Piping-Hot!
(Pot-Bouille)

By

Émile Zola

CHAPTER I.

In the Rue Neuve-Saint-Augustin, a block of vehicles arrested the cab which was bringing Octave Mouret and his three trunks from the Lyons railway station. The young man lowered one of the windows, in spite of the already intense cold of that dull November afternoon. He was surprised at the abrupt approach of twilight in this neighbourhood of narrow streets, all swarming with a busy crowd. The oaths of the drivers as they lashed their snorting horses, the endless jostlings on the foot-pavements, the serried line of shops swarming with attendants and customers, bewildered him; for, though he had dreamed of a cleaner Paris than the one he beheld, he had never hoped to find it so eager for trade, and he felt that it was publicly open to the appetites of energetic young fellows.

The driver leant towards him.

“It’s the Passage Choiseul you want, isn’t it?”

“No, the Rue de Choiseul. A new house, I think.”

And the cab only had to turn the corner. The house was the second one in the street: a big house four storeys high, the stonework of which was scarcely discoloured, in the midst of the dirty stucco of the adjoining old frontages. Octave, who had alighted on to the pavement, measured it and studied it with a mechanical glance, from the silk warehouse on the ground floor to the projecting windows on the fourth floor opening on to a narrow terrace. On the first floor, carved female heads supported a highly elaborate cast-iron balcony. The windows were surrounded with complicated frames, roughly chiselled in the soft stone; and, lower down, above the tall doorway, two cupids were unrolling a scroll bearing the number, which at night-time was lighted up by a jet of gas from the inside.

A stout fair gentleman, who was coming out of the vestibule, stopped short on catching sight of Octave.

“What! you here!” exclaimed he. “Why, I was not expecting you till to-morrow!”

“The truth is,” replied the young man, “I left Hassans a day earlier than I originally intended. Isn’t the room ready?”

“Oh, yes. I took it a fortnight ago, and I furnished it at once in the way you desired. Wait a bit, I will take you to it.”

He re-entered the house, though Octave begged he would not give himself the trouble. The driver had got the three trunks off the cab. Inside the

doorkeeper’s room, a dignified-looking man with a long face, clean-shaven like a diplomatist, was standing up gravely reading the “Moniteur.” He deigned, however, to interest himself about these trunks which were being deposited in his doorway; and, taking a few steps forward, he asked his tenant, the architect of the third floor as he called him:

“Is this the person, Monsieur Campardon?”

“Yes, Monsieur Gourd, this is Monsieur Octave Mouret, for whom I have taken the room on the fourth floor. He will sleep there and take his meals with us. Monsieur Mouret is a friend of my wife’s relations, and I beg you will show him every attention.”

Octave was examining the entrance with its panels of imitation marble and its vaulted ceiling decorated with rosettes. The courtyard at the end was paved and cemented, and had a grand air of cold cleanliness; the only occupant was a coachman engaged in polishing a bit with a chamois leather at the entrance to the stables. There were no signs of the sun ever shining there.

Meanwhile, Monsieur Gourd was inspecting the trunks. He pushed them with his foot, and, their weight filling him with respect, he talked of fetching a porter to carry them up the servants’ staircase.

“Madame Gourd, I’m going out,” cried he, just putting his head inside his room.

It was like a drawing-room, with bright looking-glasses, a red flowered Wilton carpet and violet ebony furniture; and, through a partly opened door, one caught a glimpse of the bed-chamber with a bedstead hung with garnet rep. Madame Gourd, a very fat woman with yellow ribbons in her hair, was stretehed out in an easy-chair with her hands clasped, and doing nothing.

“Well! let’s go up,” said the architect.

And seeing how impressed the young man seemed to be by Monsieur Gourd’s black velvet cap and sky blue slippers, he added, as he pushed open the mahogany door of the vestibule:

“You know he was formerly the Duke de Vaugelade’s valet.”

“Ah!” simply ejaculated Oetave.

“It’s as I tell you, and he married the widow of a little bailiff of Mort-la-Ville. They even own a house there. But they are waiting until they have three thousand francs a year before going there to live. Oh! they are most respectable doorkeepers!”

The decorations of the vestibule and the staircase were gaudily luxurious. At the foot of the stairs was the figure of a woman, a kind of gilded

Neapolitan, supporting on her head an amphora from which issued three gas-jets protected by ground glass globes. The panels of imitation white marble with pink borders succeeded each other at regular intervals up the wall of the staircase, whilst the cast-iron balustrade with its mahogany hand-rail was in imitation of old silver with clusters of golden leaves. A red carpet, secured with brass rods, covered the stairs. But what especially struck Oetave on entering was a green-house temperature, a warm breath which seemed to be puffed from some mouth into his face.

“Hallo!” said he, “the staircase is warmed.”

“Of course,” replied Campardon. “All landlords who have the least self-respect go to that expense now. The house is a very fine one, very fine.”

He looked about him as though he were sounding the walls with his architect’s eyes.

“My dear fellow, you will see, it is a most comfortable place, and inhabited solely by highly respectable people!”

Then, slowly ascending, he mentioned the names of the different tenants. On each floor were two separate suites of apartments, one looking on to the street, the other on to the courtyard, and the polished mahogany doors of which faeed eaeh other. He began by saying a few words respecting Monsieur Auguste Vabre; he was the landlord’s eldest son; since the spring he had rented the silk warehouse on the ground floor, and he also occupied the whole of the “entresol” above. Then, on the first floor the landlord’s other son, Monsieur Théophile Vabre and his wife, resided in the apartment overlooking the courtyard; and in the one overlooking the street lived the landlord himself, formerly a notary at Versailles, but who was now lodging with his son-in-law, Monsieur Duveyrier, a judge at the Court of Appeal.

“A fellow who is not yet forty-five,” said Campardon, stopping short. “That’s something remarkable, is it not?”

He ascended two steps, and then suddenly turning round, he added:

“Water and gas on every floor.”

Beneath the tall window on each landing, the panes of which, bordered with fretwork, lit up the staircase with a white light, was placed a narrow velvet covered bench. The architect observed that elderly persons could sit down and rest. Then, as he passed the second floor without naming the tenants.

“And there?” asked Octave, pointing to the door of the principal suite.

“Oh! there,” said he, “persons whom one never sees, whom no one knows. The house could well do without them. Blemishes, you know, are to be found

everywhere.”

He gave a little snort of contempt.

“The gentleman writes books, I believe.”

But on the third floor his smile of satisfaction reappeared. The apartments looking on to the courtyard were divided into two suites; they were occupied by Madame Juzeur, a little woman who was most unhappy, and a very distinguished gentleman who had taken a room to which he came once a week on business matters. Whilst giving these particulars, Campardon opened the door on the other side of the landing.

“And this is where I live,” resumed he. “Wait a moment, I must get your key. We will first go up to your room; you can see my wife afterwards.”

During the two minutes he was left alone, Octave felt penetrated by the grave silence of the staircase. He leant over the balustrade, in the warm air which ascended from the vestibule; he raised his head, listening if any noise came from above. It was the death-like peacefulness of a middle-class drawing-room, carefully shut in and not admitting a breath from outside. Behind the beautiful shining mahogany doors there seemed to be unfathomable depths of respectability.

“You will have some excellent neighbours,” said Campardon, reappearing with the key; “on the street side there are the Josserands, quite a family, the father who is cashier at the Saint-Joseph glass works, and also two marriageable daughters; and next to you the Pichons, the husband is a clerk; they are not rolling in wealth, but they are educated people. Everything has to be let, has it not? even in a house like this.”

From the third landing, the red carpet ceased and was replaced by a simple grey holland. Octave’s vanity was slightly ruffled. The staircase had, little by little, filled him with respect; he was deeply moved at inhabiting such a fine house as the architect termed it. As, following the latter, he turned into the passage leading to his room, he caught sight through a partly open door of a young woman standing up before a cradle. She raised her head at the noise. She was fair, with clear and vacant eyes; and all he carried away was this very distinct look, for the young woman, suddenly blushing, pushed the door to in the shame-faced way of a person taken by surprise.

Campardon turned round to repeat:

“Water and gas on every floor, my dear fellow.”

Then he pointed out a door which opened on to the servants’ staircase. Their rooms were up above. And stopping at the end of the passage, he added:

“Here we are at last.”

The room, which was square, pretty large, and hung with a grey wall-paper with blue flowers, was furnished very simply. Close to the alcove was a little dressing-closet with just room enough to wash one's hands. Octave went straight to the window, which admitted a greenish light. Below was the courtyard looking sad and clean, with its regular pavement, and the shining brass tap of its cistern. And still not a human being, nor even a noise; nothing but the uniform windows, without a bird-cage, without a flower-pot, displaying the monotony of their white curtains. To hide the big bare wall of the house on the left hand side, which shut in the square of the courtyard, the windows had been repeated, imitation windows in paint, with shutters eternally closed, behind which the walled-in life of the neighbouring apartments appeared to continue.

"But I shall be very comfortable here!" cried Octave delighted.

"I thought so," said Campardon. "Well! I did everything as though it had been for myself; and, moreover, I carried out the instructions contained in your letters. So the furniture pleases you? It is all that is necessary for a young man. Later on, you can make any changes you like."

And, as Octave shook his hand, thanking him, and apologising for having given him so much trouble, he resumed in a serious tone of voice:

"Only, my boy, no rows here, and above all no women! On my word of honour, if you were to bring a woman here it would revolutionize the whole house!"

"Be easy!" murmured the young man, feeling rather anxious.

"No, let me tell you, for it is I who would be compromised. You have seen the house. All middle-class people, and of extreme morality! between ourselves, they affect it rather too much. Never a word, never more noise than you have heard just now. Ah, well! Monsieur Gourd would at once fetch Monsieur Vabre, and we should both be in a nice pickle! My dear fellow, I ask it of you for my own peace of mind: respect the house."

Octave, overpowered by so much virtue and respectability, swore to do so. Then, Campardon, casting a mistrustful glance around, and lowering his voice as though some one might have heard him, added with sparkling eyes:

"Outside it concerns nobody. Paris is big enough, is it not? there is plenty of room. As for myself, I am at heart an artist, therefore I think nothing of it!"

A porter carried up the trunks. When everything was straight, the architect assisted paternally at Octave's toilet. Then, rising to his feet he said:

"Now we will go and see my wife."

Down on the third floor the maid, a slim, dark, and coquettish looking girl,

said that madame was busy. Campardon, with a view of putting his young friend at ease, showed him over the rooms: first of all, there was the huge white and gold drawingroom, highly decorated with artificial mouldings, and situated between a green parlour which the architect had turned into a workroom and the bedroom, into which they could not enter, but the narrow shape of which, and the mauve wall-paper, he described. As he next ushered him into the dining-room, all in imitation wood, with an extraordinary complication of baguettes and coffers, Octave, enchanted, exclaimed:

“It is very handsome!”

On the ceiling, two big cracks cut right through the coffers, and, in a corner, the paint had peeled off and displayed the plaster.

“Yes, it creates an effect,” slowly observed the architect, his eyes fixed on the ceiling. “You see, these kind of houses are built to create effect. Only, the walls will not bear much looking into. It is not twelve years old yet, and it is already cracking. One builds the frontage of handsome stone, with a lot of sculpture about it; one gives three coats of varnish to the walls of the staircase; one paints and gilds the rooms; and all that flatters people, and inspires respect. Oh! it is still solid, it will certainly last as long as we shall!”

He led him again across the ante-room, which was lighted by a window of ground glass. To the left, looking on to the courtyard, there was a second bed-chamber where his daughter Angèle slept, and which, all in white, looked on this November afternoon as sad as a tomb. Then at the end of the passage, came the kitchen, into which he insisted on conducting Octave, saying that it was necessary to see everything.

“Walk in,” repeated he, pushing open the door.

A terrible uproar issued from it. In spite of the cold, the window was wide open. With their elbows on the rail, the dark maid and a fat cook, a dissolute looking old party, were leaning out into the narrow well of an inner courtyard, which lighted the kitchens of each floor, placed opposite to each other. They were both yelling with their backs bent, whilst, from the depths of this hole, arose the sounds of vulgar voices, mingled with oaths and bursts of laughter. It was like the overflow of some sewer: all the domestics of the house were there, easing their minds. Octave’s thoughts reverted to the peaceful majesty of the grand staircase.

Just then the two women, warned by some instinct, turned round. They remained thunderstruck on beholding their master with a gentleman. There was a gentle whistle, windows were shut, and all was once more as silent as death.

“What is the matter, Lisa?” asked Campardon.

“Sir,” replied the maid, greatly excited, “it’s that filthy Adèle again. She has thrown a rabbit’s guts out of the window. You should speak to Monsieur Josserand, sir.”

Campardon became very grave, anxious not to make any promise. He returned to his workroom, saying to Octave:

“You have seen all. On each floor, the rooms are arranged the same. I pay a rent of two thousand five hundred francs, and on a third floor, too! Rents are rising every day. Monsieur Vabre must make about twenty-two thousand francs a year from his house. And it will increase still more, for there is a question of opening a wide thoroughfare from the Place de la Bourse to the new Opera-house. And he had the ground this is built upon almost for nothing, twelve years ago, after that great fire caused by a druggist’s servant!”

As they entered, Octave observed, hanging above a drawing-table, and in the full light from the window, a richly framed picture of a Virgin, displaying in her opened breast an enormous flaming heart. He could not repress a movement of surprise; he looked at Campardon, whom he had known to be a rather wild fellow at Plassans.

“Ah! I forgot to tell you,” resumed the latter slightly colouring, “I have been appointed diocesan architect, yes, at Evreux. Oh! a mere bagatelle as regards money, in all barely two thousand francs a year. But there is scarcely anything to do, a journey now and again; for the rest I have an inspector there. And, you see, it is a great deal, when one can print on one’s cards: ‘government architect.’ You can have no idea what an amount of work that procures me in the highest society.”

Whilst speaking, he looked at the Virgin with the flaming heart.

“After all,” continued he in a sudden fit of frankness, “I do not care a button for their paraphernalia!”

But, on Octave bursting out laughing, the architect was seized with fear. Why confide in that young man? He gave a side glance, and, putting on an air of compunction, he tried to smooth over what he had said.

“I do not care and yet I do care. Well! yes, I am becoming like that. You will see, you will see, my friend: when you have lived a little longer, you will do as every one else.”

And he spoke of his forty-two years, of the emptiness of life, posing for being very melancholy, which his robust health belied. In the artist’s head which he had fashioned for himself, with flowing hair and beard trimmed in the Henri IV. style, one found the flat skull and square jaw of a middle-class man of limited intelligence and voracious appetites. When younger, he had a

fatiguing gaiety.

Octave's eyes became fixed on a number of the "Gazette de France," which was lying amongst some plans. Then, Campardon, more and more ill at ease, rang for the maid to know if madame was at length disengaged. Yes, the doctor was just leaving, madame would be there directly.

"Is Madame Campardon unwell?" asked the young man.

"No, she is the same as usual," said the architect in a bored tone of voice.

"Ah! and what is the matter with her?"

Again embarrassed, he did not give a straightforward answer.

"You know, there is always something going wrong with women. She has been in this state for the last thirteen years, ever since her confinement. Otherwise, she is as well as can be. You will even find her stouter."

Octave asked no further questions. Just then, Lisa returned, bringing a card; and the architect, begging to be excused, hastened to the drawing-room, telling the young man as he disappeared to talk to his wife and have patience. Octave had caught sight, on the door being quickly opened and closed, of the black mass of a cassock in the centre of the large white and gold apartment.

At the same moment, Madame Campardon entered from the ante-room. He scarcely knew her again. In other days, when a youngster, he had known her at Plassans, at her father's, Monsieur Domergue, government clerk of the works, she was thin and ugly, as puny-looking as a young girl suffering from the crisis of her puberty; and now he beheld her plump, with the clear and placid complexion of a nun, soft eyes, dimples, and a general appearance of an overfed she-cat. If she had not been able to grow pretty, she had ripened towards thirty, gaining a sweet savour and a nice fresh odour of autumn fruit. He remarked, however, that she walked with difficulty, her whole body wrapped, in a mignonette coloured silk dressing-gown, moving; which gave her a languid air.

"But you are a man, now!" said she gaily, holding out her hands. "How you have grown, since our last journey to the country!"

And she gazed at him: tall, dark, handsome, with his well kept moustache and beard. When he told her his age, twenty-two, she scarcely believed it: he looked twenty-five at least. He, whom the presence of a woman, even though she were the lowest of servants, filled with rapture, laughed melodiously, enveloping her with his eyes of the colour of old gold, and of the softness of velvet.

"Ah! yes," repeated he gently, "I have grown, I have grown. Do you recollect, when your cousin Gasparine used to buy me marbles?"

Then, he gave her news of her parents. Monsieur and Madame Domergue were living happily, in the house to which they had retired; they merely complained of being very lonely, bearing Campardon a grudge for having taken their little Rose from them, during a stay he had made at Plassans on business. Then, the young man tried to bring the conversation round to cousin Gasparine, having a precocious youngster's old curiosity to satisfy, in the matter of an hitherto unexplained adventure: the architect's mad passion for Gasparine, a tall lovely girl, but poor, and his sudden marriage with skinny Rose who had a dowry of thirty thousand francs, and quite a tearful scene, and a quarrel, and the flight of the abandoned one to Paris, to an aunt who was a dressmaker. But Madame Campardon, whose placid complexion preserved a rosy paleness, did not appear to understand. He was unable to draw a single particular from her.

"And your parents?" inquired she in her turn. "How are Monsienr and Madame Mouret?"

"Very well, thank you," replied he. "My mother scarcely leaves her garden. You would find the house in the Rue de la Banne, just as you left it."

Madame Campardon, who seemed unable to remain standing for long without feeling tired, had seated herself on a high drawing-chair, her legs stretched out in her dressing-gown; and he, taking a low chair beside her, raised his head when speaking, with his air of habitual adoration. With his large shoulders, he was like a woman, he had a woman's feeling which at once admitted him to their hearts. So that, at the eud of ten minutes, they were both talking like two lady friends of long standing.

"Now I am your boarder," said he, passing a handsome hand with neatly trimmed nails over his beard. "We shall get on well together, you will see. How charming it was of you to remember the Plassans youngster and to busy yourself about everything, at the first word!"

But she protested.

"No, do not thank me. I am a great deal too lazy, I never move. It was Achille who arranged everything. And, besides, was it not sufficient that my mother mentioned to us your desire to board in some family, for us to think at once of opening our doors to you? You will not be with strangers, and will be company for us."

Then, he told her of his own affairs. After having obtained a bachelor's diploma, to please his family, he had just passed three years at Marseilles, in a big calico print warehouse, which had a factory in the neighbourhood of Plassans. He had a passion for trade, the trade in women's luxuries, into which enters a seduction, a slow possession by gilded words and adulatory glances.

And he related, laughing victoriously, how he had made the five thousand francs, without which he would never have ventured on coming to Paris, for he had the prudence of a Jew beneath the exterior of an amiable giddy-headed fellow.

“Just fancy, they had a Pompadour calico, an old design, something marvellous. No one would bite at it; it had been stowed away in the cellars for two years past. Then, as I was about to travel through the departments of the Var and the Basses-Alpes, it occurred to me to purchase the whole of the stock and to sell it on my own account. Oh! such a success! an amazing success! The women quarrelled for the remnants; and to-day, there is not one there who is not wearing some of my calico. I must say that I talked them over so nicely! They were all with me, I might have done as I pleased with them.”

And he laughed, whilst Madame Campardon, charmed, and troubled by thought of that Pompadour calico, questioned him: “Little bouquets on an unbleached ground, was it not?” She had been trying to obtain the same thing everywhere for a summer dressing-gown.

“I have travelled for two years, which is enough,” resumed he. “Besides, there is Paris to conquer. I must immediately look out for something.”

“What!” exclaimed she, “has not Achille told you? But he has a berth for you, and close by, too!”

He uttered his thanks, as surprised as though he were in fairy land, asking, by way of a joke, whether he would not find a wife and a hundred thousand francs a-year in his room that evening, when a young girl of fourteen, tall and ugly, with fair insipid-looking hair, pushed open the door, and gave a slight cry of fright.

“Come in and don’t be afraid,” said Madame Campardon. “It is Monsieur Octave Mouret, whom you have heard us speak of.”

Then, turning towards the latter, she added:

“My daughter, Angèle. We did not bring her with us at our last journey. She was so delicate! But she is getting stouter now.”

Angèle, with the awkwardness of girls in the ungrateful age, went and placed herself behind her mother, and cast glances at the smiling young man. Almost immediately, Campardon reappeared, looking excited; and he could not contain himself, but told his wife in a few words of his good fortune: the Abbé Mauduit, Vicar of Saint-Roch, had called about some work, merely some repairs, but which might lead to many other things. Then, annoyed at having spoken before Octave, and still quivering, he rapped one hand in the other, saying:

“Well! well! what are we going to do?”

“Why, you were going out,” said Octave. “Do not let me disturb you.”

“Achille,” murmured Madame Campardon, “that berth, at the Hédouins’—”

“Why, of course! I was forgetting,” exclaimed the architect. “My dear fellow, a place of first clerk at a large linen-draper’s. I know some one there who has said a word for you. You are expected. It is not yet four o’clock; shall I introduce you now?”

Oetave hesitated, anxious about the bow of his necktie, flurried by his mania for being neatly dressed. However, he decided to go, when Madame Campardon assured him that he looked very well. With a languid movement, she offered her forehead to her husband, who kissed her with a great show of tenderness, repeating:

“Good-bye, my darling—good-bye, my pet.”

“Do not forget that we dine at seven,” said she, accompanying them across the drawing-room, where they had left their hats.

Angèle followed them without the slightest grace. But her music-master was waiting for her, and she at once commenced to strum on the instrument with her bony fingers. Octave, who was lingering in the ante-room, repeating his thanks, was unable to make himself heard. And, as he went downstairs, the sound of the piano seemed to follow him: in the midst of the warm silence other pianos—from Madame Juzeur’s, the Vabres’, and Duveyriers’—were answering, playing on eaeh floor other airs, whieh issued, distantly and religiously, from the calm solemnity of the doors.

On reaching the street, Campardon turned into the Rue Neuve-Saint-Augustin. He remained silent, with the absorbed air of a man seeking for an opportunity to broach a subject.

“Do you remember Mademoiselle Gasparine?” asked he, at length. “She is first lady assistant at the Hédouins’. You will see her.”

Oetave thought this a good time for satisfying his curiosity.

“Ah!” said he. “Does she live with you?”

“No! no!” exelaimed the architect, hastily, and as though feeling hurt at the bare idea.

Then, as the young man appeared surprised at his vehemence, he gently continued, speaking in an embarrassed way:

“No; she and my wife no longer see each other. You know, in families—

Well, I met her, and I could not refuse to shake hands, could I? more especially as she is not very well off, poor girl. So that, now, they have news of each other through me. In these old quarrels, one must leave the task of healing the wounds to time."

Octave was about to question him plainly on the subject of his marriage, when the architect suddenly put an end to the conversation by saying:

"Here we are!"

It was a large linen-drapers, opening on to the narrow triangle of the Place Gaillon, at the corner of the Rue Neuve-Saint-Augustin and the Rue de la Michodière. Across two windows immediately above the shop was a signboard, with the words, "The Ladies' Paradise, founded in 1822," in faded gilt letters, whilst on the shop windows was inscribed, in red, the name of the firm, "Deleuze, Hédouin, & Co."

"It has not the modern style, but it is honest and solid," rapidly explained Campardou. "Monsieur Hédouin, formerly a clerk, married the daughter of the elder Deleuze, who died a couple of years ago; so that the business is now managed by the young couple—the old Deleuze and another partner, I think, both keep out of it. You will see Madame Hédouin. Oh! a woman with brains! Let us go in."

It so happened that Monsieur Hédouin was at Lille buying some linen; therefore Madame Hédouin received them. She was standing up, a penholder behind her ear, giving orders to two shopmen who were putting away some pieces of stuff on the shelves; and she appeared to him so tall, so admirably lovely, with her regular features and her tidy hair, so gravely smiling, in her black dress, with a turn-down collar and a man's tie, that Octave, not usually timid, could only stammer out a few observations. Everything was settled without any waste of words.

"Well!" said she, in her quiet way, and with her tradeswoman's accustomed gracefulness, "you may as well look over the place, as you are not engaged."

She called one of her clerks, and put Octave under his guidance; then, after having politely replied to a question of Cam-pardon's that Mademoiselle Gasparine was out on an errand, she turned her back and resumed her work, continuing to give her orders in her gentle and concise voice.

"Not there, Alexandre. Put the silks up at the top. Be careful, those are not the same make!"

Campardon, after hesitating, at length said to Octave that he would call again for him to take him back to dinner. Then, during two hours, the young man went over the warehouse. He found it badly lighted, small, encumbered

with stock, which, overflowing from the basement, became heaped up in the corners, leaving only narrow passages between high walls of bales. On several different occasions he ran against Madame Hédouin, busy, and scuttling along the narrowest passages without ever catching her dress in anything. She seemed the very life and soul of the establishment, all the assistants belonging to which obeyed the slightest sign of her white hands. Octave felt hurt that she did not take more notice of him. Towards a quarter to seven, as he was coming up a last time from the basement, he was told that Campardon was on the first floor with Mademoiselle Gasparine. Up there was the hosiery department, which that young lady looked after. But, at the top of the winding staircase, the young man stopped abruptly behind a pyramid of pieces of calico systematically arranged, on hearing the architect talking most familiarly to Gasparine.

“I swear to you it is not so!” cried he, forgetting himself so far as to raise his voice.

A slight pause ensued.

“How is she now?” at length inquired the young woman.

“Well! always the same. It comes and goes. She feels that it is all over now. She will never get right again.”

Gasparine resumed, in compassionate tones:

“My poor friend, it is you who are to be pitied. However, as you have been able to manage in another way, tell her how sorry I am to hear that she is still unwell—”

Campardon, without letting her finish, seized hold of her by the shoulders and kissed her roughly on the lips, in the gas-heated air already becoming heavy beneath the low ceiling. She returned his kiss, murmuring:

“To-morrow morning, if you can, at six o’clock; I will remain in bed. Knock three times.”

Octave, bewildered, and beginning to understand, coughed, and showed himself. Another surprise awaited him. Cousin Gasparine had become dried up, thin and angular, with her jaw projecting, and her hair coarse; and all she had preserved of her former self were her large superb eyes, in a face that had now become cadaverous. With her jealous forehead, her ardent and obstinate mouth, she troubled him as much as Rose had charmed him by her tardy expansion of an indolent blonde.

Gasparine was polite, without effusiveness. She remembered Plassans—she talked to the young man of the old times. When they went off, Campardon and he, she shook their hands. Downstairs, Madame Hédouin simply said to

Oetave:

“To-morrow, then, sir.”

Out in the street the young man, deafened by the cabs, jostled by the passers-by, eould not help remarking that this lady was very beautiful, but that she did not seem particularly amiable. On the black and muddy pavement, the bright windows of freshly-painted shops, flaring with gas, east broad rays of vivid light; whilst the old shops, with their sombre displays, lit up in the interior only by smoking lamps, which burnt like distant stars, saddened the streets with masses of shadow. In the Rue Neuve-Saint-Augustin, just before turning into the Rue do Choiseul, the architect bowed on passing before one of these establishments.

A young woman, slim and elegant, dressed in a silk mantlet, was standing in the doorway, drawing a little boy of three towards her, so that he might not get run over. She was talking to an old bareheaded lady, the shopkeeper, no doubt, whom she addressed in a familiar manner. Octave eould not distinguish her features in that dim light, beneath the dancing reflections of the neighbouring gas-jets; she seemed to him to be pretty, he only saw two bright eyes, whieh were fixed a moment upon him like two flames. Behind her yawned the shop, damp like a cellar, and emitting an odour of saltpetre.

