw gentleness and peaceable manners; He only foresaw the death of creatures which were bent on destroying and devouring each other. Are not the quail, the pigeon and the partridge the natural prey of the hawk? the sheep, the stag and the ox that of the great flesh-eating animals, rather than meat that has been fattened to be served up to us with truffles, which have been unearthed by pigs, for our special benefit?

"As to ourselves, the more civilized, intellectual and refined we are, the more we ought to conquer and subdue that animal instinct, which represents the will of God in us. And so, in order to mitigate our lot as brutes, we have discovered and made everything, beginning with houses, then exquisite food, sauces, sweetmeats, pastry, drink, stuffs, clothes, ornaments, beds, mattresses, carriages, railways, and innumerable machines, besides arts and sciences, writing and poetry. Every ideal comes from us and all the amenities of life, in order to make our existence as simple reproducers, for which divine Providence solely intended us, less monotonous and less hard.

"Look at this theater. Is there not here a human world created by us, unforeseen and unknown by Eternal destinies, comprehensible by our minds alone, a sensual and intellectual distraction, which has been invented solely by and for that discontented and restless little animal that we are.

"Look at that woman, Madame de Mascaret. God intended her to live in a cave naked, or wrapped up in the skins of wild animals, but is she not better as she is? But, speaking of her, does anyone know why and how her brute of a husband, having such a companion by his side, and especially after having been boorish enough to make her a mother seven times, has suddenly left her, to run after bad women?"

Grandin replied: "Oh! my dear fellow, this is probably the only reason. He found that always sleeping with her was becoming too expensive in the end, and from reasons of domestic economy, he has arrived at the same principles which you lay down as a philosopher."

Just then the curtain rose for the third act, and they turned round, took off their hats, and sat down.

IV

The Count and Countess Mascaret were sitting side by side in the carriage which was taking them home from the opera, without speaking. But suddenly the husband said to his wife: "Gabrielle!" "What do you want?" "Don't you think that this has lasted long enough?" "What?" "The horrible punishment to which you have condemned me for the last six years." "What do you want? I cannot help it." "Then tell me which of them it is!" "Never!" "Think that I can no longer see my children or feel them round me, without having my heart burdened with this doubt. Tell me which of them it is, and I swear that I will forgive you, and treat it like the others." "I have not the right to." "You do not see that I can no longer endure this life, this thought which is wearing me out, or this question which I am constantly asking myself, this question which tortures me each time I look at them. It is driving me mad."

"Then you have suffered a great deal?" she said.

"Terribly. Should I, without that, have accepted the horror of living by your side, and the still greater horror of feeling and knowing that there is one among them whom I cannot recognize, and who prevents me from loving the others." She repeated: "Then you have really suffered very much?" And he replied in a constrained and sorrowful voice:

"Yes, for do I not tell you every day that it is intolerable torture for me? Should I have remained in that house, near you and them, if I did not love them? Oh! You have behaved abominably towards me. All the affection of my heart I have bestowed upon my children, and that you know. I am for them a father of the olden time, as I was for you a husband of one of the families of old, for by instinct I have remained a natural man, a man of former days. Yes, I will confess it, you have made me terribly jealous, because you are a woman of another race, of another soul, with other requirements. Oh! I shall never forget the things that you told me, but from that day, I troubled myself no more about you. I did not kill you, because then I should have had no means on earth of ever discovering which of our ... of your children is not mine. I have waited, but I have suffered more than you would believe, for I can no longer venture to love them, except, perhaps, the two eldest; I no longer venture to look at them, to call them to me, to kiss them; I cannot take them onto my knee without asking myself: 'Can it be this one?' I have been correct in my behavior towards you for six years, and even kind and complaisant; tell me the truth, and I swear that I will do nothing unkind."

He thought, in spite of the darkness of the carriage, that he could perceive that she was moved, and feeling certain that she was going to speak at last, he said: "I beg you, I beseech you to tell me...." "I have been more guilty than you think, perhaps," she replied; "but I could no longer endure that life of continual pregnancy, and I had only one means of driving you from my bed. I lied before God, and I lied, with my hand raised to my children's head, for I have never wronged you."

He seized her arm in the darkness, and squeezing it as he had done on that terrible day of their drive in the Bois de Boulogne, he stammered: "Is that true?" "It is true." But he, in terrible grief, said with a groan: "I shall have fresh doubts that will never end! When did you lie, the last time or now? How am I to believe you at present? How can one believe a woman after that? I shall never again know what I am to think. I would rather you had said to me: 'It is Jacques, or, it is Jeanne.'"

The carriage drove them into the courtyard of their mansion, and when it had drawn up in front of the steps, the Count got down first, as usual, and offered his wife his arm, to help her up. And then, as soon as they had reached the first floor, he said: "Can I speak to you for a few moments longer?" And she replied: "I am quite willing."

They went into a small drawing-room, while a footman in some surprise, lit the wax candles. As soon as he had left the room and they were alone, he continued: "How am I to know the truth? I have begged you a thousand times to speak, but you have r