“That is Madame Vabre, the wife of Monsieur Théophile Vabre, the landlord’s younger son. You know the people who live on the first floor,” resumed Campardon, when he had gone a few steps. “Oh! a most charming lady! She was born in that shop, one of the best paying haberdashers of the neighbourhood, which her parents, Monsieur and Madame Louhette, still manage, for the sake of having something to occupy them. They have made some money there, I will warrant!”

But Oetave did not understand trade of that sort, in those holes of old Paris, where at one time a piece of stuff was sufficient sign. He swore that nothing in the world would ever make him consent to live in such a den. One surely caught some rare aches and pains there!

Whilst talking, they had reaehed the top of the stairs. They were being waited for. Madame Campardon had put on a grey silk dress, had arranged her hair coquettishly, and looked very neat and prim. Campardou kissed her on the neck, with the emotion of a good husband.

“Good evening, my darling; good evening, my pet.”

And they passed into the dining-room. The dinner was delightful. Madame Campardon at first talked of the Deleuzes and the Hédouins—families respected throughout the neighbourhood, and whose member’s were well known; a cousin who was a stationer in the Rue Gaillon, an uncle who had an

umbrella shop in the Passage Choiseul, and nephews and nieces in business all round about. Then the conversation turned, and they talked of Angèle, who was sitting stiffly on her chair, and eating with inert gestures. Her mother was bringing her up at home, it was preferable; and, not wishing to say more, she blinked her eyes, to convey that young girls learnt very naughty things at boarding-schools. The child had slyly balanced her plate on her knife. Lisa, who was clearing the cloth, missed breaking it, and exclaimed:

"It was your fault, mademoiselle!"

A mad laugh, violently restrained, passed over Angèle's face. 'Madame Campardon contented herself with shaking her head; and, when Lisa had left the room to fetch the dessert, she sang her praises—very intelligent, very active, a regular Paris girl, always knowing which way to turn. They might very well do without Victoire, the cook, who was no longer very clean, on account of her great age; but she had seen her master born at his father's—she was a family ruin which they respected. Then as the maid returned with some baked apples:

"Conduct irreproachable," continued Madame Campardon in Octave's ear. "I have discovered nothing against her as yet. One holiday a month to go and embrace her old aunt, who lives some distance off."

Octave observed Lisa. Seeing her nervous, flat-chested, blear-eyed, the thought came to him that she must go in for a precious fling, when at her old aunt's. However, he greatly approved what the mother said, as she continued to give him her views on education—a young girl is such a heavy responsibility, it is necessary to keep her clear even of the breaths of the street And, during this, Angèle, each time Lisa leant over near her chair to remove a plate, pinched her in a friendly way, whilst they both maintained their composite, without even moving an eyelid.

"One should be virtuous for one's own sake," said the architect learnedly, as though by way of conclusion to thoughts he had not expressed. "I do not care a button for public opinion; I am an artist!"

After dinuer, they remained in the drawing-room until midnight. It was a little jollification to celebrate Octave's arrival. Madame Campardon appeared to be very tired; little by little she abandoned herself, leaning back on the sofa.

"Are you suffering, my darling?" asked her husband.

"No," replied she in a low voice. "It is always the same thing."

She looked at him, and then gently asked:

"Did you see her at the Hédouins'?"

"Yes. She asked after you."

Tears came to Rose’s eyes.

“She is in good health, she is!”

“Come, come,” said the architect, showering little kisses on her hair, forgetting they were not alone. “You will make yourself worse again. You know very well that I love you all the same, my poor pet!”

Octave, who had discreetly retired to the window, under the pretence of looking into the street, returned to study Madame Campardon’s countenance, his curiosity again awakened, and wondering if she knew. But she had resumed her amiable and doleful expression, and was curled up in the depths of the sofa, like a woman who has to find her pleasure in herself, and who is forcibly resigned to receiving the caresses that fall to her share.

At length Octave wished them good-night. With his candlestick in his hand, he was still on the landing, when he heard the sound of silk dresses rustling over the stairs. He politely stood on one side. It was evidently the ladies of the fourth floor, Madame Josserand and her two daughters, returning from some party. As they passed, the mother, a superb and corpulent woman, stared in his face; whilst the elder of the young ladies kept at a distance with a sour air, and the younger, giddily looked at him and laughed, in the full light of the candle. She was charming, this one, with her irregular but agreeable features, her clear complexion, and her auburn hair gilded with light reflections; and she had a bold grace, the free gait of a young bride returning from a ball in a complicated costume of ribbons and lace, like unmarried girls do not wear. The trains disappeared along the balustrade: a door closed. Octave lingered a moment, greatly amused by the gaiety of her eyes.

He slowly ascended in his turn. A single gas-jet was burning, the staircase was slumbering in a heavy warmth. It seemed to him more wrapped up in itself than ever, with its chaste doors, its doors of rich mahogany, closing the entrances to virtuous alcoves. Not a sigh passed along, it was the silence of well-mannered people who hold their breath. Presently a slight noise was heard; Octave leant over and beheld Monsieur Gourd, in his cap and slippers, turning out the last gas-jet. Then all subsided, the house became enveloped by the solemnity of darkness, as though annihilated in the distinction and decency of its slumbers.

Octave, nevertheless, had great difficulty in getting to sleep. He kept feverishly turning over, his brain occupied with the new faces he had seen. Why the devil were the Campardons so amiable? Were they dreaming of marrying their daughter to him later on? Perhaps, too, the husband took him to board with them so that he might amuse and enliven the wife? And that poor lady, what peculiar complaint could she be suffering from? Then his ideas got more mixed; he saw shadows pass—? little Madame Pichon, his neighbour,

with her clear empty glances; beautiful Madame Hédouin, correct and grave in her black dress; and Madame Vabre's ardent eyes, and Mademoiselle Josserand's gay laugh. How they swarmed in a few hours in the streets of Paris! It had always been his dream, ladies who would take him by the hand and help him in his affairs. But these kept returning and mingling with fatiguing obstinacy. He knew not which to choose; he tried to keep his voice soft, his gestures cajoling. And suddenly, worn-out, exasperated, he yielded to his brutal inner nature, to the ferocious disdain in which he held woman, beneath his air of amorous adoration.

"Are they going to let me sleep at all?" said he out loud, turning violently on to his back. "The first who likes, it is the same to me, and all together if it pleases them! To sleep now, it will be daylight to-morrow."

CHAPTER II.

When Madame Josserand, preceded by her young ladies, left the evening party given by Madame Dambreville, who resided on a fourth floor in the Rue de Rivoli, at the corner of the Rue de l'Oratoire, she roughly slammed the street door, in the sudden outburst of a passion she had been keeping under for the past two hours. Berthe, her younger daughter, had again just gone and missed a husband.

"Well! what are you doing there?" said she angrily to the young girls, who were standing under the arcade and watching the cabs pass by. "Walk on! don't have any idea we are going to ride! To waste another two francs, eh?"

And as Hortense, the elder, murmured:

"It will be pleasant, with this mud. My shoes will never recover it."

"Walk on!" resumed the mother, all beside herself. "When you have no more shoes, you can stop in bed, that's all. A deal of good it is, taking you out!"

Berthe and Hortense bowed their heads and turned into the Rue de l'Oratoire. They held their long skirts up as high as they could over their crinolines, squeezing their shoulders together and shivering under their thin opera-cloaks. Madame Josserand followed behind, wrapped in an old fur cloak made of Calabar skins, looking as shabby as cats'. All three, without bonnets, had their hair enveloped in lace wraps, head-dresses which caused the last passers-by to look back, surprised at seeing them glide along the houses, one by one, with bent backs, and their eyes fixed on the puddles. And the mother's exasperation increased still more at the recollection of many similar returns

home, for three winters past, hampered by their gay dresses, amidst the black mud of the streets and the jeers of belated blackguards. No, decidedly, she had had enough of dragging her young ladies about to the four corners of Paris, without daring to venture on the luxury of a cab, for fear of having to omit a dish from the morrow's dinner!

"And she makes marriages!" said she out loud, returning to Madame Dambreville, and talking alone to ease herself, without even addressing her daughters, who had turned down the Rue Saint-Honoré. "They are pretty, her marriages! A lot of impertinent minxes, who come from no one knows where! Ah! if one was not obliged! It's like her last success, that bride whom she brought out, to show us that it did not always fail; a fine specimen! a wretched child who had to be sent back to her convent for six months, after a little mistake, to be re-whitewashed!"

The young girls were crossing the Place du Palais-Royal, when a shower came on. It was a regular rout. They stopped, slipping, splashing, looking again at the vehicles passing empty along.

"Walk on!" cried the mother, pitilessly. "We are too near now; it is not worth two francs. And your brother Léon, who refused to leave with us for fear of having to pay for the cab! So much the better for him if he gets what he wants at that lady's, but we can say that it is not at all decent. A woman who is over fifty and who only receives young men! An old nothing-much whom a high personage married to that fool Dambreville, appointing him head clerk!"

Hortense and Berthe trotted along in the rain, one before the other, without seeming to hear. When their mother thus eased herself, letting everything out, and forgetting the wholesome strictness with which she kept them, it was agreed that they should be deaf. Berthe, however, revolted on entering the gloomy and deserted Rue de l'Echelle.

"Oh, dear!" said she, "the heel of my shoe is coming off. I cannot go a step further!"

Madame Josserand's wrath became terrible.

"Just walk on! Do I complain? Is it my place to be out in the street at such a time and in such weather? It would be different if you had a father like others! But no, the fine gentleman stays at home taking his ease. It is always my turn to drag you about; he would never accept the burden. Well! I declare to you that I have had enough of it. Your father may take you out in future if he likes; may the devil have me if ever again I accompany you to houses where I am plagued like that! A man who deceived me as to his capacities, and who has never yet procured me the least pleasure! Ah! good heavens! there is one I would not marry now, if it were to come over again!"

The young ladies no longer protested. They were already acquainted with this inexhaustible chapter of their mother's blighted hopes. With their lace wraps drawn over their faces, their shoes sopping wet, they rapidly followed the Rue Sainte-Anne. But, in the Rue de Choiseul, at the very door of her house, a last humiliation awaited Madame Josserand: the Duveyriers' carriage splashed her as it passed in.

On the stairs, the mother and the young ladies, worn out and enraged, recovered their gracefulness when they had to pass before Octave. Only, as soon as ever their door was closed behind them, they rushed through the dark apartment, knocking up against the furniture, and tumbled into the dining-room, where Monsieur Josserand was writing by the feeble light of a little lamp.

"Failed!" cried Madame Josserand, letting herself fall on to a chair.

And, with a rough gesture, she tore the lace wrap from her head, threw her fur cloak on to the back of her chair, and appeared in a flaring dress trimmed with black satin and cut very low in the neck, looking enormous, her shoulders still beautiful, and resembling a mare's shining flanks. Her square face, with its drooping cheeks and too big nose, expressed the tragic fury of a queen restraining herself from descending to the use of coarse, vulgar expressions.

"Ah!" said Monsieur Josserand simply, bewildered by this violent entrance.

He kept blinking his eyes and was seized with uneasiness. His wife positively crushed him when she displayed that giant throat, the full weight of which he seemed to feel on the nape of his neck. Dressed in an old thread-bare frock-coat which he was finishing to wear out at home, his face looking as though tempered and expunged by thirty-five years spent at an office desk, he watched her for a moment with his big lifeless blue eyes. Then, after thrusting his grey locks behind his ears, feeling very embarrassed and unable to find a word to say, he attempted to resume his work.

"But you do not seem to understand!" resumed Madame Josserand in a shrill voice. "I tell you that there is another marriage knocked on the head, and it is the fourth!"

"Yes, yes, I know, the fourth," murmured he. "It is annoying, very annoying."

And, to escape from his wife's terrifying nudity, he turned towards his. daughters with a good-natured smile. They also were removing their lace wraps and their opera-cloaks; the elder one was in blue and the younger in pink; their dresses, too, free in cut and over-trimmed, were like a provocation. Hortense, with her sallow complexion, and her face spoilt by a nose like her

mother's, which gave her an air of disdainful obstinacy, had just turned twenty-three and looked twenty-eight; whilst Berthe, two years younger, retained all a child's gracefulness, having, however, the same features, but more delicate and dazzlingly white, and only menaced with the coarse family mask after she entered the fifties.

"It will do no good if you go on looking at us for ever!" cried Madame Josserand. "And, for God's sake, put your writing away; it worries my nerves!"

"But, my dear," said he peacefully, "I am addressing wrappers."

"Ah! yes, your wrappers at three francs a thousand! Is it with those three francs that you hope to marry your daughters?"

Beneath the feeble light of the little lamp, the table was indeed covered with large sheets of coarse paper, printed wrappers, the blanks of which Monsieur Josserand filled in for a largo publisher who had several periodicals. As his salary as cashier did not suffice, he passed whole nights at this unprofitable labour, working in secret, and seized with shame at the idea that any one might discover their penury.

"Three francs are three francs," replied he in his slow, tired voice. "Those three francs will enable you to add ribbons to your dresses, and to offer some pastry to your guests on your Tuesdays at home."

He regretted his words as soon as he had uttered them; for he felt that they struck Madame Josserand full in the heart, in the most sensitive part of her wounded pride. A rush of blood purpled her shoulders; she seemed on the point of breaking out into revengeful utterances; then, by an effort of dignity, she merely stammered, "Ah! good heavens! ah! good heavens!"

And she looked at her daughters; she magisterially crushed her husband beneath a shrug of her terrible shoulders, as much as to say, "Eh! you hear him? what an idiot!" The daughters nodded their heads. Then, seeing himself beaten, and laying down his pen with regret, the father opened the "Temps" newspaper, which he brought home every evening from his office.

"Is Saturnin asleep?" sharply inquired Madame Josserand, speaking of her younger son.

"Yes, long ago," replied he. "I also sent Adèle to bed. And Léon, did you see him at the Dambrevilles'?"

"Of course! he sleeps there!" she let out in a cry of rancour which she was unable to restrain.

The father, surprised, naively added,

“Ah! you think so?”

Hortense and Berthe had become deaf again. They faintly smiled, however, affecting to be busy with their shoes, which were in a pitiful state. To create a diversion, Madame Josserand tried to pick another quarrel with Monsieur Josserand; she begged him to take his newspaper away every morning, not to leave it lying about in the room all day, as he had done with the previous number, for instance, a number containing the report of an abominable trial, which his daughters might have read. She well recognised there his want of morality.

“Well, are we going to bed?” asked Hortense. “I am hungry.”

“Oh! and I too!” said Berthe. “I am famishing.”

“What! you are hungry!” cried Madame Josserand beside herself. “Did you not eat any cake there, then? What a couple of geese! You should have eaten some! I did.”

The young ladies resisted. They were hungry, they were feeling quite ill. So the mother accompanied them to the kitchen, to see if they could discover anything. The father at once returned stealthily to his wrappers. He well knew that, without them, every little luxury in the home would have disappeared; and that was why, in spite of the scorn and unjust quarrels, he obstinately remained till daybreak engaged in this secret work, happy like the worthy man he was whenever he fancied that an extra piece of lace would hook a rich husband. As they were already stinting the food, without managing to save sufficient for the dresses and the Tuesday receptions, he resigned himself to his martyr-like labour, dressed in rags, whilst the mother and daughters wandered from drawing-room to drawing-room with flowers in their hair.

“What a stench there is here!” cried Madame Josserand on entering the kitchen. “To think that I can never get that slut Adèle to leave the window slightly open! She pretends that the room is so very cold in the morning.”

She went and opened the window, and from the narrow courtyard separating the kitchens there rose an icy dampness, the unsavoury odour of a musty cellar. The candle which Berthe had lighted caused colossal shadows of naked shoulders to dance upon the wall.

“And what a state the place is in!” continued Madame Josserand, sniffing about, and poking her nose into all the dirty corners. “She has not scrubbed her table for a fortnight. Here are plates which have been waiting to be washed since the day before yesterday. On my word, it is disgusting! And her sink, just look! smell it now, smell her sink!”

Her rage was lashing itself. She tumbled the crockery about with her arms

white with rice powder and bedecked with gold bangles; she trailed her flaring dress amidst the grease stains, catching it in cooking utensils thrown under the tables, risking her hardly earned luxury amongst the vegetable parings. At last, the discovery of a notched knife made her anger break all bounds.

“I will turn her into the street to-morrow morning!”

“You will be no better off,” quietly remarked Hortense. “We are never able to keep anyone. This is the first who has stayed three months. The moment they begin to get a little decent and know how to make melted butter, off they go.”

Madame Josserand bit her lips. As a matter of fact, Adèle alone, stupid and lousy, and only lately arrived from her native Brittany, could put up with the ridiculously vain penury of these middle-class people, who took advantage of her ignorance and her slovenliness to half starve her. Twenty times already, on account of a comb found on the bread or of some abominable stew which gave them all the colic, they had talked of sending her about her business; then, they had resigned themselves to putting up with her, in the presence of the difficulty of replacing her, for the pilferers themselves declined to be engaged, to enter that hole, where even the lumps of sugar were counted.

“I can’t discover anything!” murmured Berthe, who was rummaging a cupboard.

The shelves had the melancholy emptiness and the false luxury of families where inferior meat is purchased, so as to be able to put flowers on the table. All that was lying about were some white and gold porcelain plates, perfectly empty, a crumb-brush, the silver-plated handle of which was all tarnished, and some cruets without a drain of oil or vinegar in them; there was not a forgotten crust, not a morsel of dessert, not a fruit, nor a sweet, nor a remnant of cheese. One could feel that Adèle’s hunger never satisfied, lapped up the rare dribblets of sauce which her betters left at the bottoms of the dishes, to the extent of rubbing the gilt off.

“But she has gone and eaten all the rabbit!” cried Madame Josserand.

“True,” said Hortense, “there was the tail piece. Ah! no, here it is. It would have surprised me if she had dared. I shall stick to it, you know. It is cold, but it is better than nothing!”

Berthe, on her side, was rummaging about, but without result. At length her hand encountered a bottle, in which her mother had diluted the contents of an old pot of jam, so as to manufacture some red currant syrup for her evening parties. She poured herself out half a glass, saying:

“Ah! an idea! I will soak some bread in this, as it is all there is!”

But Madame Josserand, all anxiety, looked at her sternly.

“Pray, don’t restrain yourself, fill your glass whilst you are about it. It will be quite sufficient if I offer water to the ladies and gentlemen to-morrow, will it not?”

Fortunately, the discovery of another of Adèle’s evil doings interrupted her reprimand. She was still turning about, searching for crimes, when she caught sight of a volume on the table; and then occurred a supreme explosion.

“Oh! the beast! she has again brought my Lamartine into the kitchen!”

It was a copy of “Jocelyn.” She took it up and rubbed it hard, as though dusting it; and she kept repeating that she had twenty times forbidden her to leave it lying about in that way, to write her accounts upon. Berthe and Hortense, meanwhile, had shared the little piece of bread which remained; then carrying their suppers away with them, they said that they would undress first. The mother gave the icy cold stove a last glance, and returned to the dining-room, tightly holding her Lamartine beneath the massive flesh of her arm.

Monsieur Josserand continued writing. He trusted that his wife would be satisfied with crushing him with a glance of contempt as she crossed the room to go to bed. But she again dropped on to a chair, facing him, and looked at him fixedly without speaking. He felt this look, and was seized with such uneasiness, that his pen kept sputtering on the flimsy wrapper paper.

“So it was you who prevented Adèle making a cream for tomorrow evening?” said she at length.

He raised his head in amazement.

“I, my dear!”

“Oh! you will again deny it, as you always do. Then, why has she not made the cream I ordered? You know very well that before our party to-morrow Uncle Bachelard is coming to dinner, it is his saint’s-day, which is very awkward, happening as it does on my reception day. If there is no cream, we must have an ice, and that will be another five francs squandered!”

He did not attempt to exculpate himself. Not daring to resume his work, he began to play with his penholder. There was a brief pause.

“To-morrow morning,” resumed Madame Josserand, “you will oblige me by calling on the Campardons and reminding them very politely, if you can, that we are expecting to see them in the evening. Their young man arrived this afternoon. Ask them to bring him with them. Do you understand? I wish him to come.”

“What young man?”

“A young man; it would take too long to explain everything to you. I have obtained all necessary information about him. I am obliged to try everything, as you leave your daughters entirely to me, like a bundle of rubbish, without occupying yourself about marrying them any more than about marrying the Grand Turk.”

The thought revived her anger.

“You see, I contain myself, but it is more, oh! it is more than I can stand! Say nothing, sir, say nothing, or really my anger will get the better of me.”

He said nothing, but she vented her wrath upon him all the same.

“It has become unbearable! I warn you, that one of these mornings I shall go off, and leave you here with your two idiotic daughters. Was I born to live such a skinflint life as this? Always cutting farthings into four, never even having a decent pair of boots, and not being able to receive my friends decently! And all that through your fault! Ah! do not shake your head, do not exasperate me more than I am already! Yes, your fault! You deceived me, sir, basely deceived me. One should not marry a woman, when one is decided to let her want for everything. You played the boaster, you pretended you had a fine future before you, you were the friend of your employer’s sons, of those brothers Bemheim, who, since, have merely made a fool of you. What! You dare to pretend that they have not made a fool of you! But you ought to be their partner by now? It is you who made their business what it is, one of the first glass-houses in Paris, and you have remained their cashier, a subordinate, a hireling. Really! you have no spirit; hold your tongue.”

“I get eight thousand francs a year,” murmured the cashier. “It is a very good berth.”

“A good berth, after more than thirty years’ labour?” resumed Madame Josserand. “They grind you down, and you are delighted. Do you know what I would have done, had I been in your place? well! I would have put the business into my pocket twenty times over. It was so easy. I saw it when I married you, and since then I have never ceased advising you to do so. But it required some initiative and intelligence; it was a question of not going to sleep on your leather-covered stool, like a blockhead.”

“Come,” interrupted Monsieur Josserand, “are you going to reproach me now with being honest?”

She jumped up, and advanced towards him, flourishing her Lamartine.

“Honest! in what way do you mean? Begin by being honest towards me. Others do not count till afterwards, I hope! And I repeat, sir, it is not honest to

take a young girl in, pretending to be ambitious to become rich some day, and then to end by losing what little wits you had in looking after somebody else's cashbox. On my word, I was nicely swindled! Ah! if it were to happen over again, and if I had only known your family!"

She was walking violently about. He could not restrain a slight sign of impatience, in spite of his great desire for peace.

"You would do better to go to bed, Eléonore," said he. "It is past one o'clock, and I assure you this work is pressing. My family has done you no harm, so do not speak of it."

"Ah! and why, pray? Your family is no more sacred than another, I suppose. Every one at Clermont knows that your father, after selling his business of solicitor, let himself be ruined by a servant. You might have seen your daughters married long ago, had he not taken up with a strumpet when over seventy. There is another who has swindled me!"

Monsieur Josserand turned pale. He replied in a trembling voice, which rose higher as he went on:

"Listen, do not let us throw our relations at each other's heads. Your father never paid me your dowry, the thirty thousand francs he promised."

"Eh? what? thirty thousand francs!"

"Exactly; don't pretend to be surprised. And if my father met with misfortunes, yours behaved in a most disgraceful way towards us. I was never able to find out clearly what he left. There were all sorts of underhand dealings, so that the school in the Rue des Fossés-Saint-Victor should remain with your sister's husband, that shabby usher who no longer recognises us now. We were robbed as though in a wood."

Madame Josserand, now ghastly white, was choking with rage before her husband's inconceivable revolt.

"Do not say a word against papa! For forty years he was a credit to instruction. Go and talk of the Bachelard Academy in the neighbourhood of the Panthéon! And as for my sister and my brother-in-law, they are what they are. They have robbed me, I know; but it is not for you to say so. I will not permit it, understand that! Do I speak to you of your sister, who eloped with an officer? Oh! you have indeed some nice relations!"

"An officer who married her, madame. There is uncle Bachelard, too, your brother, a man totally destitute of all morality—"

"But you are becoming cracked, sir! He is rich, he earns what he pleases as a commission merchant, and he has promised to provide Berthe's dowry. Do you then respect nothing?"

“Ah! yes, provide Berthe’s dowry! Will you bet that he will give a sou, and that we shall not have had to put up with his nasty habits for nothing? He makes me feel ashamed of him every time he comes here. A liar, a rake, a person who takes advantage of the situation, who for fifteen years past, seeing us all on our knees before his fortune, has been taking me every Saturday to spend two hours in his office, to go over his books! It saves him five francs. We have never yet been favoured with a single present from him.”

Madame Josserand, catching her breath, was wrapped for a moment in thought. Then she uttered this last cry:

“And you have a nephew in the police, sir!”

A fresh pause ensued. The light from the little lamp was becoming dimmer, wrappers were flying about beneath Monsieur Josserand’s feverish gestures; and he looked his wife full in the face—his wife in her low neck dress—determined to say everything, and quivering with courage.

“With eight thousand francs a year one can do many things,” resumed he. “You are always complaining. But you should not have arranged your housekeeping on a footing superior to our means. It is your mania for receiving and for paying visits, of having your at homes, of giving tea and pastry—“?

She did not let him finish.

“Now we have come to it! Shut me up in a box at once. Reproach me for not walking out as naked as my hand. And your daughters, sir, who will marry them if we never see any one? We don’t see many people as it is. It does well to sacrifice oneself, to be judged afterwards with such meanness of heart!”

“We have all of us, madame, sacrificed ourselves. Léon had to make way for his sisters; and he left the house to earn his own living without any assistance from us. As for Saturnin, poor child, he does not even know how to read. And I deny myself everything; I pass my nights—”

“Why did you have daughters then, sir? You are surely not going to reproach them with their education, I hope? Any other man in your place would be proud of Hortense’s diploma and of Berthe’s talents. The dear child again delighted every one this evening with her waltz, the ‘Banks of the Oise,’ and her last painting will certainly enchant our guests to-morrow. But you, sir, you are not even a father; you would have sent your children to take cows to grass, instead of sending them to school.”

“Well! I took out an assurance for Berthe’s benefit Was it not you, madame, who, when the fourth payment became due, made use of the money to cover the drawing-room furniture? And, since then, you have even

negotiated the premiums that had been paid."

"Of course! as you leave us to die of hunger. Ah! you may indeed bite your fingers, if your daughters become old maids."

"Bite my fingers! But, Jove's thunder! it is you who frighten the likely men away, with your dresses and your ridiculous parties!"

Never before had Monsieur Josserand gone so far. Madame Josserand, suffocating, stammered forth the words: "I—I ridiculous!" when the door opened. Hortense and Berthe were returning, in their petticoats and little calico jackets, their hair let down, and their feet in old slippers.

"Ah, well! it is too cold in our room!" said Berthe shivering. "The food freezes in your mouth. Here, at least, there has been a fire this evening."

And both dragging their chairs along the floor, seated themselves close to the stove, which still retained a little warmth. Hortense held her rabbit bone in the tips of her fingers, and was skilfully picking it. Berthe dipped pieces of bread in her glass of syrup. The parents, however, were so excited that they did not even appear to notice their arrival. They continued:

"Ridiculous—ridiculous, sir! I shall not be ridiculous again! Let my head be cut off if I wear out another pair of gloves in trying to get them husbands. It is your turn now! And try not to be more ridiculous than I have been!"

"I daresay, madame, now that you have exhibited them and compromised them everywhere! Whether you marry them or whether you don't, I don't care a button!"

"And I care less, Monsieur Josserand! I care so little that I will bundle them out into the street if you aggravate me much more. And if you have a mind to, you can follow them, the door is open. Ah, heavens! what a good riddance!"

The young ladies quietly listened, used to these lively recriminations. They were still eating, their little jackets dropping from their shoulders, and their bare skin gently rubbing against the lukewarm earthenware of the stove; and they looked charming in this undress, with their youth and their hearty appetites and their eyes heavy with sleep.

"You are very foolish to quarrel," at length observed Hortense, with her mouth full. "Mamma only spoils her temper, and papa will be ill again to-morrow at his office. It seems to me that we are old enough to be able to find husbands for ourselves."

This created a diversion. The father, thoroughly exhausted, made a feint of returning to his wrappers; and he sat with his nose over the paper, unable to write, his hands trembling violently. The mother, who had been moving about

the room like an escaped lioness, went and planted herself in front of Hortense.

“If you are speaking for yourself,” cried she, “you are a great ninny! Your Verdier will never marry you.”

“That is my business,” boldly replied the young girl.

After having contemptuously refused five or six suitors, a little clerk, the son of a tailor, and other young fellows whose prospects she did not consider good enough, she had ended by setting her cap at a barrister, whom she had met at the Dambrevilles’, and who was already turned forty. She considered him very clever, and destined to make a name in the world. But the misfortune was that for fifteen years past Verdier had been living with a mistress, who in the neighbourhood even passed for his wife. She knew of this, though, and by no means let it trouble her.

“My child,” said the father, raising his head once more, “I begged you not to think of this marriage. You know the situation.”

She stopped sucking her bone, and said with an air of impatience:

“What of it? Verdier has promised me he will leave her. She is a fool.”

“You are wrong, Hortense, to speak in that way. And if he should also leave you one day to return to her whom you would have caused him to abandon?”

“That is my business,” sharply retorted the young woman.

Berthe listened, fully acquainted with this matter, the contingencies of which she discussed daily with her sister. She was, besides, like her father, all in favour of the poor woman, whom it was proposed to turn out into the street, after having performed a wife’s duties for fifteen years. But Madame Josserand intervened.

“Leave off, do! those wretched women always end by returning to the gutter. Only, it is Verdier who will never bring himself to leave her. He is fooling you, my dear. In your place, I would not wait a second for him; I would try and find some one else.”

Hortense’s voice became sourer still, whilst two livid spots appeared on her cheeks.

“Mamma, you know how I am. I want him, and I will have him. I will never marry any one else, even though he kept me waiting a hundred years.”

The mother shrugged her shoulders.

“And you call others fools!”

But the young girl rose up, quivering with rage.

“Here! don’t go pitching into me!” cried she. “I have finished my rabbit. I prefer to go to bed. As you are unable to find us husbands, you must let us find them in our own way.”

And she withdrew, violently slamming the door behind her.

Madame Josserand turned majestically towards her husband, and uttered this profound remark:

“That, sir, is the result of your bringing up!”

Monsieur Josserand did not protest; he was occupied in dotting his thumb nail with ink, whilst waiting till they allowed him to resume his writing. Berthe, who had eaten her bread, dipped a finger in the glass to finish up her syrup. She felt comfortable, with her back nice and warm, and did not hurry herself, being undesirous of encountering her sister’s quarrelsome temper in their bedroom.

“Ah! and that is the reward!” continued Madame Josserand, resuming her walk to and fro across the dining-room. “For twenty years one wears oneself out for these young ladies, one goes in want of everything in order to make them accomplished women, and they will not even let one have the satisfaction of seeing them married according to one’s own fancy. It would be different, if they had ever been refused a single thing! But I have never kept a sou for myself, and have even gone without clothes to dress them as though we had an income of fifty thousand franca No, really, it is too absurd! When those hussies have had a careful education, have got just as much religion as is necessary, and the airs of rich girls, they leave you in the lurch, they talk of marrying barristers, adventurers, who lead lives of debauchery!”

She stopped before Berthe, and, menacing her with her finger, said:

“As for you, if you follow your sister’s example, you will have me to deal with.”

Then she recommenced stamping round the room, speaking to herself, jumping from one idea to another, contradicting herself with the brazenness of a woman who will always be in the right.

“I did what I ought to do, and were it to be done over again I should do the same. In life, it is only the most shamefaced who lose. Money is money; when one has none, one may as well retire. Whenever I had twenty sous, I always said I had forty; for that is real wisdom, it is better to be envied than pitied. It is no use having a good education if one has not good clothes to wear, for then people despise you. It is not just, but it is so. I would sooner wear dirty petticoats than a cotton dress. Feed on potatoes, but have a chicken when you

have any one to dinner. And only fools would say the contrary!”

She looked fixedly at her husband, to whom these last reflections were addressed. The latter, worn out, and declining another battle, had the cowardice to declare:

“It is true; money is everything in our days.”

“You hear,” resumed Madame Josserand, returning towards her daughter. “Go straight ahead and try to give us satisfaction. How is it you let this marriage fall through?”

Berthe understood that her turn had come.

“I don’t know, mamma,” murmured she “A second head-clerk in a government office,” continued the mother; “not yet thirty, with a splendid future before him. Every month he would be bringing you his money; it is something substantial that, there is nothing like it. You have been up to some tomfoolery again, just the same as with the others.”

“I have not, mamma, I assure you. He must have obtained some information—have heard that I had no money.”

But Madame Josserand cried out at this.

“And the dowry that your uncle is going to give you! Every one knows about that dowry. No, there is something else; he withdrew too abruptly. When dancing you passed into the parlour.”

Berthe became confused.

“Yes, mamma. And, as we were alone, he even tried to do some naughty things; he kissed me, seizing hold of me like that. Then I was frightened; I pushed him up against the furniture—”

Her mother, again overcome with rage, interrupted her.

“Pushed him up against the furniture, ah! the wretched girl pushed him up against the furniture!”

“But, mamma, he held me—”

“What of it? He held you, that was nothing! A fat lot of good it is sending such fools to school! Whatever did they teach you, eh?”

A rush of colour rose to the young girl’s cheeks and shoulders. Tears filled her eyes, whilst she looked as confused as a violated virgin.

“It was not my fault; he looked so wicked. I did not know what to do.”

“Did not know what to do! she did not know what to do! Have I not told you a hundred times that your fears are ridiculous? It is your lot to live in

society. When a man is rough, it is because he loves you, and there is always a way of keeping him in his place in a nice manner. For a kiss behind a door! in truth now, ought you to mention such a thing to us, your parents? And you push people against the furniture, and you drive away your suitors!”

She assumed a doctoral air as she continued:

“It is ended; I despair of doing anything with you, you are too stupid, my girl. One would have to coach you in everything, and that would be awkward. As you have no fortune, understand at least that you must hook the men by some other means. One should be amiable, have loving eyes, abandon one’s hand occasionally, allow a little playfulness, without seeming to do so; in short, one should angle for a husband. You make a great mistake, if you think it improves your eyes to cry like a fool!”

Berthe was sobbing.

“You aggravate me—leave off crying. Monsienr Josserand, just tell your daughter not to spoil her face by crying in that way. It will be too much if she becomes ugly!”

“My child,” said the father, “be reasonable; listen to your mother’s good advice. You must not spoil your good looks, my darling.”

“And what irritates me is that she is not so bad when she likes,” resumed Madame Josserand. “Come, wipe your eyes, look at me as if I was a gentleman courting you. You smile, you drop your fan, so that the gentleman, in picking it up, slightly touches your fingers. That is not the way. You are holding you head up too stiffly, you look like a sick hen. Lean back more, show your neck; it is too young to be hidden.”

“Then, like this, mamma?”

“Yes, that is better. And never be stiff, be supple. Men do not care for planks. And, above all, if they go too far do not play the simpleton. A man who goes too far is done for, my dear.”

The drawing-room clock struck two; and, in the excitement of that prolonged vigil, in her desire now become furious for an immediate marriage, the mother forgot herself in thinking out loud, making her daughter turn about like a papier-mache doll. The latter, without spirit or will, abandoned herself; but she felt very heavy at heart, fear and shame brought a lump to her throat. Suddenly, in the midst of a silvery laugh which her mother was forcing her to attempt, she burst into sobs, her face all upset:

“No! no! it pains me!” stammered she,

For a second, Madame Josserand remained incensed and amazed. Ever since she left the Dambrevilles’, her hand had been itching, there were slaps in

the air. Then, she landed Berthe a clout with all her might.

“Take that! you are too aggravating! What a fool! On my word, the men are right!”

In the shock, her Lamartine, which she had kept under her arm, fell to the floor. She picked it up, wiped it, and without adding another word, she retired into the bedroom, royally drawing her ball-dress around her.

“It was bound to end thus,” murmured Monsieur Josserand, not daring to detain his daughter, who went off also, holding her cheek and crying louder than ever.

But, as Berthe felt her way across the ante-room, she found her brother Saturnin up, barefooted and listening. Saturnin was a big, ill-formed fellow of twenty-five, with wild-looking eyes, and who had remained childish after an attack of brain-fever. Without being mad, he terrified the household by attacks of blind violence, whenever he was thwarted. Berthe, alone, was able to subdue him with a look. He had nursed her when she was still quite a child, through a long illness, obedient as a dog to her little invalid girl’s caprices; and, ever since he had saved her, he was seized with an adoration for her, into which entered every kind of love.

“Has she been beating you again?” asked he in a low and ardent voice.

Berthe, uneasy at finding him there, tried to send him away.

“Go to bed, it is nothing to do with you.”

“Yes, it is. I will not have her beat you! She woke me up, she was shouting so. She had better not try it on again, or I will strike her!”

Then, she seized him by the wrists, and spoke to him as to a disobedient animal. He submitted at once, and stuttered, crying like a little boy:

“It hurts you very much, does it not? Where is the sore place, that I may kiss it?”

And, having found her cheek in the dark, he kissed it, wetting it with his tears, as he repeated:

“It is well, now, it is well, now.”

Meanwhile, Monsieur Josserand, left alone, had laid down his pen, his heart was so full of grief. At the end of a few minutes, he got up gently to go and listen at the doors. Madame Josserand was snoring. No sounds of crying issued from his daughters’ room. All was dark and peaceful. Then he returned, feeling slightly relieved. He saw to the lamp which was smoking, and mechanically resumed his writing. Two big tears, unfelt by him, dropped on to the wrappers, in the solemn silence of the slumbering house.

CHAPTER III.

So soon as the fish was served, skate of doubtful freshness with black butter, which that bungler Adèle had drowned in a flood of vinegar, Hortense and Berthe, seated on the right and left of uncle Bachelard, incited him to drink, filling his glass one after the other, and repeating:

“It’s your saint’s-day, drink now, drink! Here’s your health, uncle!”

They had plotted together to make him give them twenty francs. Every year, their provident mother placed them thus on either side of her brother, abandoning him to them. But it was a difficult task, and required all the greediness of two girls prompted by dreams of Louis XV. shoes and five button gloves. To get him to give the twenty francs, it was necessary to make the uncle completely drunk. He was ferociously miserly whenever he found himself amongst his relations, though out of doors he squandered in crapulous boozes the eighty thousand francs he made each year out of his commission business. Fortunately, that evening, he was already half fuddled when he arrived, having passed the afternoon with the wife of a dyer of the Faubourg Montmartre, who kept a stock of Marseilles vermouth expressly for him.

“Your health, my little ducks!” replied he each time, with his thick husky voice, as he emptied his glass.

Covered with jewellery, a rose in his button-hole, enormous in build, he filled the middle of the table, with his broad shoulders of a boozing and brawling tradesman, who has wallowed in every vice. His false teeth lit up with too harsh a whiteness his ravaged face, the big red nose of which blazed beneath the snowy crest of his short cropped hair; and, now and again, his eyelids dropped of themselves over his pale and misty eyes. Gueulin, the son of one of his wife’s sisters, affirmed that his uncle had not been sober during the ten years he had been a widower.

“Narcisse, a little skate, I can recommend it,” said Madame Josserand, smiling at her brother’s tipsy condition, though at heart it made her feel rather disgusted.

She was sitting opposite to him, having little Gueulin on her left, and another young man on her right, Hector Trublot, to whom she was desirous of showing some politeness. She usually took advantage of family gatherings like the present to get rid of certain invitations she had to return; and it was thus that a lady living in the house, Madame Juzeur, was also present, seated next to Monsieur Josserand. As the uncle behaved very badly at table, and it was

the expectation of his fortune alone which enabled them to put up with him without absolute disgust, she only had intimate acquaintances to meet him or else persons whom she thought it was no longer worth while trying to dazzle. For instance, she had at one time thought of finding a son-in-law in young Trublot, who was employed at a stockbroker's, whilst waiting till his father, a wealthy man, purchased him a share in the business; but, Trublot having professed a determined objection to matrimony, she no longer stood upon ceremony with him, even placing him next to Saturnin, who had never known how to eat decently. Berthe, who always had a seat beside her brother, was commissioned to subdue him with a look, whenever he put his fingers too much into the gravy.

After the fish came a meat pie, and the young ladies thought the moment arrived to commence their attack.

"Take another glass, uncle!" said Hortense. "It is your saint's day. Don't you give anything when it's your saint's-day?"

"Dear me! why of course," added Berthe naively. "People always give something on their saint's-day. You must give us twenty francs."

On hearing them speak of money, Bachelard at once exaggerated his tipsy condition. It was his usual dodge; his eyelids dropped, and he became quite idiotic.

"Eh? what?" stuttered he.

"Twenty francs. You know very well what twenty francs are, it is no use your pretending you don't," resumed Berthe. "Give us twenty francs, and we will love you, oh! we will love you so much!"

They threw their arms round his neck, called him the most endearing names, and kissed his inflamed face without the least repugnance for the horrid odour of debauchery which he exhaled. Monsieur Josserand, whom these continual fumes of absinthe, tobacco and musk upset, had a feeling of disgust on seeing his daughters' virgin charms rubbing up against those infamies gathered in the vilest places.

"Leave him alone!" cried he.

"Why?" asked Madame Josserand, giving her husband a terrible look. "They are amusing themselves. If Narcisse wishes to give them twenty francs, he is quite at liberty to do so."

"Monsieur Bachelard is so good to them!" complacently murmured little Madame Juzeur.

But the uncle struggled, becoming more idiotic than ever, and repeating, with his mouth full of saliva:

“It’s funny. I don’t know, word of honour! I don’t know.”

Then, Hortense and Berthe, exchanging a glance, released him. No doubt he had not had enough to drink. And they again resorted to filling his glass, laughing like courtesans who intend robbing a man. Their bare arms, of an adorable youthful plumpness, kept passing every minute under the uncle’s big flaming nose.

Meanwhile, Trublot, like a quiet fellow who takes his pleasures alone, was watching Adèle as she turned heavily round the table. Being very short-sighted he thought her pretty, with her pronounced Breton features and her hair the colour of dirty hemp. When she brought in the roast, a piece of veal, she leant right over his shoulder, to reach the centre of the table; and he, pretending to pick up his napkin, gave her a good pinch on the calf of her leg. The servant, not understanding, looked at him, as though he had asked her for some bread.

“What is it?” said Madame Josserand. “Did she knock against you, sir? Oh! that girl! she is so awkward! But, you know, she is quite new to the work; she will be better when she has had a little training.”

“No doubt, there is no harm done,” replied Trublot, stroking his bushy black beard with the serenity of a young Indian god.

The conversation was becoming more animated in the diningroom, at first icy cold, and now gradually warming with the fumes of the dishes. Madame Juzeur was once more confiding to Monsieur Josserand the dreariness of her thirty years of solitary existence. She raised her eyes to heaven, and contented herself with this discreet allusion to the drama of her life: her husband had left her after ten days of married bliss, and no one knew why; she said nothing more. Now, she lived by herself in a lodging that was as soft as down and always closed, and which was frequented by priests.

“It is so sad, at my age!” murmured she languishingly, cutting up her veal with delicate gestures.

“A very unfortunate little woman,” whispered Madame Josserand in Trublot’s ear, with an air of profound sympathy.

But Trublot glanced indifferently at this clear-eyed devotee, so full of reserve and hidden meanings. She was not his style.

Then there was a regular panic. Saturnin, whom Berthe was not watching so closely, being too busy with her uncle, had amused himself by cutting up his meat into various designs on his plate. This poor creature exasperated his mother, who was both afraid and ashamed of him; she did not know how to get rid of him, not daring through pride to make a workman of him, after having sacrificed him to his sisters by having removed him from the school

where his slumbering intelligence was too long awakening; and, during the years he had been hanging about the house, useless and stinted, she was in a constant state of fright whenever she had to let him appear before company. Her pride suffered cruelly.

“Saturnin!” cried she.

But Saturnin began to chuckle, delighted with the mess he had made in his plate. He did not respect his mother, but called her roundly a great liar and a horrid nuisance, with the perspicacity of madmen who think out loud. Things certainly seemed to be going wrong. He would have thrown his plate at her head, if Berthe, reminded of her duties, had not looked him straight in the face. He tried to resist; then the fire in his eyes died out; he remained gloomy and depressed on his chair, as though in a dream, until the end of the meal.

“I hope, Gueulin, that you have brought your flute?” asked Madame Josserand, trying to dispel her guests’ uneasiness.

Gueulin was an amateur flute-player, but solely in the houses where he was treated without ceremony.

“My flute! Of course I have,” replied he.

He was absent-minded, his carroty hair and whiskers were more bristly than usual, as he watched with deep interest the young ladies’ manoeuvres around their uncle. Employed at an assurance office, he would go straight to Bachelard on leaving off work, and stick to him, visiting the same cafés and the same disreputable places. Behind the big, ill-shaped body of the one, the little pale face of the other was sure always to be seen.

“Cheerily, there! stick to him!” said he, suddenly, like a true sportsman.

The uncle was indeed losing ground. When, after the vegetables, French beans swimming in water, Adèle placed a vanilla and currant ice on the table, it caused unexpected delight amongst the guests; and the young ladies took advantage of the situation to make the uncle drink half of the bottle of champagne, which Madame Josserand had bought for three francs of a neighbouring grocer. He was becoming quite affectionate, and forgetting his pretended idiocy.

“Eh, twenty francs! Why twenty francs? Ah! you want twenty francs! But I have not got them, really now. Ask Gueulin. Is it not true, Gueulin, that I forgot my purse, and that you had to pay at the café? If I had them, my little ducks, I would give them to you, you are so nice.”

Gueulin was laughing in his cool way, making a noise like a pulley that required greasing. And he murmured:

“The old swindler!”

Then, suddenly, unable to restrain himself, he cried:

“Search him!”

So Hortense and Berthe again threw themselves on the uncle, this time without the least restraint. The desire for the twenty francs, which their good education had hitherto kept within bounds, bereft them of their senses in the end, and they forgot everything else. The one, with both hands, examined his waistcoat pockets, whilst the other buried her fingers inside the pockets of his frock-coat. The uncle, however, pressed back on his chair, still struggled; but he gradually burst out into a laugh—a laugh broken by drunken hiccoughs.

“On my word of honour, I haven’t a sou! Leave off, do; you’re tickling me.”

“In the trousers!” energetically exclaimed Gueulin, excited by the spectacle.

And Berthe resolutely searched one of the trouser pockets.

Their hands trembled; they were both becoming exceedingly rough, and could have smacked the uncle. But Berthe uttered a cry of victory: from the depths of the pocket she brought forth a handful of money, which she spread out in a plate; and there, amongst a heap of coppers and pieces of silver, was a twenty-franc piece.

“I have it!” said she, her face all red, her hair undone, as she tossed the coin in the air and caught it again.

There was a general clapping of hands, every one thought it very funny. It created quite a hubbub, and was the success of the dinner. Madame Josserand looked at her daughters with a mother’s tender smile. The uncle, who was gathering up his money, sententiously observed that, when one wanted twenty francs, one should earn them. And the young ladies, worn out and satisfied, were panting on his right and left, their lips still trembling in the enervation of their desire.

A bell was heard to ring. They had been eating slowly, and the other guests were already arriving. Monsieur Josserand, who had decided to laugh like his wife, enjoyed singing some of Béranger’s songs at table; but as this outraged his better half’s poetic tastes, she compelled him to keep quiet. She got the dessert over as quickly as possible, more especially as, since the forced present of the twenty francs, the uncle had been trying to pick a quarrel, complaining that his nephew, Léon, had not deigned to put himself out to come and wish him many happy returns of the day. Léon was only coming to the evening party. At length, as they were rising from table, Adèle said that the architect from the floor below and a young man were in the drawing-room.

“Ah! yes, that young man,” murmured Madame Juzeur, accepting Monsieur Josserand’s arm. “So you have invited him? I saw him to-day talking to the doorkeeper. He is very good-looking.”

Madame Josserand was taking Trublot’s arm, when Saturnin, who had been left by himself at the tableland who had not been roused from slumbering with his eyes open by all the uproar about the twenty francs, kicked back his chair, in a sudden outburst of fury, shouting:

“I won’t have it, damnation! I won’t have it!”

It was the very thing his mother always dreaded. She signalled to Monsieur Josserand to take Madame Juzeur away. Then she freed herself from Trublot, who understood, and disappeared; but he probably made a mistake, for he went off in the direction of the kitchen, close upon Adèle’s heels. Bachelard and Gueulin, without troubling themselves about the maniac, as they called him, chuckled in a corner, whilst playfully slapping one another.

“He was so peculiar, I felt there would be something this evening,” murmured Madame Josserand, uneasily. “Berthe, come quick!”

But Berthe was showing the twenty-franc piece to Hortense. Saturnin had caught up a knife. He repeated:

“Damnation! I won’t have it! I’ll rip their stomachs open!”

“Berthe!” called her mother in despair.

And, when the young girl hastened to the spot, she only just had time to seize him by the hand and prevent him from entering the drawing-room. She shook him angrily, whilst he tried to explain, with his madman’s logic.

“Let me be, I must settle them. I tell you it’s best. I’ve had enough of their dirty ways. They’ll sell the whole lot of us.”

“Oh! this is too much!” eried Berthe. “What is the matter with you? what are you talking about?”

He looked at her in a bewildered way, trembling with a gloomy rage, and stuttered:

“They’re going to marry you again. Never, you hear! I won’t have you hurt.”

The young girl eould not help laughing. Where had he got the idea from that they were going to marry her? But he nodded his head: he knew it, he felt it. And as his mother intervened to try and calm him, he grasped his knife so tightly that she drew back. However, she trembled for fear he should be overheard, and hastily told Berthe to take him away and lock him in his room; whilst he, becoming crazier than ever, raised his voice:

“I won’t have you married, I won’t have you hurt. If they marry you, I’ll rip their stomachs open.”

Then Berthe put her hands on his shoulders, and looked him straight in the face.

“Listen,” said she, “keep quiet, or I will not love you any more.”

He staggered, despair softened the expression of his face, his eyes filled with tears.

“You won’t love me any more, you won’t love me any more. Don’t say that. Oh! I implore you, say that you will love me still, say that you will love me always, and that you will never love any one else.”

She had seized him by the wrist, and she led him away as gentle as a child.

In the drawing-room Madame Josserand, exaggerating her intimacy, called Campardon her dear neighbour. Why had Madame Campardon not done her the great pleasure of coming also? and on the architect replying that his wife still continued poorly, she exelaimed that they would have been delighted to have received her in her dressing-gown and her slippers. But her smile never left Oetave, who was conversing with Monsieur Josserand; all her amiability was directed towards him, over Campardon’s shoulder. When her husband introduced the young man to her, her cordiality was so great that the latter felt quite uncomfortable.

Other guests were arriving; stout mothers with skinny daughters, fathers and uncles scarcely roused from their office drowsiness, pushing before them flocks of marriageable young ladies. Two lamps, with pink paper shades, lit up the drawingroom with a pale light, which only faintly displayed the old, worn, yellow velvet covered furniture, the scratched piano, and the three smoky Swiss views, which looked like black stains on the cold, bare, white and gold panels. And, in this miserly light, the guests—poor, and, so to say, worn-out figures, without resignation, and whose attire was the cause of much pinching and saving—seemed to become obliterated. Madame Josserand wore her fiery costume of the day before; only, with a view of throwing dust in people’s eyes, she had passed the day in sewing sleeves on to the body, and in making herself a lace tippet to cover her shoulders; whilst her two daughters, seated beside her in their dirty cotton jackets, vigorously plied their needles, rearranging with new trimmings their only presentable dresses, which they had been thus altering bit by bit ever since the previous winter.

After each ring at the bell, the sound of whispering issued from the ante-chamber. They conversed in low tones in the gloomy drawing-room, where the forced laugh of some young lady jarred at times like a false note. Behind little Madame Juzeur, Bachelard and Gueulin were nudging each other, and making

smutty remarks; and Madame Josserand watched them with an alarmed look, for she dreaded her brother's vulgar behaviour. But Madame Juzeur might hear anything; her lips quivered, and she smiled with angelic sweetness as she listened to the naughty stories. Uncle Bachelard had the reputation of being a dangerous man. His nephew, on the contrary, was chaste. No matter how splendid the opportunities were, Gueulin declined to have anything to do with women upon principle, not that he disdained them, but because he dreaded the morrows of bliss: always very unpleasant, he said.

Berthe at length appeared, and went hurriedly up to her mother.

"Ah, well! I have had a deal of trouble!" whispered she in her ear. "He would not go to bed, so I double-locked the door. But I am afraid he will break everything in the room."

Madame Josserand violently tugged at her dress. Octave, who was close to them, had turned his head.

"My daughter, Berthe, Monsieur Mouret," said she, in her most gracious manner, as she introduced them. "Monsieur Octave Mouret, my darling."

And she looked at her daughter. The latter was well acquainted with this look, which was like an order to clear for action, and which recalled to her the lessons of the night before. She at once obeyed, with the complaisance and the indifference of a girl who no longer stops to examine the person she is to marry. She prettily recited her little part with the easy grace of a Parisian already weary of the world, and acquainted with every subject, and she talked enthusiastically of the South, where she had never been. Octave, used to the stiffness of provincial virgins, was delighted with this little woman's cackle and her sociable manner.

Presently, Trublot, who had not been seen since dinner was over, entered stealthily from the dining-room; and Berthe, catching sight of him, asked thoughtlessly where he had been. He remained silent, at which she felt very confused 3 then, to put an end to the awkward pause which ensued, she introduced the two young men to each other. Her mother had not taken her eyes off her 3 she had assumed the attitude of a commander-in-chief, and directed the campaign from the easy-chair in which she had settled herself. When she judged that the first engagement had given all the result that could have been expected from it, she recalled her daughter with a sign, and said to her, in a low voice:

"Wait till the Vabre's are here before commencing your music. And play loud."

Octave, left alone with Trublot, began to engage him in conversation.

“A charming person.”

“Yes, not bad.”

“The young lady in blue is her elder sister, is she not? She is not so good-looking.”

“Of course not; she is thinner!”

Trublot, who looked without seeing with his near-sighted eyes, had the broad shoulders of a solid male, obstinate in his tastes. He had come back from the kitchen perfectly satisfied, crunching little black things which Octave recognised with surprise to be coffee berries.

“I say,” asked he abruptly, “the women are plump in the South, are they not?”

Octave smiled, and at once became on an excellent footing with Trublot. They had many ideas in common which brought them closer together. They exchanged confidences on an out-of-the-way sofa; the one talked of his employer at “The Ladies’ Paradise,” Madame Hédouin, a confoundedly fine woman, but too cold; the other said that he had been put on to the correspondence, from nine to five, at his stockbroker’s, Monsieur Desmarquay, where there was a stunning maid servant. Just then the drawing-room door opened, and three persons entered.

“They are the Vabres,” murmured Trublot, bending over towards his new friend. “Auguste, the tall one, he who has a face like a sick sheep, is the landlord’s eldest son—thirty-three years old, ever suffering from headaches which make his eyes start from his head, and which, some years ago, prevented him from continuing to learn Latin; a sullen fellow who has gone in for trade. The other, Théophile, that abortion with carroty hair and thin beard, that little old-looking man of twenty-eight, ever shaking with fits of coughing and of rage, tried a dozen different trades, and then married the young woman who leads the way, Madame Valérie—”

“I have already seen her,” interrupted Octave. “She is the daughter of a haberdasher of the neighbourhood, is she not? But how those veils deceive one! I thought her pretty. She is only peculiar, with her shrivelled face and her leaden complexion.”

“She is another who is not my ideal,” sententiously resumed Trublot. “She has superb eyes, and that is enough for some men. But she’s a thin piece of goods.”

Madame Josserand had risen to shake Valérie’s hand.

“How is it,” cried she, “that Monsieur Vabre is not with you? and that neither Monsieur nor Madame Duveyrier have done us the honour of coming?

They promised us though. Ah! it is very wrong of them!”

The young woman made excuses for her father-in-law, whose age kept him at home, and who, moreover, preferred to work of an evening. As for her brother and sister-in-law, they had asked her to apologise for them, they having received an invitation to an official party, which they were obliged to attend. Madame Josserand bit her lips. She never missed one of the Saturdays at home of those stuck-up people on the first floor, who would have thought themselves dishonoured had they ascended, one Tuesday, to the fourth. No doubt her modest tea was not equal to their grand orchestral concerts. But, patience! when her two daughters were married, and she had two sons-in-law and their relations to fill her drawing-room, she also would go in for choruses.

“Get yourself ready,” whispered she in Berthe’s ear.

They were about thirty, and rather tightly packed, for the parlour, having been turned into a bedroom for the young ladies, was not thrown open. The new arrivals distributed handshakes round. Valérie seated herself beside Madame Juzeur, whilst Bachelard and Gueulin made unpleasant remarks out loud about Théophile Vabre, whom they thought it funny to call “good for nothing.” Monsieur Josserand—who in his own home kept himself so much in the background that one would have taken him for a guest, and whom one would fail to find when wanted, even though he were standing close by—was in a corner listening in a bewildered way to a story related by one of his old friends, Bonnaud. He knew Bonnaud, who was formerly the general accountant of the Northern railway, and whose daughter had married in the previous spring? Well! Bonnaud had just discovered that his son-in-law, a very respectable-looking man, was an ex-clown, who had lived for ten years at the expense of a female circus-rider.

“Silence! silence!” murmured some good-natured voices. Berthe had opened the piano.

“Really!” explained Madame Josserand, “it is merely an unpretentious piece, a simple reverie. Monsieur Mouret, you like music, I think. Come nearer then. My daughter plays pretty fairly—oh! purely as an amateur, but with expression; yes, with a great deal of expression.”

“Caught!” said Trublot in a low voice. “The sonata stroke.” Octave was obliged to leave his seat and stand up beside the piano. To see the caressing attentions which Madame Josserand showered upon him, it seemed as though she were making Berthe play solely for him.

“‘The Banks of the Oise,’” resumed she. “It is really very pretty. Come begin, my love, and do not be confused. Monsieur Mouret will be indulgent.”

The young girl commenced the piece without being in the least confused.

Besides, her mother kept her eyes upon her like a sergeant ready to punish with a blow the least theoretical mistake. Her great regret was that the instrument, worn-out by fifteen years of daily scales, did not possess the sonorous tones of the Duveyriers' grand piano; and her daughter never played loud enough in her opinion.

After the sixth bar, Octave, looking thoughtful and nodding his head at each spirited passage, no longer listened. He looked at the audience, the politely absent-minded attention of the men, and the affected delight of the women, all that relaxation of persons for a moment at rest, but soon again to be harassed by the cares of every hour, the shadows of which, before long, would be once more reflected on their weary faces. Mothers were visibly dreaming that they were marrying their daughters, whilst a smile hovered about their mouths, revealing their fierce-looking teeth in their unconscious abandonment; it was the mania of this drawing-room, a furious appetite for sons-in-law, which consumed these worthy middle-class mothers to the asthmatic sounds of the piano.

The daughters, who were very weary, were falling asleep, with their heads dropping on to their shoulders, forgetting to sit up erect. Octave, who had a certain contempt for young ladies, was more interested in Valerie—she looked decidedly ugly in her peculiar yellow silk dress, trimmed with black satin—and feeling ill at ease, yet attracted all the same, his gaze kept returning to her; whilst she, with a vague look in her eyes, and unnerved by the discordant music, was smiling like a crazy person.

At this moment quite a catastrophe occurred. A ring at the bell was heard, and a gentleman entered the room without the least regard for what was taking place.

"Oh! doctor!" said Madame Josserand angrily.

Doctor Juillerat made a gesture of apology, and stood stockstill. Berthe, at this moment, was executing a little passage with a slow and dreamy fingering, which the guests greeted with flattering murmurs. Ah! delightful! delicious! Madame Juzeur was almost swooning away, as though being tickled. Hortense, who was standing beside her sister, turning the pages, was sulkily listening for a ring at the bell amidst the avalanche of notes; and, when the doctor entered, she made such a gesture of disappointment that she tore one of the pages on the stand. But, suddenly, the piano trembled beneath Berthe's weal: fingers, thrumming away like hammers; it was the end of the reverie, amidst a deafening uproar of clangorous chords.

There was a moment of hesitation. The audience was waking up again.. Was it finished? Then the compliments burst out on all sides. Adorable! a superior talent!

“Mademoiselle is really a first-rate musician,” said Octave, interrupted in his observations. “No one has ever given me such pleasure.”

“Do you really mean it, sir?” exclaimed Madame Josserand delighted. “She does not play badly, I must admit. Well! we have never refused the child anything; she is our treasure! She possesses every talent she wished for. Ah! sir, if you only knew her.”

A confused murmur of voices again filled the drawing-room. Berthe very calmly received the praise showered upon her, and did not leave the piano, but sat waiting till her mother relieved her from fatigue-duty. The latter was already speaking to Octave of the surprising manner in which her daughter dashed off “The Harvesters,” a brilliant gallop, when some dull and distant thuds created a stir amongst the guests. For several moments past there had been violent shocks, as though some one was trying to burst a door open. Everybody left off talking, and looked about inquiringly.

“What is it?” Valérie ventured to ask. “I heard it before, during the finish of the piece.”

Madame Josserand had turned quite pale. She had recognised Saturnin’s blows. Ah! the wretched lunatic! and in her mind’s eye she beheld him tumbling in amongst the guests. If he continued hammering like that, it would be another marriage done for!

“It is the kitchen door slamming,” said she with a constrained smile. “Adèle never will shut it. Go and sec, Berthe.”

The young girl had also understood. She rose and disappeared. The noise ceased at once, but she did not return immediately. Uncle Bachelard, who had scandalously disturbed “The Banks of the Oise” with reflections uttered out loud, finished putting his sister out of countenance by calling to Gueulin that he felt awfully bored and was going to have a grog. They both returned to the dining-room, banging the door behind them.

“That dear old Narcisse, he is always original!” said Madame Josserand to Madame Juzeur and Valérie, between whom she had gone and seated herself. “His business occupies him so much! You know, he has made almost a hundred thousand francs this year!”

Octave, at length free, had hastened to rejoin Trublot, who was half asleep on the sofa. Near them, a group surrounded Doctor Juillerat, the old medical man of the neighbourhood, not over brilliant, but who had become in course of time a good practitioner, and who had delivered all the mothers in their confinements and had attended all the daughters. He made a speciality of women’s ailments, which caused him to be in great demand of an evening, the husbands all trying to obtain a gratuitous consultation in some corner of the

drawing-room. Just then, Théophile was telling him that Valérie had had another attack the day before; she was for ever having a choking fit and complaining of a lump rising in her throat; and he, too, was not very well, but his complaint was not the same. Then he did nothing but speak of himself, and relate his vexations: he had commenced to read for the law, had engaged in manufactures at a foundry, and had tried office management at the Mont-de-Piété; then he had busied himself with photography, and thought he had found a means of making vehicles supply their own motive power; meanwhile, out of kindness, he was travelling some piano-flutes, an invention of one of his friends. And he complained of his wife: it was her fault if nothing went right at home; she was killing him with her perpetual nervous attacks.

"Do pray give her something, doctor!" implored he, coughing and moaning, his eyes lit up with hatred, in the querulous rage of his impotency.

Trublot watched him, full of contempt; and he laughed silently as he glanced at Octave. Doctor Juillerat uttered vague and calming words: no doubt, they would relieve her, the dear lady. At fourteen, she was already stifling, in the shop of the Rue Neuve-Saint-Augustin; he had attended her for vertigo which always ended by bleeding at the nose; and, as Théophile recalled with despair her languid gentleness when a young girl, whilst now, fantastic and her temper changing twenty times in a day, she absolutely tortured him, the doctor merely shook his head. Marriage did not succeed with all women.

"Of course!" murmured Trublot, "a father who has gone off his chump by passing thirty years of his life in selling needles and thread, a mother who has always had her face covered with pimples, and that in an airless hole of old Paris, no one can expect such people to have daughters like other folks!"

Octave was surprised. He was losing some of his respect for that drawing-room which he had entered with a provincial's emotion. Curiosity was awakened within him, when he observed Campardon consulting the doctor in his turn, but in whispers, like a sedate person desirous of letting no one become acquainted with his family mishaps.

"By the way, as you appear to know everything," said Octave to Trublot, "tell me what it is that Madame Campardon is suffering from. Every one puts on a very sad face whenever it is mentioned."

"Why, my dear fellow," replied the young man, "she has—"

And he whispered in Octave's ear. Whilst he listened, the latter's face first assumed a smile, and then became very long with a look of profound astonishment.

"It is not possible!" said he.

Then, Trublot gave his word of honour. He knew another lady in the same state.

“Besides,” resumed he, “it sometimes happens after a confinement that—”

And he began to whisper again. Octave, convinced, became quite sad. He who had fancied all sorts of things, who had imagined quite a romance, the architect occupied elsewhere and drawing him towards his wife to amuse her! In any case he now knew that she was well guarded. The young men pressed up against each other, in the excitement caused by these feminine secrets which they were stirring up, forgetting that they might be overheard.

Madame Juzeur was just then confiding to Madame Josser-and her impressions of Octave. She thought him very becoming, no doubt, but she preferred Monsieur Auguste Vabre The latter, standing up in a corner of the drawing-room, remained silent, in his insignificance and with his usual evening headache.

“What surprises me, dear madame, is that you have not thought of him for your Berthe. A young man set up in business, who is prudence itself. And he is in want of a wife, I know that he is desirous of getting married.”

Madame Josserand listened, surprised. She would never herself have thought of the linendraper. Madame Juzeur, however, insisted, for in her misfortune, she had the mania of working for the happiness of other women, which caused her to busy herself with everything relating to the tender passions of the house. She affirmed that Auguste never took his eyes off Berthe. In short, she invoked her experience of men: Monsieur Mouret would never let himself be caught, whilst that good Monsieur Vabre would be very easy and very advantageous. But Madame Josserand, weighing the latter with a glance, came decidedly to the conclusion that such a son-in-law would not be of much use in filling her drawing-room.

“My daughter detests him,” said she, “and I would never oppose the dictates of her heart.”

A tall thin young lady had just played a fantasia on the “Dame Blanche.” As uncle Bachelard had fallen asleep in the dining-room, Gueulin reappeared and imitated the nightingale on his flute. No one listened, however, for the story about Bonnaud had spread. Monsieur Josserand was quite upset, the fathers held up their arms, the mothers were stifling. What! Bonnaud’s son-in-law was a clown! Then who could one believe in now? and the parents, in their appetites for marriages, suffered regular nightmares, like so many distinguished convicts in evening dress. The fact was, that Bonnaud had been so delighted at the opportunity of getting rid of his daughter that he had not troubled much about references, in spite of his rigid prudence of an over-

scrupulous general accountant.

“Mamma, the tea is served,” said Berthe, as she and Adèle opened the folding doors.

And, whilst the company passed slowly into the dining-room, she went up to her mother and murmured:

“I have had enough of it! He wants me to stay and tell him stories, or he threatens to smash everything!”

On a grey cloth which was too narrow, was served one of those teas laboriously got together, a cake bought at a neighbouring baker’s, with some mixed sweet biscuits, and some sandwiches on either side. At either end of the table quite a luxury of flowers, superb and costly roses, withdrew attention from the ancient dust on the biscuits, and the poor quality of the butter. The sight caused a commotion, and jealousies were kindled: really those Josserands were ruining themselves in trying to marry off their daughters. And the guests, having but poorly dined, and only thinking of going to bed with their bellies full, casting side glances at the bouquets, gorged themselves with weak tea and imprudently devoured the hard stale biscuits and the heavy cake. For those persons who did not like tea, Adèle handed round some glasses of red currant syrup. It was pronounced excellent.

Meanwhile, the uncle was asleep in a corner. They did not wake him, they even politely pretended not to see him. A lady talked of the fatigues of business. Berthe went from one to another, offering sandwiches, handing cups of tea, and asking the men if they would like any more sugar. But she was unable to attend to every one, and Madame Josserand was looking for her daughter Hortense, when she caught sight of her standing in the middle of the deserted drawing-room, talking to a gentleman, of whom one could only see the back.

“Ah! yes! he has come at last,” she permitted, in her anger, to escape her.

There was some whispering. It was that Verdier, who had been living with a woman for fifteen years past, whilst waiting to marry Hortense. Every one knew the story, the young ladies exchanged glances; but they bit their lips, and avoided speaking of it, out of propriety. Octave, being made acquainted with it, examined the gentleman’s back with interest. Trublot knew the mistress, a good girl, a reformed streetwalker, who was better now, said he, than the best of wives, taking care of her man, and looking after his clothes; and he was full of a fraternal sympathy for her. Whilst they were being watched from the dining-room, Hortense was scolding Verdier with all the sulkiness of a badly brought up virgin for having come so late.

“Hallo! red currant syrup!” said Trublot, seeing Adèle standing before him,

a tray in her hand.

He sniffed it and declined. But, as the servant turned round, a stout lady's elbow pushed her against him, and he pinched her back. She smiled, and returned to him with the tray.

"No, thanks," said he. "By-and-by."

Women were seated round the table, whilst the men were eating, standing up behind them. Exclamations were, heard, an enthusiasm, which died away as the mouths were filled with food. The gentlemen were appealed to. Madame Josserand cried:

"Ah! yes, I was forgetting. Come and look, Monsieur Mouret, you who love the arts."

"Take care, the water-colour stroke!" murmured Trublot, who knew the house.

It was better than a water-colour. As though by chance, a porcelain bowl was standing on the table; right at the very bottom of it, surrounded by the brand new varnished bronze mounting, Greuze's "Young girl with the broken Pitcher" was painted in light colours, passing from pale lilac to faint blue. Berthe smiled in the midst of the praise.

"Mademoiselle possesses every talent," said Octave with his good-natured grace. "Oh! the colours are so well blended, and it is very accurate, very accurate!"

"I can guarantee that the design is!" resumed Madame Josserand, triumphantly. "There is not a hair too many or few. Berthe copied it here, from an engraving. There are really such a number of nude subjects at the Louvre, and the people there are at times so mixed!"

She had lowered her voice when giving this last piece of information, desirous of letting the young man know that, though her daughter was an artist, she did not let that carry her beyond the limits of propriety. She probably, however, thought Octave rather cold, she felt that the bowl had not met with the success she had anticipated, and she watched him with an anxious look, whilst Valérie and Madame Juzeur, who were drinking their fourth cup of tea, examined the painting and gave vent to little cries of admiration.

"You are looking at her again," said Trublot to Octave, on seeing him with his eyes fixed on Valérie.

"Why, yes," replied he, slightly confused. "It is funny, she looks pretty just at this moment. A warm woman, evidently. I say, do you think one might venture?"

“Warm, one never knows. It is a peculiar fancy! Anyhow, it would be better than marrying the girl.”

“What girl?” exclaimed Octave, forgetting himself. “What! you think I am going to let myself be hooked’ Never! My dear fellow, we don’t marry at Marseilles!” Madame Josserand had drawn near. The words came upon her like a stab in the heart. Another fruitless campaign, another evening party wasted! The blow was such, that she was obliged to lean against a chair, as she looked with despair at the now despoiled table, where all that remained was a burnt piece of the cake. She had given up counting her defeats, but this one should be the last; she took a frightful oath, swearing that she would no longer feed persons who came to see her solely to gorge. And, upset and exasperated, she glanced round the dining-room, seeking into what man’s arms she could throw her daughter, when she caught sight of Auguste resignedly standing against the wall and not having partaken of anything.

Just then, Berthe, with a smile on her face, was moving towards Octave, with a cup of tea in her hand. She was continuing the campaign, obedient to her mother’s wishes. But the latter caught her by the arm and called her a silly fool under her breath.

“Take that cup to Monsieur Vabre, who has been waiting for an hour past,” said she, graciously and very loud.

Then, whispering again in her daughter’s ear, and giving her another of her warlike looks, she added:

“Be amiable, or you will have me to deal with!”

Berthe, for a moment put out of countenance, soon recovered herself. It often changed thus three times in an evening. She carried the cup to Auguste, with the smile which she had commenced for Octave; she was amiable, talked of Lyons silks, and did the engaging young person who would look very well behind a counter. Auguste’s hands trembled a little, and he was very red, as he was suffering a good deal from his head that evening.

Out of politeness, a few persons returned and sat down for some moments in the drawing-room. Having fed, they were all going off. When they looked for Verdier, he had already taken his departure; and some young ladies, greatly put out, only carried away an indistinct view of his back. Campardon, without waiting for Octave, retired with the doctor, whom he detained on the landing, to ask him if there was really no more hope. During the tea, one of the lamps had gone out, emitting a stench of rancid oil, and the other lamp, the wick of which was all charred, lit up the room with so poor a light that the Vabres themselves rose to leave in spite of the attentions with which Madame Josserand overwhelmed them. Octave had preceded them into the ante-room,

where he had a surprise: Trublot, who was looking for his hat, suddenly disappeared. He could only have gone off by the passage leading to the kitchen.

“Well! wherever has he got to? does he leave by the servants’ staircase?” murmured the young man.

But he did not seek to clear up the mystery. Valérie was there, looking for a lace neckerchief. The two brothers, Théophile and Auguste, were going downstairs, without troubling themselves about her. Octave, having found the neckerchief, handed it to her, with the air of admiration he put on when serving the pretty lady customers of “The Ladies’ Paradise.” She looked at him, and he felt certain that her eyes, on fixing themselves on his, had flashed forth flames.

“You are too kind, sir,” said she, simply.

Madame Juzeur, who was the last to leave, enveloped them both in a tender and discreet smile. And when Octave, highly excited, had reached his cold chamber, he looked at himself for an instant in the glass, and he thought it worth while to make the attempt!

Meanwhile, Madame Josserand was wandering about the deserted room, without saying a word, and as though carried away by some gale of wind. She had violently closed the piano and turned out the last lamp; then, passing into the diningroom, she began to blow out the candles so vigorously that the chandelier quite shook. The sight of the despoiled table covered with dirty plates and empty cups, increased her rage; and she turned round it, casting terrible glances at her daughter Hortense, who, quietly sitting down, was devouring the piece of burnt cake.

“You are putting yourself in a fine state again, mamma,” said the latter. “Is it not going on all right, then? For myself, I am satisfied. He is purchasing some chemises for her to enable her to leave.”

The mother shrugged her shoulders.

“Eh? you say that this proves nothing. Very good, only steer your ship as well as I steer mine. Here now is a cake which may flatter itself it is a precious bad one! They must be a wretched lot to swallow such stuff.”

Monsieur Josserand, who was always worn out by his wife’s parties, was reposing on a chair 3 but he was in dread of an encounter, he feared that Madame Josserand might drive him before her in her furious promenade 3 and he drew close to Bachelard and Gueulin, who were seated at the table in front of Hortense. The uncle, on awaking, had discovered a decanter of rum. He was emptying it, and bitterly alluding to the twenty francs.

“It is not for the money,” he kept repeating to his nephew, “it is the way the thing was done. You know how I behave to women: I would give them the shirt off my back, but I do not like them to ask me for anything. The moment they begin to ask, it annoys me, and I don’t even chuck them a radish.”

And, as his sister was about to remind him of his promises: “Be quiet, Eléonore! I know what I have to do for the child. But, you see, when a woman asks, it is more than I can stand. I have never been able to keep friends with one, have I now, Gueulin? And besides, there is really such little respect shown me! Léon has not even deigned to wish me many happy returns of the day.”

Madame Josserand resumed her walk, clinching her fists. It was true, there was Léon too, who promised and then disappointed her like the others. There was one who would not sacrifice an evening to help to marry off his sisters! She had just discovered a sweet biscuit, fallen behind one of the flower vases, and was locking it up in a drawer when Berthe, who had gone to release Saturnin, brought him back with her. She was quieting him, whilst he, haggard and with a mistrustful look in his eyes, was searching the corners, with the feverish excitement of a dog that has been long shut up.

“How stupid he is!” said Berthe, “he thinks that I have just been married. And he is seeking for the husband! Ah! my poor Saturnin, you may seek. I tell you that it has come to nothing! You know very well that it never comes to anything.”

Then, Madame Josserand’s rage burst all bounds.

“Ah! I swear to you that it sha’n’t come to nothing next time, even if I have to tie him to you myself! There is one who shall pay for all the others. Yes, yes, Monsieur Josserand, you may stare at me, as though you did not understand: the wedding shall take place, and without you, if it does not please you. You hear, Berthe! you have only to pick that one up!” Saturnin appeared not to hear. He was looking under the table. The young girl pointed to him; but Madame Josserand made a gesture which seemed to imply that he would be got out of the way. And Berthe murmured:

“So then it is decidedly to be Monsieur Vabre? Oh! it is all the same to me. To think though that not a single sandwich has been saved for me?”

CHAPTER IV.

As early as the morrow, Octave commenced to occupy himself about Valérie. He studied her habits, and ascertained the hour when he would have a

chance of meeting her on the stairs; and he arranged matters so that he could frequently go up to his room, taking advantage of his coming home to lunch at the Campardons', and leaving "The Ladies' Paradise" for a few minutes under some pretext or other. He soon noticed that, every day towards two o'clock, the young woman, who took her child to the Tuileries gardens, passed along the Rue Gaillon. Then he would stand at the door, wait till she came, and greet her with one of his handsome shopman's smiles. At each of their meetings, Valérie politely inclined her head and passed on; but he perceived her dark glance to be full of passionate fire; he found encouragement in her ravaged complexion and in the supple swing of her gait.

His plan was already formed, the bold plan of a seducer used to cavalierly overcoming the virtue of shop-girls. It was simply a question of luring Valérie inside his room on the fourth floor; the staircase was always silent and deserted, no one would discover them up there; and he laughed at the thought of the architect's moral admonitions; for taking a woman belonging to the house was not the same as bringing one into it.

One thing, however, made Octave uneasy. The passage separated the Pichons' kitchen from their dining-room, and this obliged them to constantly have their door open. At nine o'clock in the morning, the husband started off for his office, and did not return home until about five in the evening; and, on alternate days of the week, he went out again after his dinner to do some bookkeeping, from eight to midnight. Besides this, though, the young woman, who was very reserved—almost wildly timid—would push her door to, directly she heard Octave's footsteps. He never caught sight of more than her back, which always seemed to be flying away, with her light hair done up into a scanty chignon. Through that door kept discreetly ajar, he had, up till then, only beheld a small portion of the room: sad and clean looking furniture, linen of a dull whiteness in the grey light admitted through a window which he could not see, and the corner of a child's crib inside an inner room; all the monotonous solitude of a wife occupied from morning to night with the recurring cares of a clerk's home. Moreover, there was never a sound; the child seemed dumb and worn-out like the mother; one scarcely distinguished at times the soft murmur of some ballad which the latter would hum for hours together in an expiring voice. But Octave was none the less furious with the disdainful creature as he called her. She was playing the spy upon him perhaps. In any case, Valérie could never come up to him if the Pichons' door was thus being continually opened.

He was just beginning to think that things were taking the right course. One Sunday when the husband was absent, he had manoeuvred in such a way as to be on the first-floor landing at the moment the young woman, wrapped in her dressing-gown, was leaving her sister-in-law's to return to her own

apartments; and she being obliged to speak to him, they had stood some minutes exchanging polite remarks. So he was hoping that next time she would ask him in. With a woman with such a temperament the rest would follow as a matter of course. That evening during dinner, there was some talk about Valérie at the Campardons'. Octave tried to draw the others out. But as Angèle was listening and casting sly glances at Lisa, who was handing round some leg of mutton and looking very serious, the parents at first did nothing but sing the young woman's praises. Moreover, the architect always stood up for the respectability of the house, with the vain conviction of a tenant who seemed to obtain from it a regular certificate of his own gentility.

"Oh! my dear fellow, most respectable people. You saw them at the Josserands'. The husband is no fool; he is full of ideas, he will end by discovering something very grand. As for the wife, she has some style about her, as we artists say."

Madame Campardon, who had been rather worse since the day before, and who was half reclining, though her illness did not prevent her eating thick underdone slices of meat, languidly murmured in her turn:

"That poor Monsieur Théophile, he is like me, he drags along. Ah! great praise is due to Valérie, for it is not lively always having by one a man trembling with fever, and whose infirmity usually makes him quarrelsome and unjust."

During dessert, Octave, seated between the architect and his wife learnt more than he asked. They forgot Angèle, they spoke in hints, with glances which underlined the double meanings of the words; and, when they were at a loss for an expression, they bent towards him one after the other, and coarsely whispered the rest of the disclosure in his ear. In short, that Théophile was a stupid and impotent person, who deserved to be what his wife made him. As for Valérie, she was not worth much, she would have behaved just as badly even if her husband had been different, for with her, nature had so much the mastery. Moreover, no one was ignorant of the fact that, two months after her marriage, in despair at recognising that she would never have a child by her husband, and fearing she would lose her share of old Vabre's fortune if Théophile happened to die, she had her little Camille got for her by a butcher's man of the Rue Sainte-Anne.

Campardon bent down and whispered a last time in Octave's ear:

"Well! you know, my dear fellow, a hysterical woman!"

And he put into the word all the middle-class wantonness of an indelicacy combined with the blobber-lipped smile of a father of a family whose imagination, abruptly let loose, revels in licentiousness. The conversation then

took a different turn, they were speaking of the Pichons, and words of praise were not stinted.

“Oh! they are indeed worthy people!” repeated Madame Campardon. “Sometimes, when Marie takes her little Lilitte out, I also let her take Angèle. And I assure you, Monsieur Mouret, I do not trust my daughter to everyone; I must be absolutely certain of the person’s morality. You love Marie very much, do you not, Angèle?”

“Yes, mamma,” answered the child.

The details continued. It was impossible to find a woman better brought up, or according to severer principles. And it was a pleasure to see how happy the husband was! Such a nice little home, and so clean, and a couple that adored each other, who never said one word louder than another!

“Besides, they would not be allowed to remain in the house, if they did not behave themselves properly,” said the architect gravely, forgetting his disclosures about Valérie. “We will only have respectable people here. On my word of honour! I would give notice, the day that my daughter ran the risk of meeting disreputable women on the stairs.”

That evening, he had secretly arranged to take cousin Gasparine to the Opéra-Comique. He therefore went and fetched his hat at once, talking of a business matter which would keep him out till very late. Rose though probably knew of the arrangement, for Octave heard her murmur, in her resigned and maternal voice, when her husband came to kiss her with his habitual effusive tenderness:

“Amuse yourself well, and do not catch cold on coming out.” On the morrow, Octave had an idea: it was to become acquainted with Madame Pichon, by rendering her a few neighbourly services; in this way, if she ever caught Valeric, she would keep her eyes shut. And an opportunity occurred that very day. Madame Pichon was in the habit of taking Lilitte, then eighteen months old, out in a little basket-work perambulator, which raised Monsieur Gourd’s ire; the doorkeeper would never permit it to be carried up the principal staircase, so that she had to take it up the servants’; and as the door of her apartment was too narrow, she had to remove the wheels every time, which was quite a job. It so happened that that day Octave was returning home, just as his neighbour, incommoded by her gloves, was giving herself a great deal of trouble to get the nuts off. When she felt him standing up behind her, waiting till the passage was clear, she quite lost her head, and her hands trembled.

“But, madame, why do you take all that trouble?” asked he at length. “It would be far simpler to put the perambulator at the end of the passage, behind

my door.”

She did not reply, her excessive timidity kept her squatting there, without strength to rise; and, beneath the curtain of her bonnet, he beheld a hot blush invade the nape of her neck and her ears. Then he insisted:

“I assure you, madame, it will not inconvenience me in the least.”

Without waiting, he lifted up the perambulator and carried it in his easy way. She was obliged to follow him; but she remained so confused, so frightened by this important adventure in her uneventful every-day life, that she looked on, only able to stutter fragments of sentences.

“Dear me! sir, it is too much trouble—I feel quite ashamed—you will find it very awkward. My husband will be very pleased—”

And she entered her room and locked herself in, this time hermetically, with a sort of shame. Octave thought that she was stupid. The perambulator was a great deal in his way for it prevented him opening his door wide, and he had to slip into his room sideways. But his neighbour seemed to be won over, more especially as Monsieur Gourd consented to authorize the obstruction at that end of the passage, thanks to Campardon’s influence.

Every Sunday, Marie’s parents, Monsieur and Madame Vuillaume, came to spend the day. On the Sunday following, as Octave was going out, he beheld all the family seated taking their coffee, and he was discreetly hastening by, when the young woman, whispering quickly in her husband’s ear, the latter jumped up, saying:

“Excuse me, sir, I am always out, I have not yet had an opportunity of thanking you. But I wish to tell you how pleased I was—”

Octave protested. At length he was obliged to give in. Though he had already had his coffee, they made him accept another cup. They gave him the place of honour, between Monsieur and Madame Vuillaume. Opposite to him, on the other side of the round table, Marie was again thrown into one of those confused conditions which at any minute, without apparent cause, brought all the blood from her heart to her face. He watched her, never having seen her at his ease. But, as Trublot said, she was not his fancy: she seemed to him wretched and washed out, with her flat face and her thin hair, though her features were refined and pretty. When she recovered herself a little, she laughed lightly as she again talked of the perambulator, about which she found a great deal to say.

“Jules, if you had only seen Monsieur Mouret carry it in his arms. Ah well! it did not take long!”

Pichon again uttered his thanks. He was tall and thin, with a doleful look

about him, already subdued to the routine of office life, his dull eyes full of the apathetic resignation displayed by circus horses.

“Pray say no more about it!” Octave ended by observing, “it is really not worth while. Madame, your coffee is exquisite. I have never drunk any like it.”

She blushed again, and so much that her hands even became quite rosy.

“Do not spoil her, sir,” said Monsieur Vuillaume gravely, “Her coffee is good, but there is better. And you see how proud she has become at once!”

“Pride is worth nothing,” declared Madame Vuillaume. “We have always taught her to be modest.”

They were both of them little and dried up, very old, and with dark-looking countenances; the wife wore a tight black dress, and the husband a thin frock-coat, on which only the mark of a big red ribbon was to be seen.

“Sir,” resumed the latter, “I was decorated at the age of sixty, on the day I was pensioned off, after having been for thirty-nine years employed at the Ministry of Public Instruction. Well! sir, on that day I dined the same as on other days, and did not let pride interfere with any of my habits. The Cross was due to me, I knew it. I was simply filled with gratitude.” His life was perfectly clear, he wished every one to know it. After twenty-five years’ service, he had been promoted to four thousand francs. His pension, therefore, was two thousand. But he had had to re-engage himself in a subordinate position at fifteen hundred francs, as they had had their little Marie late in life when Madame Vuillaume was no longer expecting either son or daughter. Now that the child was established in life, they were living on the pension, by pinching themselves, in the Rue Durantin at Montmartre, where things were cheaper.

“I am sixty-three,” said he, in conclusion, “and that is all about it, and that is all about it, son-in-law!”

Pichon looked at him in a silent and weary way, his eyes fixed on his red ribbon. Yes, it would be his own story if luck favoured him. He was the last born of a greengrocer who had spent the entire worth of her shop in her anxiety to make her son take a degree, just because all the neighbourhood said he was very intelligent; and she had died bankrupt eight days before his triumph at the Sorbonne. After three years of hardships at his uncle’s, he had had the unexpected luck of getting a berth at the Ministry, which was to lead him to everything, and on the strength of which he had already married.

“When one does one’s duty, the government does the same,” murmured he, mechanically reckoning that he still had thirty-six years to wait before

obtaining the right to wear a piece of red ribbon and to enjoy a pension of two thousand francs.

Then he turned towards Octave.

“You see, sir, it is the children who are such a heavy weight.”

“No doubt,” said Madame Vuillaume. “If we had had another we should never have made both ends meet. Therefore, remember Jules, what I insisted upon when I gave you Marie: one child and no more, or else we shall quarrel! It is only workpeople who have children like fowls lay eggs, without troubling themselves as to what it will cost them. It is true that they turn the youngsters out on to the streets, like flocks of animals, which make me feel sick when I pass by.”

Octave had looked at Marie, thinking that this delicate subject would make her cheeks crimson; but she remained pale, approving her mother’s words with ingenuous serenity. He was feeling awfully bored, and did not know how to retire. In the little cold dining-room these people thus spent their afternoon, slowly muttering a few words every five minutes, and always about their own affairs. Even dominoes disturbed them too much.

Madame Vuillaume now explained her notions. At the end of a long silence, which left all four of them in no way embarrassed as though they had felt the necessity of rearranging their ideas, she resumed:

“You have no child, sir? It will come in time. Ah! it is a responsibility, especially for a mother! When my little one was born I was forty-nine, sir, an age when luckily one knows how to behave. A boy will get on anyhow, but a girl! And I have the consolation of knowing that I have done my duty, oh, yes!”

Then, she explained her plan of education, in short sentences. Honesty first. No playing on the stairs, the little one always kept at home and watched closely, for children think of nothing but evil. The doors and windows shut, never any draughts, which bring the wicked things of the street with them. Out of doors, never leave go of the child’s hand, teach it to keep its eyes lowered to avoid seeing anything wrong. With regard to religion, it should not be overdone, just sufficient as a moral restraint. Then, when she has grown up, engage teachers instead of sending her to school, where the innocent ones are corrupted; and assist also at the lessons, see that she does not learn what she should not know, hide all newspapers of course, and keep the bookcase locked.

“A young person always knows too much,” declared the old lady coming to an end.

Whilst her mother spoke, Marie kept her eyes vaguely fixed on space. She once more beheld the little convent-like lodging, those narrow rooms in the Rue Durantin, where she was not even allowed to lean out of a window. It was one prolonged childhood, all sorts of prohibitions which she did not understand, lines which her mother inked out on their fashion paper, the black marks of which made her blush, lessons purified to such an extent that even her teachers were embarrassed when she questioned them. A very gentle childhood, however, the soft warm growth of a greenhouse, a waking dream in which the words uttered by the tongue, and the facts of every day life acquired ridiculous meanings. And, even at that hour as she gazed vacantly, and was filled with these recollections, a childish smile hovered about her lips, as though she had remained in ignorance spite even of her marriage.

“You will believe me if you like, sir,” said Monsieur Vuillaume, “but my daughter had not read a single novel when she was past eighteen. Is it not true, Marie?”

“Yes, papa.”

“I have George Sand’s works very handsomely bound,” he continued, “and in spite of her mother’s fears I decided, a few months before her marriage, to permit her to read ‘André,’ a perfectly innocent work, full of imagination, and which elevates the soul. I am for a liberal education. Literature has certainly its rights. The book produced an extraordinary effect upon her, sir. She cried all night in her sleep: which proves that there is nothing like a pure imagination to understand genius.”

“It is so beautiful!” murmured the young woman, her eyes sparkling.

But Pichon having enunciated this theory: no novels before marriage, and as many as one likes afterwards—Madame Vuillaume shook her head. She never read, and was none the worse for it. Then, Marie gently spoke of her loneliness.

“Well! I sometimes take up a book. Jules chooses them for me at the library in the Passage Choiseul. If I only played the piano!”

For some time past, Octave had felt the necessity of saying something.

“What! madame,” exclaimed he, “you do not play!”

A slight awkwardness ensued. The parents talked of a succession of unfortunate circumstances, not wishing to admit that they had not been willing to incur the expense. Madame Vuillaume, moreover, affirmed, that Marie sang in tune from her birth; when she was a child she knew all sorts of very pretty ballads, she had only to hear the tunes once to remember them; and the mother spoke of a song about Spain, the story of a captive weeping for her lover,

which the child gave out with an expression that would draw tears from the hardest hearts. But Marie remained disconsolate. She let this cry escape her, as she extended her hand in the direction of the inner room, where her little one was sleeping:

“Ah! I swear that Lilitte shall learn to play the piano, even though I have to make the greatest sacrifices!”

“Think first of bringing her up as we brought you up,” said Madame Vuillaume, severely. “I certainly do not condemn music, it develops one’s feelings. But, above all, watch over your daughter, keep every foul breath from her, strive that she may preserve her innocence.”

She started off again, giving even more weight to religion, settling the number of times to go to confess each month, naming the masses that it was absolutely necessary to attend, all from the point of view of propriety. Then Octave, unable to bear any more of it, talked of an appointment which obliged him to go out. He had a singing in his ears, he felt that this conversation would continue in a like manner until the evening. And he hastened away, leaving the Vuillaumes and the Pichons telling one another, around the same cups of coffee slowly emptied, what they told each other every Sunday. As he was bowing a last time, Marie, suddenly and without any reason, became scarlet.

Ever since that afternoon, Octave hastened past the Pichons’ door whenever he heard the slow tones of Monsieur and Madame Vuillaume on a Sunday. Moreover, he was entirely absorbed in his conquest of Valérie. In spite of the fiery glances of which he thought himself the object, she maintained an inexplicable reserve; and in that he fancied he saw the play of a coquette. He even met her one day, as though by chance, in the Tuileries gardens, when she quietly began to talk of a storm of the day before; which finally convinced him that she was devilish smart. And he was constantly on the staircase, watching for an opportunity of entering her apartments, decided if necessary upon being positively rude.

Now, every time that he passed her, Marie smiled and blushed. They exchanged the greetings of good neighbours. One morning, at lunch-time, as he brought her up a letter, which Monsieur Gourd had given him, to avoid having to go up the four flights of stairs himself, he found her in a sad way: she had seated Lilitte in her chemise on the round table, and was trying to dress her again.

“What is the matter?” asked the young man.

“Why, this child!” replied she. “I foolishly took her things off, because she was complaining. And now I don’t know what to do, I don’t know what to do!”

He looked at her in surprise. She was turning a skirt over and over, looking for the hooks. Then, she added:

“You see, her father always helps me to dress her in the morning before he goes out. I can never manage it by myself. It bothers me, it annoys me.”

The child, meanwhile, tired of being in her chemise and frightened by the sight of Octave, was struggling and tumbling about on the table.

“Take care!” cried he, “she will fall.”

It was quite a catastrophe. Marie looked as though she dare not touch her child’s naked limbs. She continued contemplating her, with the surprise of a virgin, amazed at having been able to produce such a thing. However, assisted by Octave, who quieted the little one, she succeeded in dressing her again.

“How will you manage when you have a dozen?” asked he, laughing.

“But we shall never have any more!” answered she in a fright.

Then, he joked: she was wrong to be so sure, a child comes so easily?

“No! no!” repeated she obstinately. “You heard what mamma said, the other day. She forbade Jules to have any more. You do not know her; it would lead to endless quarrels, if another came.”

Octave was amused by the quiet way in which she discussed this question. He drew her out, without, however, succeeding in embarrassing her. She, moreover, did as her husband wished. No doubt, she loved children; had she been allowed to desire others, she would not have said no. And, beneath this complacency, which was restricted to her mother’s commands, the indifference of a woman whose maternity was still slumbering could be recognized. Lilitte occupied her like her home, which she looked after through duty. When she had washed up the breakfast things and taken the child for her walk, she continued her former young girl’s existence, of a somnolent emptiness, lulled by the vague expectation of a joy which never came. Octave having remarked that she must feel very dull, being always alone, she seemed surprised: no, she was never dull, the days passed somehow or other, without her knowing, when she went to bed, how she had employed her time. Then, on Sundays, she sometimes went out with her husband; or her parents called, or else she read. If reading did not give her headaches, she would have read from morning till night, now that she was allowed to read everything.

“What is really annoying,” resumed she, “is that they have scarcely anything at the library in the Passage Choiseul. For instance, I wanted ‘André,’ to read it again, because it made me cry so much the other time. Well! their copy has been stolen. Besides that, my father refuses to lend me his, because Lilitte might tear the pictures.”

“But,” said Octave, “my friend Campardon has all George Sand’s works. I will ask him to lend me ‘André’ for you.”

She blushed, and her eyes sparkled. He was really too kind! And, when he left her, she stood before Lilitte, her arms hanging down by her sides, without an idea in her head, in the attitude which she maintained for whole afternoons together. She detested sewing, she did crochet work, always the same piece, which she left lying about the room.

Octave brought her the book on the morrow, a Sunday. Pichon had had to go out, to leave his card on one of his superiors. And, as the young man found her dressed for walking, she having just been on some errand in the neighbourhood, he asked her out of curiosity whether she had been to church, having the idea that she was religious. She answered no. Before marrying her off, her mother used to take her regularly to mass. During the six first months of her married life, she continued going through force of habit, with the constant fear of being too late. Then, she scarcely knew why, after missing a few times, she left off going altogether. Her husband detested priests, and her mother never even mentioned them now. Octave’s question, however, disturbed her, as though it had awakened within her things that had been long buried beneath the idleness of her existence.

“I must go to Saint-Roch one of these mornings,” said she. “An occupation gone always leaves a void behind it.”

And, on the pale face of this late child, born of parents too old, there appeared the unhealthy regret of another existence, dreamed of once upon a time, in the land of chimeras. She could conceal nothing, everything was reflected in her face, beneath her skin, which had the softness and the transparency accompanying an attack of chlorosis. Then, she gave way to her feelings, and caught hold of Octave’s hands with a familiar gesture.

“Ah! let me thank you for having brought me this book! Come to-morrow after lunch. I will return it to you and tell you the effect that it produced on me. It will be amusing, will it not?”

On leaving her, Octave thought that she was funny all the same. She was beginning to interest him, he contemplated speaking to Pichon so as to make him rouse her up a bit; for the little woman, most decidedly, only wanted a shaking. It so happened that on the morrow he came across the clerk just as he was going off, and he accompanied him part of the way, at the risk of being late himself at “The Ladies’ Paradise.” But Pichon seemed to him to be even more benumbed than his wife, full of manias in their early stage, and entirely occupied with the dread of getting mud on his shoes in wet weather. He walked on his toes, and continually talked of the second head-clerk of his office. Octave, who was only animated by fraternal intentions in the matter,

ended by leaving him in the Rue Saint-Honoré, after advising him to take Marie to the theatre frequently.

“Whatever for?” asked Pichon in amazement.

“Because it is good for women. It makes them nicer.”

“Ah! you really think so?”

He promised to give the matter his attention, and crossed the street, eyeing the cabs with terror, the only thing in life which worried him being the fear of getting splashed.

At lunch-time, Octave knocked at the Pichons’ door for the book. Marie was reading, her elbows on the table, her hands buried in her dishevelled hair. She had just eaten an egg cooked in a tin pan which was lying in the centre of the hastily laid table without any cloth. Lilitte, forgotten on the floor, was sleeping with her nose on the pieces of a plate which she had no doubt broken.

“Well?”

Marie did not answer at once. She was still wrapped in her morning dressing-gown, which, from the buttons being torn off, displayed her throat, in all the disorder of a woman just risen from her bed.

“I have scarcely read a hundred pages,” she ended by saying. “My parents came yesterday.”

And she spoke in a painful tone of voice, with a sourness about her mouth. When she was younger, she longed to live in the midst of the woods. She was for ever dreaming that she met a huntsman who was sounding his horn. He approached her and knelt down. This took place in a copse, very far away, where roses were blooming like in a park. Then, suddenly, they had been married, and afterwards lived there, wandering about till eternity. She, very happy, wished for nothing more; he, as tender and submissive as a slave, was continually at her feet.

“I had a talk with your husband this morning,” said Octave. “You do not go out enough, and I have persuaded him to take you to the theatre.”

But she shook her head, turning pale and shivering. A silence ensued. She again beheld the narrow dining-room with its cold light. Jules’s image, sullen and correct, had suddenly cast a shadow over the huntsman of the romance whom she had been imagining, and the sound of whose horn in the distance again rang in her ears. Every now and then she listened: perhaps he was coming. Her husband had never taken her feet in his hands to kiss them; he had never either knelt beside her to tell her he adored her. Yet, she loved him well; but she was surprised that love did not contain more sweetness.

“What stifles me, you know,” resumed she, returning to the book, “is when there are passages in novels about the characters telling one another of their love.”

Octave then sat down. He wished to laugh, not caring for such sentimental trifling.

“I detest a lot of phrases,” said he. “When two persons adore each other, the best thing is to prove it at once.”

But she did not seem to understand, her eyes remained undimmed. He stretched out his hand, slightly touching hers, and leant over so close to her to observe a passage in the book that his breath warmed her shoulder through the open dressing-gown; yet she remained insensible. Then, he rose up, full of a contempt mingled with pity. As he was leaving, she said:

“I read very slowly, I shall not have finished it before tomorrow. It will be amusing to-morrow! Look in during the evening.”

He certainly had no designs upon her, and yet he felt indignant. He conceived a singular friendship for this young couple who exasperated him, they seemed to take life so stupidly. And the idea came to him of rendering them a service in spite of them; he would take them out to dinner, make them tipsy, and then amuse himself by pushing them into each other’s arms. When such fits of kindness got hold of him, he, who would not have lent ten francs, delighted in flinging his money out of the window, to bring two lovers together and give them joy.

Little Madame Pichon’s coldness, however, brought Octave back to the ardent Valérie. This one, certainly, would not require to be breathed upon twice on the back of her neck. He was advancing in her favour: one day that she was going upstairs before him, he had ventured to compliment her on her ankle, without her appearing displeased.

At length the opportunity so long watched for presented itself. It was the evening that Marie had made him promise to look in; they would be alone to talk about the novel, as her husband was not to be home till very late. But the young man had preferred to go out, seized with fright at the thought of this literary treat. However, he had decided to venture upon it, towards ten o’clock, when he met Valérie’s maid on the first-floor landing with a scared look on her face, and who said to him:

“Madame has gone into hysterics, my master is out, and every one opposite has gone to the theatre. Pray come in. I am all alone, I don’t know what to do.”

Valérie was stretched out in an easy-chair in her bedroom, her limbs rigid.

The maid had unlaced her stays, and her bosom was heaving. The attack subsided almost immediately. She opened her eyes, was surprised to see Octave there, and acted moreover as she might have done in the presence of a doctor.

“I must ask you to excuse me, sir,” murmured she, her voice still choking. “I have only had this girl since yesterday, and she lost her head.”

Her perfect coolness in adjusting her stays and fastening up her dress again, embarrassed the young man. He remained standing, swearing not to depart thus, yet not daring to sit down. She had sent away the maid, the sight of whom seemed to irritate her; then she went to the window to breathe the cool outdoor air in long nervous inspirations, her mouth wide open. After a short silence, they commenced talking. She had first suffered from these attacks when fourteen years old; Doctor Juillerat was tired of prescribing for her; sometimes they seized her in the arms, sometimes in the loins. However, she was getting used to them; she might as well have them as anything else, as no one was really perfectly well. And, whilst she talked, with scarcely any life in her limbs, he excited himself with looking at her, he thought her provoking in the midst of her disorder, with her leaden complexion, her face upset by the attack as though by a whole night of love. Behind the black mass of her loose hair, which hung over her shoulders, he fancied he beheld the husband’s poor and beardless head. Then, stretching out his hands, with the unrestrained gesture with which he would have seized some harlot, he tried to take hold of her.

“Well! what now?” asked she, in a voice full of surprise.

In her turn she looked at him, whilst her eyes were so cold, her flesh so calm, that he felt frozen and let his hands fall with an awkward slowness, fully aware of the ridiculousness of his gesture. Then, in a last nervous gape which she stifled, she slowly added:

“Ah! my dear sir, if you only knew!”

And she shrugged her shoulders, without getting angry, as though crushed beneath her contempt for man and her weariness of him. Octave thought she was about to have him turned out when he saw her move towards a bell-pull, dragging her loosely fastened skirts along with her. But she merely required some tea; and she ordered it to be very weak and very hot. Altogether nonplussed, he muttered some excuses and made for the door, whilst she again reclined in the depths of her easy-chair, with the air of a chilly woman greatly in want of sleep.

On the stairs, Octave stopped at each landing. She did not like that then? He had just seen how indifferent she was, without desire as without

indignation, as difficult to deal with as his employer, Madame Hédouin. Why did Campardon say she was hysterical? it was absurd to take him in by telling him such humbug; for had it not been for the architect's lie, he would never have risked such an adventure. And he remained quite bewildered by the result, his ideas of hysteria altogether upset, and thinking of the different stories that were going about. He recalled Trublot's words: one never knows what to expect, with those crazy sort of people whose eyes shine like balls of fire.

Up on his landing Octave, annoyed with all women, walked as softly as he could. But the Pichons' door opened, and he had to resign himself. Marie awaited him, standing in the narrow room, which the charred wick of the lamp but imperfectly lighted. She had drawn the crib close to the table, and Lilitte was sleeping there in the circle of the yellow light. The lunch things had probably also served for the dinner, for the closed book was lying beside a dirty plate full of radish ends.

"Have you finished it?" asked Octave, surprised at the young woman's silence.

She seemed intoxicated, her face was swollen as though she had just awakened from a too heavy sleep.

"Yes, yes," said she, with an effort. "Oh! I have passed the day, my head in my hands, buried in it. When the fit takes one, one no longer knows where one is. I have such a stiff neck."

And, feeling pains all over her, she did not speak any more of the book, but was so full of her emotion and of confused dreams engendered by her reading, that she was choking. Her ears rang with the distant calls of the horn, blown by the huntsman of her romances, in the blue background of ideal loves. Then, without the least reason, she said that she had been to Saint-Roch that morning to hear the nine o'clock mass. She had wept a great deal, religion replaced everything.

"Ah! I feel better," resumed she, heaving a deep sigh and standing still in front of Octave.

A pause ensued. She smiled at him with her candid eyes. He had never thought her so useless, with her scanty hair and her washed-out features. But as she continued looking at him, she became very pale and almost stumbled; and he was obliged to put out his hands to support her.

"Good heavens! good heavens!" stuttered she, sobbing.

He continued to hold her, feeling considerably embarrassed.

"You should take a little infusion. You have been reading too much."

“Yes, it upset me, when on closing the book I found myself alone. How kind you are, Monsieur Mouret! I might have hurt myself, had it not been for you.”

He looked for a chair on which to seat her.

“Shall I light a fire?”

“No, thank you, it would dirty your hands. I have noticed that you always wear gloves.”

And choking again at the idea, and suddenly feeling faint, she launched an awkward kiss into space as though in a dream, a kiss which slightly touched the young man’s ear.

Octave received this kiss with amazement. The young woman’s lips were as cold as ice. Then, when she had sank upon his breast in an abandonment of her whole frame, he was seized with a sudden desire, and sought to bear her into the inner room. But this brusque wooing roused Marie; her womanly instinct revolted; she struggled and called upon her mother, forgetting her husband, who was shortly to return; and her daughter who was sleeping near her.

“No, oh! no, no. It is wrong.”

But he kept ardently repeating:

“No one will ever know—I shall never tell.”

“No, Monsieur Octave. Do not spoil the happiness I have in knowing you. It will do no good I assure you, and I had dreamed things—”

Then he left off speaking, having a revenge to take on woman-kind, and saying coarsely to himself: “You, at any rate, shall succumb!” The door had not even been shut, the solemnity of the staircase seemed to ascend in the midst of the silence. Lilitte was peacefully sleeping on the pillow of her crib.

When Marie and Octave rose up, they could find nothing to say to each other. She, mechanically, went and looked at her daughter, took up the plate, and then laid it down again. He remained silent, a prey to similar uneasiness, the adventure had been so unexpected; and he recalled to mind how he had fraternally planned to restore the young woman to her husband’s arms. Feeling the necessity of breaking that intolerable silence he ended by murmuring:

“You did not shut the door, then?”

She glanced out on to the landing, and stammered:

“That is true, it was open.”

Her face wore an expression of disgust. The young man too was now

thinking that after all there was nothing the least funny in this adventure with a helpless woman, in the midst of that solitude.

“Dear me! the book has fallen on the floor!” she continued, picking the volume up.

A corner of the cover was broken. That drew them together, and afforded some relief. Speech returned to them. Marie appeared quite distressed.

“It was not my fault. You see, I had covered it with paper for fear of soiling it. We must have knocked it over, without doing so on purpose.”

“Was it there then?” asked Octave. “I did not notice it. Oh! for myself, I don’t care a bit! But Campardon thinks so much of his books!”

They kept passing it from one to the other, trying to put the corner straight again. Their fingers touched without a quiver. As they inflected on the consequences, they were quite dismayed at the accident which had happened to that handsome volume of George Sand.

“It was bound to end badly,” concluded Marie, with tears in her eyes.

Octave was obliged to console her. He would invent some story, Campardon would not eat him. And their uneasiness returned, at the moment of separation. They would have liked at least to have said something amiable to eaeh other; but the words choked them. Fortunately, a step was heard, it was the husband coming upstairs. Octave silently took her in his arms again and kissed her in his turn on the mouth. She once more complaisantly submitted, her lips iey cold as before. When he had noiselessly regained his room, he asked himself, as he took off his overcoat, whatever was it that she wanted? Women, he said, were decidedly very peculiar.

On the morrow, at the Cam pardons’, just as lunch was finished, Octave was once more explaining that he had clumsily knocked the book over, when Marie entered the room. She was going to take Lilitte to the Tuileries gardens, and she had called to ask if they would allow Angèle to accompany her. And she smiled at Octave, without the least confusion, and glanced in her innocent way at the book lying on a chair.

“Why, I shall be only too pleased!” said Madame Campardon. “Angèle, go and put your hat on. I have no fear in trusting her with you.”

Marie, looking very modest, in a simple dress of dark woollen stuff, talked of her husband, who had caught a cold the night before, and of the price of meat, which would soon prevent people buying it at all. Then, when she had left with Angèle, they all leant out of the windows to see them depart. Marie gently pushed Lilitte’s perambulator along the pavement with her gloved hands; whilst Angèle, knowing that they were looking at her, walked beside

her friend, with her eyes fixed on the ground.

“How respectable she looks!” exclaimed Madame Campardon. “And so gentle! so decorous!”

Then, slapping Octave on the shoulder, the architect said:

“Education is everything in a family, my dear fellow; there is nothing like it!”

CHAPTER V.

That evening, there was a reception and concert at the Duveyriers.

Towards nine o’clock, Octave, who had been invited for the first time, was just finishing dressing. He was grave, and felt irritated with himself. Why had he missed fire with Valérie, a woman so well connected? And Berthe Josserand, ought he not to have reflected before refusing her? At the moment he was tying his white tie, the thought of Marie Pichon had become unbearable to him: five months in Paris, and nothing but that wretched adventure! It was as painful to him as a disgrace, for he well saw the emptiness and the uselessness of such a connection. And he vowed to himself, as he took up his gloves, that he would no longer waste his time in such a manner. He was decided to act, as he had at length got into society, where opportunities were certainly not wanting.

But, at the end of the passage, Marie was watching for him. Pichon not being there, he was obliged to go in for a moment.

“How smart you are!” murmured she.

They had never been invited to the Duveyriers’, and that filled her with respect for the first floor drawing-room. Besides, she was jealous of no one, she had neither the strength nor the will to be so.

“I shall wait for you,” resumed she holding up her forehead. “D° not come up too late; you can tell me how you amused yourself.”

Octave had to deposit a kiss on her hair. Though relations were established between them, according to his fancy, whenever a desire or want of something to do drew him to her, they did not as yet address each other very familiarly. He at length went downstairs; and she, leaning over the balustrade, followed him with her eyes.

At the same minute, quite a drama was enacting at the Josserands’. In the mind of the mother, the Duveyriers’ party to which they were going, was to

decide the question of a marriage between Berthe and Auguste Vabre. The latter, who had been vigorously attacked for a fortnight past, still hesitated, evidently entertaining doubts with respect to the dowry. So Madame Josserand, for the purpose of striking a decisive blow, had written to her brother, informing him of the contemplated marriage and reminding him of his promises, with the hope that, in his answer, he might say something that she could turn to account. And all the family were awaiting nine o'clock before the dining-room stove, dressed ready to go down, when Monsieur Gourd brought up a letter from uncle Bachelard which had been forgotten under Madame Gourd's snuff-box since the last delivery.

"Ah! at last!" said Madame Josserand, tearing open the envelope.

The father and the two daughters watched her anxiously as she read. Adèle, who had had to dress the ladies, was moving heavily about, clearing the table still covered with the dirty crockery from the dinner. But Madame Josserand turned ghastly pale.

"Nothing! nothing!" stuttered she, "not a clear sentence! He will see later on, at the time of the marriage. And he adds that he loves us very much all the same. What a confounded scoundrel!"

Monsieur Josserand in his evening dress sank into a chair. Hortense and Berthe also sat down, their legs feeling worn out; and they remained there, the one in blue, the other in pink, in their eternal costumes, altered once again.

"I have always said," murmured the father, "that Bachelard is imposing upon us. He will never give a sou."

Standing up in her flaring dress, Madame Josserand was reading the letter over again. Then, her anger burst out, "Ah! men! men! That one, one would think him an idiot, he leads such a life. Well! not a bit of it! Though he never seems to be in his right mind, he opens his eye the moment any one speaks to him of money. Ah! men! men!"

She turned towards her daughters, to whom this lesson was addressed.

"It has come to the point, you see, that I ask myself why it is you have such a mania for getting married. Ah! if you had been worried out of your lives by it as I have! Not a fellow who loves you for yourselves and who would bring you a fortune without haggling! Millionaire uncles who, after having been fed for twenty years, will not even give their nieces a dowry! Husbands who are quite incompetent, oh! yes, sir, incompetent!"

Monsieur Josserand bowed his head. Adèle, who was not even listening, was quietly finishing clearing the table. But Madame Josserand suddenly turned angrily upon her.

“What are you doing there, spying upon us? Go into your kitchen and see if I am there!”

And she wound up by saying:

“In short, everything for those wretched beings, the men; and for us, not even enough to satisfy our hunger. Listen! they are only fit for being taken in! Remember my words!”

Hortense and Berthe nodded their heads, as though deeply penetrated by what their mother had been saying. For a long time past she had completely convinced them of man’s utter inferiority, his unique part in life being to marry and to pay. A long silence ensued in the smoky dining-room, where the remainder of the things left on the table by Adèle emitted a stuffy smell of food. The Josserands, gorgeously arrayed, scattered on different chairs and overwhelmed, were forgetting the Duveyriers’ concert as they reflected on the continual deceptions of life From the depths of the adjoining chamber, one could hear the snoring of Saturnin, whom they had sent to bed early.

At length, Berthe spoke:

“So it is all up. Shall we take our things off?”

But, at this, Madame Josserand’s energy at once returned to her. Eh? what? take their things off! and why pray! were they not respectable people, was not an alliance with their family as good as with any other? The marriage should take place all the same, she would die rather. And she rapidly distributed their parts to each: the two young ladies were instructed to be very amiable to Auguste, and not to leave him until he had taken the leap; the father received the mission of overcoming old Vabre and Duveyrier, by agreeing with everything they said, if his intelligence was sufficient to enable him to do such a thing; as for herself, desirous of neglecting nothing, she undertook the women, she would know how to get them all on her side. Then, collecting her thoughts and casting a last glance round the dining-room, as though to make sure that no weapon had been forgotten, she put on the terrible look of a man of war about to lead his daughters to massacre, and uttered these words in a powerful voice:

“Let us go down!”

And down they went. In the solemnity of the staircase, Monsieur Josserand was full of uneasiness, for he foresaw many disagreeable things for the too narrow conscience of a worthy man like himself.

When they entered, there was already a crush at the Duveyriers’.

The enormous grand piano occupied one entire end of the drawing-room, the ladies being seated in front of it on rows of chairs, like at the theatre; and

two dense masses of black coats filled up the doorways leading to the dining-room and the parlour. The chandelier and the candelabra, and the six lamps standing on side-tables, lit up with a blinding light the white and gold room in which the red silk of the furniture and of the hangings showed up vividly. It was very warm, the fans produced a breeze at regular intervals, impregnated with the penetrating odours of bodices and bare shoulders.

Just at that moment, Madame Duveyrier was taking her seat at the piano. With a gesture, Madame Josserand smilingly begged she would not disturb herself; and she left her daughters in the midst of the men, as she accepted a chair for herself between Valérie and Madame Juzeur. Monsieur Josserand had made for the parlour, where the landlord, Monsieur Vabre, was dozing at his usual place, in the corner of a sofa. There were also Campardon, Théophile and Auguste Vabre, Doctor Juillerat and the Abbé Mauduit, forming a group; whilst Trublot and Octave, who had rejoined each other, had flown from the music to the end of the dining-room. Near them, and behind the stream of black coats, Duveyrier, thin and tall of stature, was looking fixedly at his wife seated at the piano waiting for silence. In the button-hole of his coat he wore the ribbon of the Legion of Honour in a neat little rosette.

“Hush! hush! silence!” murmured some friendly voices.

Then, Clotilde Duveyrier commenced one of Chopin’s most difficult serenades. Tall and handsome, with magnificent red hair, she had a long face, as pale and cold as snow; and, in her grey eyes, music alone kindled a flame, an exaggerated passion on which she existed without any other desire either of the flesh or the spirit. Duveyrier continued watching her; then, after the first bars, a nervous exasperation contracted his lips, he drew aside and kept himself at the farthest end of the dining-room. On his clean-shaven face, with its pointed chin and eyes all askew, large red blotches indicated a bad blood, quite a pollution festering just beneath the skin.

Trublot, who was examining him, quietly observed:

“He does not like music.”

“Nor I either,” replied Octave.

“Oh! the unpleasantness is not the same for you. A man, my dear fellow, who was always lucky. Not a whit more intelligent than another, but who was helped along by every one. Belonging to an old middle-class family, the father an ex-presiding judge, called to the bar the moment he had completed his studies, then appointed, deputy judge at Reims, from whence he was removed to Paris and made judge of the Court of First Instance, decorated, and now a counsellor before he is forty-five years of age. It’s stiff, isn’t it? But he does not like music, that piano has been the bane of his life. One cannot have

everything.”

Meanwhile, Clotilde was knocking off the difficult passages with extraordinary composure. She handled her piano like a circus-rider her horse. Octave’s attention was solely occupied with the furious working of her hands.

“Just look at her fingers,” said he, “it is astonishing! A quarter of an hour of that must hurt her immensely.”

And they both fell to talking of women without troubling themselves any further with what she was playing. Octave felt rather embarrassed on catching sight of Valérie: what line of conduct should he pursue? ought he to speak to her or pretend not to see her? Trublot affected a great disdain: there was still not one to take his fancy; and, as his companion protested, looking about, and saying that there was surely one amongst the number who would suit him, he learnedly declared:

“Well! take your choice, and you will see afterwards, when the gloss is off. Eh? not the one with the feathers over there; nor the blonde in the mauve dress; nor that old party, though she at least has the merit of being fat. I tell you, my dear fellow, it is absurd to seek for anything of the kind in society. Plenty of airs, but not a particle of pleasure!”

Octave smiled. He had to make his position in the world; he could not afford merely to consider his taste, like Trublot, whose father was so rich. The sight of those rows of women set him musing, he asked himself which among them he would have chosen for his fortune and his pleasure, if he had been allowed to take one of them away. As he was weighing them with a glance, one after the other, he suddenly exclaimed:

“Hallo! my employer’s wife! She visits here then?”

“Did you not know it?” asked Trublot. “In spite of the difference in their ages, Madame Hédouin and Madame Duveyrier are two school friends. They used to be inseparable, and were called the polar bears, because they were always fully twenty degrees below freezing point. They are some more of the ornamental class! Duveyrier would be in a sad plight if he had not some other hot water-bottle for his feet in winter time!”

But Octave had now become serious. For the first time, he beheld Madame Hédouin in a low neck dress, her shoulders and arms bare, with her black hair plaited in front; and she appeared in the ardent light as the realisation of his desires: a superb woman, extremely healthy and calmly beautiful, who would be a benefit in every way to a man. Complicated plans were already absorbing him, when an awful din awoke him from his dream.

“What a relief! it is finished!” said Trublot.

Compliments were being showered upon Clotilde. Madame Josserand, who had hastened to her, was pressing her hands; whilst the men resumed their conversation, and the ladies fanned themselves more vigorously. Duveyrier then ventured back into the parlour, where Trublot and Octave followed him. Whilst in the midst of the skirts, the former whispered into the latter's ear:

"Look on your right. The angling has commenced."

It was Madame Josserand who was setting Berthe on to Auguste. He had imprudently gone up to the ladies to wish them good evening. His head was not bothering him so much just then; he merely felt a touch of neuralgia in his left eye; but he dreaded the end of the party, for there was going to be singing, and nothing was worse for him than this.

"Berthe," said the mother, "tell Monsieur Vabre of the remedy you copied for him out of that book. Oh! it is a sovereign cure for headaches!"

And, having started the affair, she left them standing beside a window.

"By Jove! they are going in for chemistry!" murmured Trublot.

In the parlour, Monsieur Josserand, desirous of pleasing his wife, had remained seated before Monsieur Vabre, feeling very embarrassed, for the old gentleman was asleep, and he did not dare awake him to do the amiable. But, when the music ceased, Monsieur Vabre raised his eye-lids. Short and stout, and completely bald, save for two tufts of white hair over his ears, he had a ruddy face, with thick lips, and round eyes almost at the top of his head. Monsieur Josserand having politely inquired after his health, the conversation began. The retired notary, whose four or five ideas always followed the same order, commenced by making an observation about Versailles, where he had practiced during forty years; then, he talked of his sons, once more regretting that neither the one nor the other had shown himself capable of carrying on the practice, so that he had decided to sell it and inhabit Paris; after which, he came to the history of his house, the building of which was the romance of his life.

"I have buried three hundred thousand francs in it, sir. A superb speculation, my architect said. But to-day I have great difficulty in getting the value of my money; more especially as all my children have come to live here, with the idea of not paying me, and I should never have a quarter's rent, if I did not apply for it myself on the fifteenth. Fortunately, I have work to console me."

"Do you still work much?" asked Monsieur Josserand.

"Always, always, sir!" replied the old gentleman with the energy of despair. "Work is life to me."

And he explained his great task. For ten years past, he had every year waded through the official catalogue of the exhibition of paintings, writing on tickets each painter's name, and the paintings exhibited. He spoke of it with an air of weariness and anguish; the whole year scarcely gave him sufficient time, the task was often so arduous, that it sometimes proved too much for him; for instance, when a lady artist married, and then exhibited under her husband's name, how was he to see his way clearly?

"My work will never be complete, it is that which is killing me," murmured he.

"You take a great interest in art, do you not?" resumed Monsieur Josserand, to flatter him.

Monsieur Vabre looked at him, full of surprise.

"No, I do not require to see the paintings. It is merely a matter of statistics. There now! I had better go to bed, my head will be all the clearer to-morrow. Good-night, sir."

He leant on a walking-stick, which he used even in the house, and withdrew, walking painfully, the lower part of his back already succumbing to paralysis. Monsieur Josserand felt perplexed: he had not understood very clearly, he feared he had not spoken of the tickets with sufficient enthusiasm.

But a slight hubbub coming from the drawing-room, attracted

Trublot and Octave again to the door. They saw a lady of about fifty enter, very stout, and still handsome, followed by a young man, correctly attired, and with a serious air about him.

"What! they arrive together!" murmured Trublot. "Well! I never!"

The new-comers were Madame Dambreville and Léon Josserand. She had undertaken to find him a wife; then, whilst waiting, she had kept him for her own personal use; and they were now in their full honeymoon, attracting general attention in the middle-class drawing-rooms. There were whisperings amongst the mothers who had daughters to marry. But Madame Duveyrier was advancing to meet Madame Dambreville, who supplied her with young men for her choruses. Madame Josserand at once supplanted her, and overwhelmed her son's friend with all sorts of attentions, reflecting that she might have need of her. Léon coldly exchanged a few words with his mother; yet, she was now beginning to think that he would after all be able to do something for himself.

"Berthe does not see you," said she to Madame Dambreville. "Excuse her, she is telling Monsieur Auguste of some remedy."

"But they are very well together, we must leave them alone," replied the lady, understanding at a glance.

They both watched Berthe maternally. She had ended by pushing Auguste into the recess caused by the window, and was keeping him there with her pretty gestures. He was becoming animated, and running the risk of a bad headache.

Meanwhile, a group of grave men were talking politics in the parlour. There had been a stormy sitting of the Senate the day before, where they were discussing the address respecting the Roman question; and Doctor Juillerat, whose opinions were atheistical and revolutionary, was maintaining that Rome ought to be given to the king of Italy; whilst the Abbé Mau-duit, one of the heads of the Ultramontane party prophesied the most awful catastrophes, if Frenchmen did not shed the last drop of their blood in supporting the temporal power of the pope.

“Perhaps some modus vivendi may be found which will prove acceptable to both parties,” observed Léon Josserand arriving.

He was just then the secretary of a celebrated barrister, one of the deputies of the left. During two years, having nothing to expect from his parents, whose mediocrity moreover exasperated him, he had frequented the students’ quarter in the guise of a ferocious demagogue. But, since his acquaintance with the Dambrevilles, at whose expense he was satisfying his first appetites, he was calming down, and drifting into the learned Republican.

“No, no agreement is possible,” said the priest. “The Church could not make terms.”

“Then, it shall vanish!” exclaimed the doctor.

And, though great friends, having met at the bedsides of all the departing souls of the Saint-Roch district, they seemed irreconcilable, the doctor thin and nervous, the priest fat and affable. The latter preserved a polite smile, even when making his most absolute statements, like a man of the world, tolerant for the shortcomings of existence, but also like a Catholic who did not intend to abandon any of his religions belief.

“The Church vanish, pooh!” said Campardon with a furious air, just to be well with the priest, from whom he was expecting a large order.

Besides, it was the opinion of almost all the gentlemen: it could not vanish. Théophile Vabre, who, coughing and spitting, and shaking with fever, dreamed of universal happiness through the organization of a humanitarian republic, alone maintained that, perhaps, it would be transformed.

The priest resumed in his gentle voice:

“The Empire is committing suicide. You will see it is so, next year, when the elections come on.”

“Oh! as for the Empire, we permit you to rid us of it,” said the doctor boldly. “You will be rendering us a precious service.”

Then, Duveyrier, who seemed listening profoundly, shook his head. He belonged to an Orleanist family; but he owed everything to the Empire and considered he ought to defend it.

“Believe me,” he at length declared severely, “do not shake the foundations of society, or everything will collapse. It is we, as sure as fate, who suffer from every catastrophe.”

“Very true!” observed Monsieur Josserand, who entertained no opinion, but remembered his wife’s instructions.

All spoke at once. None of them liked the Empire. Doctor Juillerat condemned the Mexican expedition, the Abbé Mauduit blamed the recognition of the kingdom of Italy. Yet, Théophile Vabre and even Léon felt anxious when Duveyrier threatened them with another ‘93. What was the use of those continual revolutions? had not liberty been obtained? and the hatred of new ideas, the fear of the people wishing their share, calmed the liberalism of those satisfied middle-class men. They all declared, however, that they would vote against the Emperor, for he was in need of a lesson.

“Ah! how they bore me!” said Trublot, who had been trying to understand for some minutes past.

Octave persuaded him to return to the ladies. In the recess of the window, Berthe was deafening Auguste with her laughter. This big fellow, with his pale blood, was forgetting his fear of women, and was becoming quite red, beneath the attacks of the lovely girl, whose breath warmed his face. Madame Josserand, however, probably considered that the affair was dragging, for she looked fixedly at Hortense; and the latter obediently went and gave her sister her assistance.

“Are you quite recovered, madame?” Octave dared to ask Valérie. “Quite, sir, thank you,” replied she coolly, as though she remembered nothing.

Madame Juzeur spoke to the young man about some old lace which she wished to show him, to have his opinion of it; and he had to promise to look in on her for a moment on the morrow. Then, as the Abbé Mauduit re-entered the drawing-room, she called him and made him sit beside her with an air of rapture.

The conversation had again resumed. The ladies were discussing their servants.

“Well! yes,” continued Madame Duveyrier, “I am satisfied with Clémenee, she is a very clean and very active girl.”

“And your Hippolyte,” asked Madamo Josserand, “had you not the intention of discharging him?”

Just then, Hippolyte, the footman, was handing round some iees. When he had withdrawn, tall, strong, and with a florid complexion, Clotilde answered in an embarrassed way:

“We have deeided to keep him. It is so unpleasant changing! You know, servants get used to one another, and I should not like to part with Clémence.”

Madame Josserand hastened to agree with her, feeling that they were on delicate ground. There was some hope of marrying the two together, some day; and the Abbé Mauduit, whom the Duveyriers’ had consulted in the matter, slowly wagged his head, as though to dissemble a state of affairs known to all the house, but of which no one ever spoke. All the ladies now opened their hearts: Valérie had sent another servant about her business that very morning, and that made three in a week; Madamo Juzeur had deeided to take a young girl of fifteen from the foundling hospital so as to teach her herself; as for Madame Josserand, her complaints of Adèle seemed never likely to cease, a slut, a good-for-nothing, whose goings-on were most extraordinary. And they all, feeling languid in the blaze of the candles and the perfume of the flowers, sank deeper into these ante-room stories, wading through greasy account-books, and taking a delight in relating the insolence of a coachman or of a scullery-maid.

“Have you seen Julie?” abruptly asked Trublot of Octave, in a mysterious tone of voice.

And, as the other looked at him in amazement, he added:

“My dear fellow, she is stunning. Go and see her. Just pretend you want to go somewhere, and then slip into the kitchen. She is stunning!”

He was speaking of the Duveyriers’ cook. The ladies’ conversation was taking a turn: Madame Josserand was describing, with overflowing admiration, a very modest estate which the Duveyriers had near Villeneuve-Saint-Georges, and which she had merely caught a glimpse of from the train, one day when she was going to Fontainebleau. But Clotilde did not like the country, she lived there as little as possible, merely during the holidays of her son, Gustave, who was then studying rhetoric at the Lycée Bonaparte.

“Caroline is right in not wishing to have any children,” declared she, turning towards Madame Hédouin, seated two chairs away from her. “The little things interfere with all your habits!”

Madame Hédouin said that she liked them a good deal. But she was much too busy; her husband was constantly away, and she had everything to look

after.

Octave, standing up behind her chair, searched with a side glance the little curly hairs, as black as ink, on the nape of her neck, and the snowy whiteness of her bosom, which—her dress being open very low—disappeared in a mass of lace. She ended by completely confusing him, as she sat there so calm, speaking but rarely and with a continuous smile on her handsome face; he had never before seen so superb a creature, even at Marseilles. Decidedly, it was worth trying, though it would be a long task.

“Having children robs women of their good looks so quickly!” said he in her ear, leaning over, feeling an absolute necessity to speak to her, and yet finding nothing else to say.

She slowly raised her large eyes, and then replied with the simple air with which she would give him an order at the warehouse.

“Oh! no, Monsieur Octave; with me it is not for that. One must have the time, that is all.”

But Madame Duveyrier intervened. She had merely greeted the young man with a slight bow, when Campardon had introduced him to her; and now she was examining him, and listening to him, without seeking to hide a sudden interest. When she heard him conversing with her friend, she could not help asking:

“Pray, excuse me, sir. What voice have you?”

He did not understand immediately; but he ended by saying that his was a tenor voice. Then, Clotilde became quite enthusiastic: a tenor voice, really! what a piece of luck, tenor voices were becoming so rare! For instance, for the “Blessing of the Daggers,” which they were going to sing by-and-by, she had never been able to find more than three tenors among her acquaintances, when at least five were required. And, suddenly excited, her eyes sparkling, she had to restrain herself from going at once to the piano to try his voice. He was obliged to promise to come one evening for the purpose. Trublot, who was behind him, kept nudging him with his elbow, ferociously enjoying himself in his impassibility.

“Ah! so you are in for it too!” murmured he, when she had moved away. “For myself, my dear fellow, she first of all thought I had a barytone voice; then, seeing that I did not get on all right, she tried me as a tenor; but as I went no better, she has decided to use me to-night as bass. I am one of the monks.”

But he had to leave Octave as Madame Duveyrier was just then calling him; they were about to sing the chorus, the great piece of the evening. There was quite a commotion. Some fifteen men, all amateurs, and all recruited

among the guests of the house, painfully opened a passage for themselves through the groups of ladies, to form in front of the piano. They were constantly brought to a standstill, and asked to be excused, in voices drowned by the hum of conversations; whilst the fans were moved more rapidly in the increasing heat. At length, Madame Duveyrier counted them; they were all there, and she distributed them their parts, which she had copied out herself. Campardon took the part of Saint-Bris; a young auditor attached to the Council of State was intrusted with De Nevers's few bars; then came eight nobles, four aldermen, and three monks, represented by barristers, clerks, and simple householders. She, who accompanied, had also reserved herself the part of Valentine, passionate cries which she uttered whilst striking chords; for she would have no lady amongst the gentlemen, the resigned troop of whom she directed with all the severity of a conductor of an orchestra.

The conversations continued, an intolerable noise issued from the parlour especially, where the political discussions were evidently entering on a disagreeable phase. Then Clotilde, taking a key from her pocket, tapped gently with it on the piano. A murmur ran through the room, the voices dropped, two streams of black coats again flowed to the doors; and, looking over the heads, one beheld for a moment Duveyrier's red spotted face wearing an agonised expression. Octave had remained standing behind Madame Hédouin, the glances from his lowered eyes losing themselves, in the shadows of her bosom, in the depths of the lace. But when the silence was almost complete, there was a burst of laughter, and he raised his head. It was Berthe, who was amused at some joke of Auguste's; she had heated his poor blood to such a point that he was becoming quite jovial. Every person in the drawing-room looked at them, mothers became grave, members of the family exchanged a glance.

"She has such spirits!" murmured Madame Josserand tenderly, in such a way as to be heard.

Hortense, close to her sister, was assisting her with complaisant abnegation, joining in her laughter, and pushing her up against the young man; whilst the breeze which entered through the partly open window behind them gently swelled the big crimson silk curtains.

But a sepulchral voice resounded, all the heads turned towards the piano. Campardon, his mouth wide open, his beard spread out in a lyrical blast, was giving the first line:

"Yes, we are here assembled by the queen's command."

Clotilde at once ran up a scale and down again; then, her eyes fixed on the ceiling, a look of fright on her face, she uttered the cry:

“I tremble!”

And the whole thing followed, the eight barristers, clerks and householders, their noses on their parts, in the postures of schoolboys humming and hawing over a page of Greek, swore that they were ready to deliver France. This opening was a surprise, for the voices were stifled beneath the low ceiling, one was unable to catch more than a sort of hum, like a noise of passing carts full of paving stones causing the windows to rattle. But when Saint-Bris’s melodious line: “For this holy cause—” unrolled the principal theme, some of the ladies recognised it and nodded their heads knowingly. All were warming to the work, the nobles shouted out at random: “We swear it!—We will follow you!” and, each time, it was like an explosion which caught the guests full in the chest.

“They sing too loud,” murmured Octave in Madame Hédouin’s ear.

She did not move. Then, as De Nevers’s and Valentine’s explanations bored him, more especially as the auditor attached to the Council of State was a false barytone, he corresponded by signs with Trublot who, whilst awaiting the entrance of the monks, drew his attention with a wink to the window where Berthe was continuing to keep Auguste imprisoned. Now, they were alone, in the fresh breeze from outside; whilst, with her ear pricked up, Hortense stood before them, leaning against the curtain and mechanically twisting the loop. No one was watching them now, even Madame Josserand and Madame Dambreville were looking away, after an instinctive exchange of glances.

Meanwhile, Clotilde, her fingers on the keys, carried away and unable to risk a gesture, stretehed her neck and addressed to the music stand this oath intended for De Nevers:

“Ah! from to-day all my blood is yours!”

The aldermen had made their entrance, a substitute, two attorneys, and a notary. The quartette was well delivered, the line: “For this holy cause—” returned, spread out, supported by half the chorus, in a continuous expansion. Cam pardon, his mouth opened wider and wider, gave the orders for the combat, with a terrible roll of syllables. And, suddenly, the chant of the monks burst forth: Trublot sang from his stomach, so as to reach the low notes.

Octave, having had the curiosity to wateh him singing, was struck with surprise, when he again cast his eyes in the direction of the window. As though carried away by the chorus, Hortense had unfastened the loop, by a movement which might have been unintentional; and, in falling, the big crimson silk curtain had completely hidden Auguste and Berthe. They were there behind it, leaning against the window bar, without a movement betraying their presence.

Oetave no longer troubled himself about Trublot, who was just then blessing the daggers: “Holy daggers, by us be blessed.” Whatever could they be doing behind that curtain? The fugue was commencing; to the deep tones of the monks, the chorus replied: “Death! death! death!” And still they did not move; perhaps, feeling the heat too much, they were simply watching the cabs pass. But Saint-Bris’s melodious line had again returned, by degrees all the voices uttered it with the whole strength of their lungs, progressively and in a final outburst of extraordinary force. It was like a gust of wind burying itself in the farthest corners of the too narrow room, scaring the candles, making the guests turn pale and their ears bleed. Clotilde furiously strummed away on the piano, carrying the gentlemen along with her with a glance; then the voices quieted down, almost whispering: “At midnight, let there be not a sound!” and she continued on alone, using the soft pedal, and imitating the cadenced and distant footsteps of some departing patrol.

Then, suddenly, in the midst of this expiring music, of this relief after so much uproar, one heard a voice exclaim:

“You are hurting me!”

All the heads again turned towards the window. Madame Dambreville kindly made herself useful, by going and pulling the curtain aside. And the whole drawing-room beheld Auguste looking very confused and Berthe very red, still leaning against the bar of the window.

“What is the matter, my treasure?” asked Madame Josserand earnestly.

“Nothing, mamma. Monsieur Auguste knocked my arm with the window. I was so warm!”

She turned redder still. There were, affected smiles and scandalized pouts. Madame Duveyrier, who, for a month past, had been trying to keep her brother out of Berthe’s way, turned quite pale, more especially as the incident had spoilt the effect of her chorus. However, after the first moment of surprise, the applause burst forth, she was congratulated, and some amiable things were said about the gentlemen. How delightfully they had sung! what pains she must have taken to get them to sing so well in time! Really, it could not have been rendered better at a theatre. But, beneath all this praise, she could not fail to hear the whispering which went round the drawing-room: the young girl was too much compromised, a marriage had become inevitable.

“Well! he is hooked!” observed Trublot as he rejoined Octave. “What a ninny! as though he could not have pinched her whilst we were all bellowing! I thought all the while that he was taking advantage of it. You know, in drawing-rooms where they go in for singing, one pinches a lady, and if she cries out it does not matter, no one hears!”

Berthe, now very calm, was again laughing, whilst Hortense looked at Auguste with her crabbed air of a girl who had taken a diploma; and, in their triumph, the mother's lessons reappeared, the undisguised contempt for man. All the gentlemen had now invaded the drawing-room, mingling with the ladies, and raising their voices. Monsieur Josserand, feeling sick at heart through Berthe's adventure, had drawn near his wife. He listened uneasily as she thanked Madame Dambreville for all her kindness to their son Léon, whom she had most decidedly changed to his advantage. But his uneasiness increased when he heard her again refer to her daughters. She pretended to converse in low tones with Madame Juzeur, though speaking all the while for Valérie and Clotilde, who were standing up close beside her.

"Well, yes! her uncle mentioned it in a letter again to-day; Berthe will have fifty thousand francs. It is not much, no doubt, but when the money is there, and as safe as the bank too!"

This lie roused his indignation. He could not help stealthily touching her shoulder. She looked at him, forcing him to lower his eyes before the resolute expression of her face. Then, as Madame Duveyrier turned round quite amiably, she asked her with great concern for news of her father.

"Oh! papa has probably gone to bed," replied the young woman, quite won over. "He works so hard!"

Monsieur Josserand said that Monsieur Vabre had indeed retired, so as to have his ideas clear on the morrow. And he mumbled a few words: a most remarkable mind, extraordinary faculties; asking himself at the same time where he would get that dowry from, and thinking what a figure he would cut, the day the marriage contract had to be signed.

A great noise of chairs being moved now filled the drawingroom. The ladies passed into the dining-room, where the tea was ready served. Madame Josserand sailed victoriously in, surrounded by her daughters and the Vabre family. Soon only the group of serious men remained amidst the vacant chairs. Campardon had button-holed the Abbé Mauduit: there was a question of some repairs to the calvary at Saint-Roch. The architect said he was quite free, for the diocese of Evreux gave him very little to do. All he had in hand there were a pulpit and a heating apparatus, and also some new ranges to be placed in the bishop's kitchen, which work his inspector was quite competent to see after. Then, the priest promised to have the matter definitely settled at the next meeting of the vestry. And they both joined the group where Duveyrier was being complimented on a judgment, of which he admitted himself to be the author; the presiding judge, who was his friend, reserved certain easy and brilliant tasks for him, so as to bring him to the fore.

"Have you read this last novel?" asked Léon, looking through a number of

the “Revue des Deux Mondes,” lying on a table. “It is well written; but there is another adultery, it is really becoming wearisome!”

And the conversation turned upon morality. Campardou said that there were some very virtuous women. All the others agreed with him. Moreover, according to the architect, one could always live peacefully at home, if one only went the right way about it. Théophile Vabre observed that it depended on the woman, without explaining himself farther. They wished to have Doctor Juillerat’s opinion, but he smiled and begged to be excused: he considered virtue was a question of health. During this, Duveyrier had remained wrapped in thought.

“Dear me!” murmured he at length, “these authors exaggerate; adultery is very rare amongst educated people. A woman who comes from a good family, has in her soul a flower—”

He was for grand sentiments, he uttered the word “ideal” with an emotion which brought a mist to his eyes. And he said that the Abbé Mauduit was right when the latter spoke of the necessity for the wife and mother having some religious belief. The conversation was thus brought back to religion and politics, at the point where these gentlemen had previously left it. The Church would never disappear, because it was the foundation of all families, the same as it was the natural support of governments.

“As a sort of police, perhaps it is,” murmured the doctor.

Duveyrier, however, did not like politics being discussed in his house, and he contented himself with severely declaring, as he glanced into the dining-room where Berthe and Hortense were stuffing Auguste with sandwiches:

“There is one fact, gentlemen, which settles everything: religion moralizes marriage.”

At the same moment, Trublot, seated on a sofa beside Octave, was bending towards the latter.

“By the way,” asked he, “would you like me to get you invited to a lady’s where there is plenty of amusement?”

And as his companion desired to know what kind of a lady, he added, indicating the counsellor by a sign:

“His mistress.”

“Impossible!” said Octave in amazement.

Trublot slowly opened and closed his eyes. It was so. When one married a woman who was disobliging and disgusted with one’s little ailments, and who strummed on her piano to the point of making all the dogs of the

neighbourhood ill, one had to go elsewhere and be made a fool of!

“Let us moralize marriage, gentlemen, let us moralize marriage,” repeated Duveyrier in his rigid way, with his inflamed face, where Octave now distinguished the foul blood of secret vices.

The gentlemen were being called into the dining-room. The Abbé Mauduit, left for a moment alone in the middle of the empty drawing-room, looked from a distance at the crush of guests. His fat shrewd face bore an expression of sadness. He who heard all those ladies, both old and young, at confession, knew them all in the flesh, the same as Doctor Juillerat, and he had had to end by merely watching over appearances, like a master of the ceremonies throwing the mantle of religion over the corruption of the middle classes, trembling at the certainty of a final downfall, the day when the canker would appear in all its hideousness. At times, in his ardent and sincere faith of a priest, his indignation would overcome him. But his smile returned; he took the cup of tea which Berthe came and offered him, and conversed a minute with her so as to cover, as it were, the scandal of the window, with his sacred character; and he again became the man of the world, resigned to merely insisting upon a decent behaviour from those sinners, who were escaping him, and who would have compromised providence.

“Well, these are fine goings-on!” murmured Octave, whose respect for the house had received another shock.

And seeing Madame Hédouin move towards the ante-room, he wished to reach there before her, and followed Trublot, who was also leaving. His intention was to see her home. She refused; it was scarcely midnight, and she lived so near. Then, a rose having fallen from the bouquet at her breast, he picked it up in spite and made a pretence of keeping it. The young woman’s beautiful eyebrows contracted; then, she said in her quiet way:

“Pray open the door for me, Monsieur Octave. Thank you.” When she had departed, the young man, who was rather confused, looked for Trublot. But Trublot had disappeared, the same as he had done at the Josserands’. This time also he must have slipped along the passage leading to the kitchen.

Octave, greatly put out, went off to his room, his rose in his hand. Upstairs, he beheld Marie leaning over the balustrade, at the place where he had left her; she had been listening for his footstep, and had hastened to see him come up. And when she had made him enter her room, she said:

“Jules has not yet come home. Did you enjoy yourself? Were there any pretty dresses?”

But she did not give him time to answer. She had caught sight of the rose, and was seized with a childish delight. “Is that flower for me? You have

thought of me? Ah! how nice of you! how nice of you!”

And her eyes filled with tears, she became quite confused and very red. Then Octave, suddenly moved, kissed her tenderly.

Towards one o’clock, the Josserands withdrew in their turn. Adèle always left a candle and some matches on a chair. When the members of the family, who had not exchanged a word coming upstairs, had entered the dining-room, from whence they had gone down in despair, they suddenly yielded to a mad delirious joy, holding each others’ hands, and dancing like savages round the table; the father himself gave way to the contagion, the mother cut capers, and the daughters uttered little inarticulate cries; whilst the candle in the middle of them showed up their huge shadows careering along the walls.

“At last, it is settled!” said Madame Josserand, out of breath, dropping on to a chair.

But she jumped up again at once, in a fit of maternal affection, and ran and imprinted two big kisses on Berthe’s cheeks.

“I am very pleased, very pleased indeed with you, my darling. You have just rewarded me for all my efforts. My poor girl, my poor girl it is true then, this time!”

Her voice was choking, her heart was in her mouth. She succumbed in her flaring dress, beneath the weight of a deep and sincere emotion, suddenly overwhelmed in the hour of her triumph by the fatigues of her terrible campaign which had lasted three winters. Berthe had to swear that she was not ill, for her mother thought she looked ill, and was full of little attentions, almost insisting on making her a cup of infusion. When the young girl was in bed, she went barefooted and carefully tucked her in, like in the already distant days of her childhood.

Meanwhile, Monsieur Josserand, his head on his pillow, awaited her. She blew out the light, and stepped over him, to reach the side of the bed nearest the wall. He was wrapped in thought, his uneasiness having returned, his conscience all upset by that promise of a dowry of fifty thousand francs. And he ventured to mention his scruples aloud. Why make a promise, when one has a doubt of being able to keep it? It was not honest.

“Not honest!” exclaimed Madame Josserand in the dark, her voice resuming its ferocious tone. “It is not honest to let your daughters become old maids, sir; yes, old maids, such was perhaps your dream! We have plenty of time to turn about, we can talk the matter over, we will end by persuading her uncle. And understand, sir, that in my family, we have always been honest!”

CHAPTER VI.

On the morrow, which was a Sunday, Octave with his eyes open lay thinking for an hour in the warmth of the sheets. He awoke happy, full of the lucidity of the morning laziness. What need was there to hurry? He was very comfortable at “The Ladies’ Paradise,” he was there losing all his provincial ways, and he had an absolute and profound conviction of one day possessing Madame Hédouin, who would make his fortune; but it was an affair that required prudence, a long series of gallant tactics, which his voluptuous passion for women was already enjoying by anticipation. As he was dozing off again, forming his plans, allowing himself six months to succeed in, Marie Pichon’s image resulted in calming his impatience. A woman like that was a real boon; he had merely to stretch out his arm, when he required her, and she did not cost him a sou. Whilst awaiting the other, he could certainly not hope for anything better. In his half-slumber, this bargain and this convenience ended by making him quite tender-hearted: she appeared to him very nice and pretty with all her good-nature, and he promised himself he would behave better to her in future.

“Hang it! nine o’clock!” said he thoroughly roused by his clock striking. “I must get up.”

A fine rain was falling. Then, he made up his mind not to go out all day. He would accept an invitation to dine with the Pichons, which he had been refusing for some time past, dreading another meeting with the Vuillaumes; it would please Marie, he would find opportunities of kissing her behind the doors; and, as she was always asking for books, he even thought of giving her the surprise of a quantity which he had, stowed away in one of his boxes in the loft. When he was dressed, he went down to Monsieur Gourd to get the key of this common loft, where all the tenants got rid of whatever things were in their way, or which they had no present use for.

Down below, on that damp morning, it was quite stifling in the heated staircase, the imitation marble, the tall looking-glasses, and the mahogany doors of which were covered with steam. Under the porch, a poorly clad woman, mother Pérou, to whom the Gourds paid four sons an hour for doing the heavy work of the house, was washing the pavement with plenty of water, in face of the icy-cold blast blowing from the courtyard.

“Eh! I say old ‘un, just rub that a bit better, that I may not find a spot on it!” called ont Monsieur Gourd, warmly covered up, standing on the threshold of his apartment.

And, Octave arriving, he talked to him of mother Pérou with the brutal domineering spirit, the mad mania for revenge, of former servants who were

being served in their turn.

“A lazy creature that I can do nothing with! I should like to have seen her at the duke’s! Ah well! they stood no nonsense there! I’ll send her to the right about, if she doesn’t give me my money’s worth! That’s all I care about. But, excuse me, what is it you require, Monsieur Mouret?”

Octave asked for the key. Then the doorkeeper, without hurrying himself, continued to explain to him that, if they had chosen, Madame Gourd and he, they might have lived respectably in their own house, at Mort-la-Ville; only, Madame Gourd adored Paris, in spite of her swollen legs which prevented her getting as far as the pavement; and they were waiting until they had made their income into a round sum, their hearts almost breaking moreover and drawing back, each time that they felt a desire to go and live at last upon the little fortune which they had got together sou by sou.

“No one had better bother me,” concluded he, drawing himself up to the full height of his handsome figure. “I’m no longer working for a living. The key of the loft you said, did you not, Monsieur Mouret? Wherever have we put the key of the loft, my dear?”

Madame Gourd, tenderly seated before a wood fire, the flames of which enlivened the big light room, was drinking her coffee and milk out of a silver cup. She had no idea; perhaps in one of the drawers. And, whilst soaking her toast, she did not take her eyes off the door of the servants’ staircase, at the other end of the courtyard, looking barer and severer than ever in the rain.

“Look out! here she is!” said she suddenly, as a woman appeared in the doorway.

Monsieur Gourd at once went and placed himself before his room, so as to prevent the woman from passing, whilst she slackened her footsteps with an air of anxiety.

“We have been on the look-out for her since the first thing this morning, Monsieur Mouret,” resumed he, in a low voice. “Last night we saw her pass. You know she comes from that carpenter, upstairs, the only workman we have in the house, thank goodness! And if the landlord only listened to me, he would let the room remain empty, a servant’s room which does not go with the other apartments. For one hundred and thirty francs a year, it is really not worth while having such a scum in the place—”

He interrupted himself, to ask the woman roughly:

“Where do you come from?”

“From upstairs, of course!” answered she, walking on.

Then, he exploded.

“We’ll have no women here, understand! The man who brings you has already been told so. If you return here to sleep, I’ll fetch a policeman, that’s what I’ll do! and we’ll see if you’ll continue your goings-on in a respectable house!”

“Oh! don’t bother me!” said the woman. “I’ve a right here; I shall come if I choose.”

And she went off, followed by Monsieur Gourd’s indignation, as he talked of going up to fetch the landlord. Had any one ever heard the like! such a creature amongst respectable people, who did not tolerate the least immorality! And it seemed as though that little room occupied by a workman was the abomination of the house, a bad place, the supervision of which offended the doorkeeper’s delicacy and spoilt his rest at night.

“And that key!” Octave ventured to observe.

But the doorkeeper, furious at a tenant’s having been able to see his authority disputed, fell on mother Pérou, wishing to show that he knew how to make himself obeyed. Did she take him for a fool? She had again splashed the door of his room with her broom. If he paid her out of his own pocket, it was to save him from dirtying his hands, and yet he continually had to clean up after her. Might the devil take him if he was ever again charitable enough to have anything more to do with her! she could go and croak. Without answering, and bent double by the fatigue of this task so much above her strength, the old body continued to scrub with her skinny arms, struggling to keep back her tears, so great was the respectful fright that broad shouldered gentleman in cap and slippers caused her.

“I remember, my darling,” called Madame Gourd from her easy chair in which she passed the day, warming her fat person. “It was I who hid the key under the shirts, so that the servants should not be always going into the loft. Come, give it to Monsieur Mouret.”

“They’re a nice lot, too, those servants!” murmured Monsieur Gourd, who, from his many years in service, had preserved a hatred for menials. “Here is the key, sir; but I must ask you to bring it me back, for no place can be left open, without the servants getting in there and misconducting themselves.”

To save crossing the wet courtyard, Octave went back up the principal staircase. It was not till he had reached the fourth floor that he gained the servants’ staircase, by taking the door of communication that was close to his room. Up above, a long passage was intersected twice at right angles, it was painted pale yellow with a dado of darker ochre; and the doors of the servants’ rooms, also yellow, were uniform and placed at equal distances, the same as in the corridor of a hospital. An icy chill came from the zinc roof. All was bare

and clean, with that unsavoury odour of the lodgings of the poor.

The loft overlooking the courtyard was in the right wing, at the further end. But Octave, who had not been there since the day of his arrival, was going along the left wing, when, suddenly, a spectacle which he beheld inside one of the rooms, by the partly open door, brought him to a standstill and filled him with amazement. A gentleman was standing in his shirt sleeves before a little looking-glass, tying his white cravat.

“What! you here?” said he.

It was Trublot. He also, at first, stood as one petrified. No one ever came near there at that hour. Octave, who had walked in, looked at him in that room with its narrow iron bedstead, and its washstand on which a little bundle of woman’s hair was floating on the soapy water; and, perceiving the black dress coat hanging up amongst some aprons, he could not restrain himself from saying:

“So you sleep with the cook?”

“Not at all!” replied Trublot, in a fright.

Then, recognising the stupidity of this lie, he began to laugh in his convinced and satisfied way.

“Eh! she is amusing! I assure you, my dear fellow, it is awfully fine!”

Whenever he dined out, he escaped from the drawing-room to go and pinch the cook before her stove; and when she was willing to trust him with her key, he would take his departure before midnight, and go and wait patiently for her in her room, seated on a trunk, in his black dress coat and white tie. On the morrow, he would leave by the principal staircase towards ten o’clock, and pass before the doorkeeper as though he had been making an early call on one of the tenants. So long as he was pretty punctual at the stockbroker’s, his father was satisfied. Moreover, he was now employed in attending the Bourse from twelve to three. It would sometimes happen that on a Sunday he would spend the whole day in some servant’s bed, happy, lost, his nose buried in the pillow.

“You, who are going to be so rich some day!” said Octave, his face retaining an expression of disgust.

Then Trublot learnedly declared:

“My dear fellow, you don’t know what it is; don’t speak about it.”

And he stood up for Julie, a tall Burgundian of forty, with her big face pitted with small-pox, but who had the body of a superb woman. One might disrobe the ladies of the house; they were all sticks, not one would come up to

her knee. Besides that, she was a girl very well to do; and to prove it he opened her drawers, displayed a bonnet, some jewellery, and some chemises trimmed with lace, no doubt stolen from Madame Duveyrier. Octave, indeed, now noticed a certain coquettishness about the room, some gilded cardboard boxes on the drawers, a chintz curtain hung over the skirts, all the accessaries of a cook aping the grand lady.

“There is no denying, you see, that one may own to this one,” repeated Trublot. “If they were only all like her!”

At this moment a noise came from the servants’ staircase. It was Adèle coming up to wash her ears, Madame Josserand having furiously forbidden her to proceed with her work until she had cleaned them with soap. Trublot peeped out and recognised her.

“Shut the door quick!” said he very anxiously. “Hush! don’t say a word!”

He pricked up his ear, and listened to Adèle’s heavy footstep along the passage.

“You sleep with her too, then?” asked Octave, surprised at his paleness, and guessing that he dreaded a scene.

But this time Trublot was coward enough to deny.

“Oh! no indeed! not with that slat! Whoever do you take me for, my dear fellow!”

He had seated himself on the edge of the bed, and while waiting to finish dressing, begged Oetave not to move; and both remained perfectly still, whilst that filthy Adèle scoured out her ears, which took at least ten good minutes. They heard the tempest in her washhand basin.

“There is, however, a room between this one and hers,” softly explained Trublot, “a room that is let to a workman, a carpenter who stinks the place out with his onion soup. ‘This morning again, it almost made me sick. And you know, in all houses, the partitions of the servants’ rooms are now almost as thin as sheets of paper. I don’t understand the landlords. It is not very decent, one can scarcely turn in one’s bed. I think it very inconvenient.”

When Adèle had gone down again, he resumed his swagger and finished dressing himself, making free use of Julie’s combs and pomatum. Oetave having spoken of the loft, he insisted on taking him there, for he knew the most out-of-the-way corner of that floor. And, as he passed the doors, he familiarly mentioned the servants’ names: in this bit of a passage, after Adèle came Lisa, the Campardons’ maid, a wench who took her pleasures outside; then, Victoire, their cook, a stranded whale, seventy years old, the only one he respected; then, Françoise, who had entered Madame Valerie’s serviee the day

before, and whose trunk would perhaps only remain twenty-four hours behind the meagre bed upon whieh such a gallop of maids passed, that it was always necessary to make inquiries before going there and waiting in the warmth of the blanket; then, a quiet couple, in the serviee of the people on the second floor; then, these people's coachman, a strapping fellow of whom he spoke with the jealousy of a handsome man, suspecting him of going from door to door and noiselessly doing some very fine work; finally, at the other end of the passage, there were Clémenee, the Duveyriers' maid, whom her neighbour Hippolyte, the butler, rejoined matrimonially every night, and little Louise, the orphan whom Madame Juzeur had taken on trial, a chit of fifteen, who must hear some very strange things in the small hours, if she were a light sleeper.

"My dear fellow, don't lock the door, do this to oblige me," said he to Oetave, when he had helped him to take the books from the box. "You see, when the loft is open, one can hide there and wait."

Octave, having consented to deceive Monsieur Gourd, returned with Trublot to Julie's room. The young man had left his overcoat there. Then it was his gloves that he could not find; he shook the skirts, overturned the bed-clothes, raised such a dust and such an odour of soiled linen, that his companion, half-suffocated, opened the window. It looked on to the narrow inner courtyard, which gave light to all the kitchens. And he was stretching out his head over this damp well, which exhaled the greasy odours of dirty sinks, when a sound of voices made him hastily withdraw.

"The little morning gossip," said Trublot on all fours under the bed, still searching. "Just listen to it."

It was Lisa, who was leaning out of the window of the Cam-pardons' kitchen to speak to Julie, two storeys below her.

"So it's come off then this time?"

"It seems so," replied Julie, raising her head. "You see, she did all she could to catch him. Hippolyte came from the drawing-room so disgusted, that he almost had an attack of indigestion."

"If we were only to do a quarter as much!" resumed Lisa.

But she disappeared a moment, to drink some broth that Victoire brought her. They got on well together, nursing each other's vices, the maid hiding the cook's drunkenness, and the cook facilitating the maid's outings, from which the latter returned quite worn out, her limbs aching, her eyelids blue.

"Ah! my children," said Victoire leaning out in her turn, her elbows touching Lisa's, "you're young. When you've seen what I've seen! At old Campardon's, there was a niece who had been well brought up, and who used

to go and look at the men through the key-hole."

"Pretty goings-on!" murmured Julie with the horrified air of a lady. "Had I been in the place of the little one of the fourth floor, I'd have boxed Monsieur Auguste's ears, if he'd touched me in the drawing-room! He's a fine fellow!"

At these words, a shrill laugh issued from Madame Juzeur's kitchen. Lisa, who was opposite, searched the room with a glance, and caught sight of Louise, whose precocious fifteen years took a delight in listening to the other servants.

"She's spying on us from morning to night, the chit," said she. "How stupid it is to thrust a child upon us! We sha'n't be able to talk at all soon."

She did not finish. The sound of a suddenly opened window chased them away. A profound silence ensued. But they ventured to look out again. Eh! what! what was the matter? They had thought that Madame Valérie or Madame Josserand was going to catch them.

"No fear!" resumed Lisa. "They're all soaking in their washhand basins. They're too busy with their skins, to think of bothering us. It's the only moment in all the day when one can breathe freely."

"So it still goes on the same at your place?" asked Julie, who was paring a carrot.

"Still the same," replied Victoire. "It's all over, she's no more use."

"But your big noodle of an architect, what does he do then?"

"Takes up with the cousin, of course!"

They were laughing louder than ever, when they beheld the new servant, Françoise, in Madame Valérie's kitchen. It was she who had caused the alarm, by opening the window. At first there was an exchange of politeness.

"Ah! it's you, mademoiselle."

"Why, yes, mademoiselle. I am trying to make myself at home, but this kitchen is so filthy!"

Then came scraps of abominable information.

"You will be more than constant, if you remain there long. The last one had her arms all scratched by the child, and madame worked her so hard, that we could hear her crying from here."

"Ah well! that won't last long with me," said Françoise. "Thanks all the same, mademoiselle."

"Where is she, your missus?" asked Victoire curiously.

“She’s just gone off to lunch with a lady.”

Lisa and Julie stretched their necks, to exchange a glance. They knew her well, the lady. A funny sort of lunch, with her head down and her feet in the air! Was it possible, to lie to that extent! They did not pity the husband, for he deserved more than that; only, it was a disgrace to humanity, that a woman should not behave herself better.

“There’s Dish-cloth!” interrupted Lisa, discovering the Josserands’ servant overhead.

Then a host of vulgar expressions were bawled from the depths of this hole, as obscure and infected as a sewer. All, with their faces raised, violently yelled at Adèle, who was their butt, the dirty awkward creature on whom the entire household vented their spite.

“Hallo! she’s washed herself, it’s evident!”

“Just throw your fish bones into the yard again, and I’ll come up and rub ‘em in your face!”

Thoroughly bewildered, Adèle looked down upon them from above, her body half out of the window. She ended by answering:

“Leave me alone, can’t you? or I’ll water you.”

But the yells and the laughter increased.

“You married your young mistress, last night, didn’t you! Eh! it’s you, perhaps, who teach her how to hook the men?”

“Ah! the heartless thing! she stops in a place where they don’t give you enough to eat! On my word, it’s that which exasperates me against her! You’re such a fool, you should send ’em to blazes!”

Adèle’s eyes filled with tear’s.

“You can only talk nonsense,” stammered she. “It’s not my fault if I don’t get enough to eat.”

And the voices swelled, unpleasant words commenced to be exchanged between Lisa and the new servant, Françoise, who stuck up for Adèle, when the latter, forgetting the abuse heaped upon her, and yielding to party instinct, called out: “Look out! here’s madame!”

The silence of the tomb ensued. They all immediately plunged back into their kitchens; and from the dark chasm of the narrow courtyard all that ascended was the stench of the dirty sinks, like the exhalation of the hidden abominations of the families, stirred up there by the spite of the hirelings. It was the sewer of the house, the shames of which it carried off, whilst the

masters were still lounging in their slippers, and the grand staircase unfolded the solemnity of its flights, in the silent suffocation of the hot air stove. Octave recalled the blast of uproar he received full in the face, when entering the Campardons' kitchen, the day of his arrival.

"They are very nice," said he simply.

And, leaning out in his turn, he looked at the walls, as though annoyed at not having at once read through them, behind the imitation marble and the mouldings bright with gilding.

"Where the devil has she stowed them away?" repeated Trublot who had searched everywhere for his white kid gloves.

At length, he discovered them at the bottom of the bed itself, flattened out and quite warm. He gave a last glance in the glass, went and hid the key in the place agreed upon, right at the end of the passage, underneath an old sideboard left behind by some lodger, and led the way downstairs, accompanied by Octave. After passing the Josserands' door, on the grand staircase, he recovered all his assurance, with his overcoat buttoned up to the neck to hide his dress clothes and white tie.

"Good-bye, my dear fellow," said he raising his voice. "I felt anxious, so I just looked in to hear how the ladies were. They passed a very good night. Good-bye."

Octave watched him with a smile as he went downstairs. Then, as it was almost lunch time, he decided to return the key of the loft later on. During lunch, at the Campardons', he particularly watched Lisa, who waited at table. She had her usual clean and agreeable look; but, in his mind, he could still hear her defiling her lips with the most abominable words. His knowledge of women had not deceived him with respect to that girl with the flat chest. Madame Campardon continued to be enchanted with her, surprised that she did not steal anything, which was a fact, for her vice was of a different kind. Moreover, the girl seemed very kind to Angèle, and the mother entirely trusted her. .

It so happened, that on that day Angèle disappeared when the dessert was placed on the table, and she could be heard laughing in the kitchen. Octave ventured to make an observation.

"You are perhaps wrong, to let her be so free with the servants."

"Oh! there is not much harm in it," replied Madame Campardon, in her languid way. "Victoire saw my husband born, and I am so sure of Lisa. Besides, how can I help it? the child gives me a headache. I should go crazy, if I heard her jumping about me all day."

The architect gravely chewed the end of his cigar.

“It is I,” said he, “who make Angèle pass two hours in the kitchen, every afternoon. I wish her to become a good housewife. It teaches her a great deal. She never goes out, my dear fellow, she is continually under our sheltering wing. You will see what a jewel we shall make of her.”

Octave said no more. On certain days, Campardon appeared to him to be very stupid; and as the architect pressed him to go and hear a great preacher at Saint-Roch, he refused, obstinately persisting in remaining indoors. After telling Madame Campardon that he would not dine with them that evening, he was returning to his room, when he felt the key of the loft in his pocket. He preferred to go down and return it at once. But on the landing an unexpected sight attracted his attention. The door of the room let to the highly distinguished gentleman, whose name was never mentioned, happened to be open; and this was quite an event, for it was invariably shut, as though barred by the silence of the tomb. His surprise increased: he was looking for the gentleman’s work-table, and in its stead had discovered the corner of a big bedstead, when he beheld a slim lady dressed in black, her face hidden behind a thick veil, come ont of the room, whilst the door closed noiselessly behind her.

Then, his curiosity being roused, he followed the lady downstairs, to find out if she were pretty. But she hastened along with an anxious nimbleness, scarcely touching the Wilton carpet with her tiny boots, and leaving no trace in the house, save a faint odour of verbena. As he reached the vestibule, she disappeared, and he only beheld Monsieur Gourd standing under the porch, cap in hand and bowing very low to her.

When the young man had returned the doorkeeper his key, he tried to make him talk.

“She looks very lady-like,” said he. “Who is she?”

“A lady,” answered Monsieur Gourd.

And he would add nothing further. But he was more communicative regarding the gentleman on the third floor. Oh! a man belonging to the very best society, who had taken that room to come and work there quietly, one night a week.

“Ah! he works!” interrupted Octave. “What at, pray!”

“He was kind enough to ask me to keep his room tidy for him,” continued Monsieur Gourd, without appearing to have heard the question. “And, you know, he pays money down. Ah! sir, when one waits on people, one soon knows whether they are decent He is everything that is most respectable: it is

easily seen by his clothes.”

He was obliged to jump on one side, and Octave himself had to enter the doorkeepers’ room for a moment, in order to let the carriage of the second floor people, who were going to the Bois, pass. The horses pawed the ground, held back by the coachman the reins high; and, when the big closed landau rolled under the vaulted roof, one beheld through the windows two handsome children, whose smiling faces almost hid the vague profiles of the father and mother. Monsieur Gourd drew himself up, polite, but cold.

“They don’t make much noise in the house,” observed Octave.

“No one makes any noise,” said the doorkeeper, curtly.

“Eaeh one lives as he thinks best, that’s all. There are people who know how to live, and there are people who don’t know how to live.”

The second floor tenants were judged severely, because they associated with no one. They appeared to be well off, however; but the husband wrote books, and Monsieur Gourd mistrusted him, curling his lip with contempt; more especially as no knew what the family was up to in there, with its air of requiring nobody, and being always perfectly happy. It did not seem to him natural.

Octave was opening the vestibule door, when Valérie returned. He drew politely on one side, to allow her to pass before him.

“Are you quite well, madame?”

“Yes, sir, thank you.”

She was out of breath; and as she went upstairs he looked at her muddy boots, thinking of that lunch, with her head down and her feet in the air, which the servants had spoken of. She had no doubt walked home, not having been able to find a cab. A hot unsavoury odour came from her damp skirts. Fatigue, a placid weariness of all her flesh, made her at times, in spite of herself, place her hand on the balustrade.

“What a disagreeable day, is it not, madame?”

“Frightful, sir. And, with that, the atmosphere is very close.”

She had reaehed the first-floor landing, and they bowed to each other. But, with a glance, he had seen her haggard face, her eyelids heavy with sleep, her unkempt hair beneath the bonnet tied on in haste; and as he continued on his way upstairs, he reflected, annoyed and angry. Then, why not with him? He was neither more stupid nor uglier than the others.

When before Madame Juzeur’s door, on the third floor, his promise of the evening before recurred to him. He felt curious about that little woman, so

discreet and with eyes like periwinkles. He rang. It was Madame Juzeur herself who answered the door.

“Ah! dear sir, how kind of you! Pray walk in.”

There was a softness about the lodging which smelt a bit stuffy: carpets and hangings everywhere, seats as yielding as down, with the warm unruffled atmosphere of a chest padded with old rainbow coloured satin. In the drawing-room, to which the double curtains imparted the peacefulness of a church, Octave was invited to seat himself on a broad and very low sofa.

“Here is the lace,” resumed Madame Juzeur, reappearing with a sandal-wood box full of finery. “I am going to make a present of it to some one, and I am curious to know its value.”

It was a piece of very fine old Brussels. Octave examined it carefully, and ended by valuing it at three hundred francs. Then, without waiting further, as their hands were both handling the lace, he bent forward and kissed her fingers, fingers as delicate as a little girl’s.

“Oh! Monsieur Octave, at my age! you cannot think what you are doing!” murmured Madame Juzeur, prettily, without getting angry.

She was thirty-two, and pretended she was quite old. And she made her usual allusion to her misfortunes; good heavens! yes, after ten days of married bliss, the cruel man had gone off one morning and had not returned, nobody had ever discovered why.

“You can understand,” continued she, gazing up at the ceiling, “that all is over for the woman who has gone through this.”

Octave had kept hold of her little warm hand which seemed to mould itself to his, and he continued kissing it lightly, on the fingers. She turned her eyes towards him, and gazed upon him with a vague and tender look; then, in a maternal way, she uttered this single word:

“Child!”

Thinking himself encouraged, he wished to take her round the waist, and draw her on to the sofa; but she freed herself without any violence, and slipped from his arms, laughing, and with an air of thinking that he was merely playing.

“No, leave me alone, do not touch me, if you wish that we should remain good friends.”

“Then, no?” asked he in a low voice.

“What, no? What do you mean? Oh! my hand, as much as you like!”

He had again taken hold of her hand. But, this time, he opened it, kissing it on the palm; and, her eyes half closed, treating the little game as a joke, she opened her fingers like a cat spreads out its claws to be tickled inside its paw. She did not let him go farther than the wrist. The first day, a sacred line was drawn there, where harm began.

“The priest is coming upstairs,” Louise suddenly entered and said, on returning from some errand.

The orphan had the yellow complexion, and the squashed features of girls forgotten on doorsteps. She burst into an idiotic laugh on beholding the gentleman eating, as she thought, out of her mistress’s hand. But at a glance from the latter, she hastened away.

“I greatly fear I shall never be able to do anything with her,” resumed Madame Juzeur. “However, it is only right to try and put one of those poor souls into the straight path. Come this way, if you please, Monsieur Mouret.”

She conducted him to the dining-room, so as to leave the drawing-room to the priest, whom Louise ushered in. She invited Octave to come again and have a chat. It would be a little company for her; she was always so sad and so lonely! Happily, religion consoled her.

That evening, towards five o’clock, Octave experienced a real relief in making himself comfortable at the Pichons’ whilst waiting for dinner. The house bewildered him somewhat; after having allowed himself to be impressed with a provincial’s respect, in the face of the rich solemnity of the staircase, he was gliding to an exaggerated contempt for what he thought he could guess took place behind the high mahogany doors. He was quite at sea; it seemed to him now that those middle-class women, whose virtue had frozen him at first, should yield at a sign; and, when one of them resisted, he was filled with surprise and rancour.

Marie blushed with joy on seeing him place the pile of books which he had fetched for her in the morning on the sideboard. She kept saying, “How nice of you, Monsieur Octave! Oh! thank you, thank you! And how kind to come early! Will you have a glass of sugar and water with some cognac? It assists the appetite.”

He accepted, just to please her. Everything appeared pleasant to him, even Pichon and the Vuillaumes, who conversed round the table, slowly mumbling over again their usual Sunday conversation. Marie, now and again, ran to the kitchen, where she was cooking a boned shoulder of mutton; and he dared in a chaffing way to follow her, seizing hold of her before the stove, and kissing her on the nape of her neck. She, without a cry and without a start, turned round and kissed him in her turn on the mouth, with lips which were always

cold. This coolness seemed delicious to the young man.

“Well, and your new Minister?” asked he of Pichon, on returning into the room.

But the clerk gave a start. Ah! there was going to be a new Minister of Public Instruction! He knew nothing of it; no one ever troubled about that at the Ministry.

“The weather is so bad!” he abruptly remarked. “It is quite impossible to keep one’s trousers clean!”

Madame Vuillaume talked of a girl at Batignolles who had gone to the bad.

“You will scarcely believe me, sir,” said she. “She had been exceedingly well brought up; but she felt so bored at her parents’, that she had twice tried to throw herself into the street. It is incredible!”

“They should have put bars on the windows,” said Monsieur Vuillaume simply.

The dinner was delightful. This kind of conversation lasted all the time around the modest board lighted by a little lamp. Pichon and Monsieur Vuillaume, having got on to the staff of the Ministry, did nothing but talk of head-clerks and second head-clerks; the father-in-law obstinately alluded to those of his time, then recollected that they were dead; whilst, on his side, the son-in-law continued to speak of the new ones, in the midst of an inextricable confusion of names. The two men, however, as well as Madame Vuillaume, agreed on one point: fat Chavignat, he who had such an ugly wife, had gone in for a great deal too many children. It was absurd for a man of his position. And Octave smiled, feeling happy and at his ease; he had not spent such an agreeable evening for a long time; he even ended by blaming Chavignat with conviction. Marie quieted him with her clear, innocent look, devoid of emotion at seeing him seated beside her husband, helping them both according to their tastes, with her rather tired air of passive obedience.

Punctually at ten o’clock, the Vuillaumes rose to take their departure. Pichon put on his hat. Every Sunday he saw them to the omnibus. Out of deference, he had got into the habit about the time of his marriage, and the Vuillaumes would have been deeply offended had he now tried to give it up. All three made for the Rue de Richelieu, then walked slowly up it, searching with a glance the Batignolles omnibuses which kept passing full, so that Pichon often went thus as far as Montmartre; for he would never have thought of leaving his father and mother-in-law before seeing them into an omnibus. As they could not walk fast, it took him close upon two hours to go there and back.

They exchanged some friendly handshakes on the landing. Octave, on returning to the room with Marie, said quietly, “It rains; Jules will not get back before midnight.”

And, as Lilitte had been put to bed early, he at once took Marie on his knees, and drank the rest of the coffee with her out of the same cup, like a husband glad at having got rid of his guests and at finding himself again in the quiet of his home, excited by a little family gathering, and able to kiss his wife at his case, with the doors closed. A pleasant warmth filled the narrow room, where some frosted eggs had left an odour of vanilla. He was gently kissing the young woman under the chin, when some one knocked. Marie did not even give a start of affright. It was young Josserand, he who was a bit cracked. Whenever he could escape from the apartment opposite, he would come in this way to chat with her, attracted by her gentleness; and they both got on well together, remaining ten minutes at a time without speaking, exchanging at distant intervals phrases which had no connection with each other. Octave, very much put out, remained silent.

“They’ve some people there,” stuttered Saturnin. “I don’t care a hang for their not letting me dine with them! So I took the lock off and bolted. It serves them right.”

“They will be anxious; you ought to go back,” said Marie, who noticed Octave’s impatience.

But the idiot laughed with delight. Then, with his embarrassed speech, he related what took place in his home. He seemed to come each time for the sake of thus relieving his memory.

“Papa worked all night again. Mamma slapped Berthe. I say, when people get married, does it hurt?”

And, as Marie did not reply, becoming excited, he continued: “I won’t go to the country; I won’t. If they only touch her, I’ll strangle them; it’s easy to do in the night, when they’re asleep. The palm of her hand is as soft as note-paper. But, you know, the other is a beast of a girl—”

He recommenced, got more muddled still, and did not succeed in expressing what he had come to say. Marie, at length, made him return to his parents, without his even having noticed Octave’s presence.

Then the latter, through fear of being again disturbed, wanted to take the young woman into his own room. But she refused, her cheeks suddenly becoming scarlet He, not understanding this bashfulness, said that they would be sure to hear Jules coming up, and that she would have time to slip into her room; and as he drew her along, she became quite angry, with the indignation of a woman to whom violence is being offered.

“No, not in your room, never! It would be too wrong. Let us remain here.”

And she ran to the farthest end of her room. Octave was still on the landing, surprised at this unexpected resistance, when the sounds of a violent altercation ascended from the courtyard. Really, everything seemed to be against him, he would have done better to have gone off to bed. Such an uproar was so unusual at that late hour, that he ended by opening a window, to hear what was going on. Monsieur Gourd, down below, was shouting out:

“I tell you, you shall not pass! The landlord has been sent for. He will come and turn you out himself.”

“What! turn me out!” replied a thick voice. “Don’t I pay my rent? Pass, Amélie, and if the gentleman touches you, we’ll have something to laugh at!”

It was the workman from upstairs, who had returned with the woman sent away in the morning. Octave leant out; but, in the black hole of the courtyard, he could only distinguish some big moving shadows in a ray of gaslight from the vestibule.

“Monsieur Vabre! Monsieur Vabre!” called the doorkeeper in urgent tones, as the carpenter shoved him aside. “Quick, quick, she is coming in!”

In spite of her poor legs, Madame Gourd had gone to fetch the landlord, who was just then at work on his great task. He was coming down. Octave could hear him furiously repeating:

“It is scandalous! it is disgraceful! I will never allow such a thing in my house!”

And, addressing the workman, whom his presence seemed at first to intimidate:

“Send that woman away, at once, at once. You hear me! we will have no women brought to the house.”

“But she’s my wife!” replied the workman in a scared way.

“She is out at service, she comes once a month, when her people allow her to. What a fuss! It isn’t you who’ll prevent me sleeping with my wife, I suppose!”

At these words, the doorkeeper and the landlord quite lost their heads.

“I give you notice to quit,” stuttered Monsieur Vabre. “And, in the meantime, I forbid you to take my premises for what they are not. Gourd, turn that creature out on to the pavement. Yes, sir, I don’t like bad jokes. When a person is married, he should say so. Hold your tongue, do not give me any more of your rudeness!”

The carpenter, who was a jolly fellow, and who had no doubt had a drop too much wine, ended by bursting out laughing.

“It’s damned funny all the same. However, as the gentleman objects, you’d better return home, Amélie. We’ll wait till some other time. By Jove! I accept your notice with pleasure! I wouldn’t stop in such a hole on any account! There are some pretty goings-on in it, one comes across some rare filth. You won’t have women brought here, but you tolerate, on every floor, well-dressed strumpets who lead fine lives behind the doors! You set of muffs! you swells!”

Amélie had gone off so as not to cause her old man any more annoyance; and he, jolly, and without anger, continued his chaff. During this time, Monsieur Gourd protected Monsieur Vabre’s retreat, permitting himself to make a few remarks out loud. What a dirty set the lower classes were! One workman in a house was sufficient to pollute it.

Octave closed the window. But, just as he was returning to Marie, an individual who was lightly gliding along the passage, knocked up against him.

“What! it’s you again!” said he recognising Trublot.

The latter remained a second taken aback. Then, he wished to explain his presence.

“Yes, it is I. I dined at the Josserands’, and I’m going—”

Octave felt disgusted.

“What, with that slut Adèle? You declared it was not so.”

Then, Trublot assumed all his swagger, saying with an air of intense satisfaction:

“I assure you, my dear fellow, it’s awfully fine. She has such a skin, you’ve no idea what a skin!”

Then he railed against the workman, who had almost been the cause of his being caught on the servants’ staircase, and all his dirty fuss about women. He had been obliged to come round by the grand staircase. And, as he made off, he added:

“Remember, it is next Thursday that I am going to take you to see Duveyrier’s mistress. We will dine together.”

The house resumed it’s peacefulness, lapsing into that religious silence which seemed to issue from its chaste alcoves. Octave had rejoined Marie in the inner chamber at the side of the conjugal couch, where she was arranging the pillows. Upstairs, the chair being littered with the washhand basin and an old pair of shoes, Trublot sat down on Adèle’s narrow bed, and waited in his dress clothes and his white tie. When he recognised Julie’s step as she came up

to bed, he held his breath, having a constant dread of women's quarrels. At length Adèle appeared. She was in a temper, and went for him at once.

"I say, you! you might treat me a bit better, when I wait at table!"

"How, treat you better?"

"Why of course you don't even look at me, you never say if you please, when you ask for bread. For instance, this evening when I handed round the veal, you had a way of disowning me. I've had enough of it, look you! All the house badgers me with its nonsense. It's too much, if you're going to join the others!"

Whilst this was taking place, the workman in the next room, not yet sobered, talked to himself in so loud a voice that every one on that landing could hear him.

"Well! it's funny all the same, that a fellow can't sleep with his wife! No woman allowed in the house, you fussy old idiot! Just go now and poke your nose into all the rooms, and see what you'll see?"

CHAPTER VII.

For a fortnight past, with the view of getting uncle Bachelard to give Berthe a dowry, the Josserands had been inviting him to dinner almost every evening, in spite of his offensive habits.

When the marriage was announced to him, he had contented himself with giving his niece a gentle pat on the cheek, saying:

"What! you are going to get married! Ah! that's very nice, little girl!"

And he remained deaf to all allusions, exaggerating his air of a silly old boozer who got drunk on liquors, the moment money was mentioned before him.

Madame Josserand had the idea to invite him one evening together with Auguste, the bridegroom elect. Perhaps the sight of the young man would decide him. The step was heroical, for the family did not like exhibiting the uncle, always fearing that he would give people a bad impression of them. He had, however, behaved pretty well; his waistcoat alone had a big syrup stain, which it had obtained no doubt in some café. But when his sister questioned him, after Auguste had taken his departure, and asked him what he thought of the young fellow, he answered without involving himself:

"Charming, charming."

This would never do. It was a pressing matter. Therefore, Madame Josserand determined to plainly place the position of affairs before him.

“As we are by ourselves,” resumed she, “we may as well take advantage of it. Leave us, my darlings; we want to have some talk with your uncle. You, Berthe, just look after Saturnin, and see that he does not take the lock off the door again.”

Saturnin, ever since they had been busy about his sister’s marriage, hiding everything from him, had taken to wandering about the rooms, an anxious look in his eyes, and scenting that there was something up; and he imagined most diabolical things which gave the family awful frights.

“I have obtained every information,” said the mother, when she had shut herself in with the father and the uncle. “This is the position of the Vabres.”

And she went into long details of figures. Old Vabre had brought half a million with him from Versailles. If the house had cost him three hundred thousand francs, he had two hundred thousand left, which, during the twelve years that had past had been producing interest. Moreover, he received each year twenty-two thousand francs in rent; and, as he lived with the Duveyriers, scarcely spending anything at all, he must consequently be altogether worth five or six hundred thousand francs, besides the house. Thus, there were some very handsome expectations on that side.

“Has he no vices, then?” asked uncle Bachelard. “I thought he speculated at the Bourse.”

But Madame Josserand cried out. Such a quiet old gentleman, and occupied on a such a great task! That one, at least, had shown himself capable of putting a fortune by; and she smiled bitterly as she looked at her husband, who bowed his head.

As for Monsieur Vabre’s three children, Auguste, Clotilde and Théophile, they had each had a hundred thousand francs on their mother’s death. Théophile, after some ruinous enterprises, was living as best he could on the crumbs of this inheritance. Clotilde, with no other passion than her piano, had probably invested her share. And Auguste had purchased the business on the ground floor and gone in for the silk trade with his hundred thousand francs, which he had long kept in reserve.

“And the old fellow naturally gives nothing to his children when they marry,” observed the uncle.

Well! he did not much like giving, that was a fact which was unfortunately indisputable.

“Well!” declared Bachelard, “it is always hard on the parents. Dowries are

never really paid."

"Let us return to Auguste," continued Madame Josserand. "I have told you his expectations, and the only danger comes from the Duveyriers, whom Berthe will do well to watch very closely, if she enters the family. At the present moment, Auguste, after purchasing the business for sixty thousand francs, has started with the other forty thousand. Only, the sum is not sufficient; besides which, he is single, and requires a wife; that is why he wishes to marry. Berthe is pretty, he already sees her in his counting-house; and as for the dowry, fifty thousand francs are a respectable sum which has decided him."

Uncle Bachelard did not so much as blink his eyes. He ended by saying, in a tender-hearted way, that he had dreamed of something better. And he commenced to pick the future husband to pieces: a charming fellow, certainly; but too old, a great deal too old, thirty-three years and over; besides which, always ill, his face distorted by neuralgia; in short, a sorry object, not near lively enough for trade.

"Have you another?" asked Madame Josserand, whose patience was wearing out. "I searched all Paris before finding him."

However, she did not deceive herself much. She too picked him to pieces.

"Oh! he is not a phoenix, in fact I think him a bit of a fool. Besides which, I mistrust those men who have never had any youth and who do not risk a stride in life without thinking about it for years beforehand. On leaving college, where his headaches prevented him completing his studies, he remained for fifteen years a mere clerk before daring to touch his hundred thousand francs, the interest of which, it seems, his father was cheating him out of all the time. No, no, he is not up to much."

Monsieur Josserand, who until then had kept silent, ventured an observation.

"But, my dear, why insist so obstinately on this marriage? If the young man's health is so bad——"

"Oh! it is not bad health that need prevent it," interrupted Bachelard. "Berthe would find no difficulty in marrying again."

"However, if he is incapable," resumed the father, "if he is likely to make our daughter unhappy——"

"Unhappy!" cried Madame Josserand. "Say at once that I throw my child at the head of the first-comer! We are among ourselves, we discuss him: he is this, he is that, not young, not handsome, not intelligent. We just talk the matter over, do we not? it is but natural. Only, he is very well, we shall never

find a better; and, shall I tell you? it is a most unexpected match for Berthe. I was about to give up all hope, on my word of honor!" She rose to her feet. Monsieur Josserand, reduced to silence, pushed back his chair.

"I have only one fear," continued she, making a resolute stand before her brother, "and that is that he may break it off if he is not paid the dowry on the day the contract is to be signed. It is easy to understand, he is in want of money——"

But at this moment a hot breathing, which she heard behind her, caused her to turn round. Saturnin was there, passing his head round the partly opened door, his eyes glaring like a wolf's as he listened to what was being said. And it created quite a panic, for he had stolen a spit from the kitchen, to spit the geese, said he. Uncle Bachelard, feeling very uneasy at the turn the conversation was taking, availed himself of the general alarm.

"Don't disturb yourselves," cried he, from the ante-room. "I'm off, I've an appointment at midnight, with one of my customers, who's come specially from Brazil."

When they had succeeded in getting Saturnin to bed, Madame Josserand, exasperated, declared that it was impossible to keep him any longer. He would end by doing some one an injury, if he was not shut up in a madhouse. Life was unbearable with him always to be kept in hiding. His sisters would never get married, so long as he was there to disgust and frighten people.

"Wait a bit longer," murmured Monsieur Josserand, whose heart bled at the thought of this separation.

"No, no!" declared the mother, "I do not want him to spit me in the end! I had brought my brother to the point, I was about to get him to do something. Never mind! we will go with Berthe to-morrow to his own place, and we will see if he will have the cheek to escape from his promises. Besides, Berthe owes her godfather a visit. It is only proper."

On the morrow, all three, the mother, the father, and the daughter, paid an official visit to the uncle's warehouses, which occupied the basement and the ground floor of an enormous house in the Rue d'Enghien.

"Hallo! you here!" said he, greatly annoyed.

And he received them in a little closet, from which he watched his men through a window.

"I have brought Berthe to see you," explained Madame Josserand. "She knows what she owes you."

Then, when the young girl, after kissing her uncle, had, on a glance from her mother, returned to look at the goods in the courtyard, the latter resolutely

broached the subject.

“Listen, Narcisse; this is how we are situated. Counting on your kindness of heart and on your promises, I have engaged to give a dowry of fifty thousand francs. If I do not give it, the marriage will be broken off. It would be a disgrace, things having gone as far as they have. You cannot leave us in such an embarrassing position.”

But a vacant look had come into Bachelard’s eyes, and he stuttered, as though very drunk:

“Eh? what? you’ve promised. You should never promise; it’s a bad thing to promise.”

He pleaded poverty. For instance, he had bought a whole stock of horsehair, thinking that the price of horsehair would go up; but not at all; the price had fallen lower still, and he had been obliged to dispatch them at a loss. And he pounced on his books, opened his ledgers, and insisted on showing the invoices, it was ruination.

“Nonsense!” Monsieur Josserand ended by saying, completely out of patience. “I know your business; you make no end of money, and you would be rolling in wealth if you did not squander it in the way you do. I ask you for nothing myself. It was Eléonore who persisted in applying to you. But allow me to tell you, Bachelard, that you have been fooling us. Every Saturday for fifteen years past, when I come to look over your books for you, you are forever promising me——”

The uncle interrupted him, and violently slapped himself on the chest.

“I promise? impossible! No, no; let me alone, you’ll see. I don’t like being asked, it annoys me—it makes me ill. You’ll see one day.”

Madame Josserand herself could get nothing further out of him. He shook their hands, wiped away a tear, talked of his soul and of his love for the family, imploring them not to worry him any more, and swearing before heaven that they would never repent it. He knew his duty; he would perform it to the uttermost. Later on, Berthe would know how her uncle loved her.

“And what about the dotal insurance,” asked he, in his natural tone of voice, “the fifty thousand francs you had insured the little one for?”

Madame Josserand shrugged her shoulders.

“It has been dead and buried for fourteen years past. You have been told twenty times already that when the fourth premium fell due, we were unable to pay the two thousand francs.”

“That doesn’t matter,” murmured he, with a wink, “the thing is to talk of

this insurance to the family, and then get time for paying the dowry. One never pays a dowry."

Monsieur Josserand rose indignantly.

"What! that is all you can find to say?"

But the uncle mistook his meaning, and went on to show that it was quite a usual thing.

"Never, I tell you I One gives something on account, and then merely pays the interest. Look at Monsieur Vabre himself. Did our father ever pay you Eléonore's dowry? why, no, of course not. Every one sticks to his money; its only natural!"

"In short, you advise me to commit a most abominable action!" cried Monsieur Josserand. "I should lie; it would be a forgery to produce the policy of that insurance——"

Madame Josserand stopped him. The idea suggested by her brother had rendered her grave. She was surprised she had not thought of it herself.

"Dear me! how excited you become, my dear. Narcisse has not told you to forge anything."

"Of course not," murmured the uncle. "There is no occasion to show any documents."

"It is simply a question of gaining time," continued she. "Promise the dowry, we shall always manage to give it later on."

Then the worthy man's conscience spoke out. No! he refused; he would not again venture on such a precipice. They were always taking advantage of his complacency, to get him to agree little by little to things which afterward made him ill, so deeply did they wound his feelings. As he had no dowry to give, he could not promise one.

Bachelard was strumming on the little window with his fingers, and whistling a march, as though to show his great contempt for such scruples. Madame Josserand had listened to her husband, her face all pale with an anger which had been slowly rousing, and which suddenly exploded.

"Well! sir, as this is how you look at it, this marriage shall take place. It was my daughter's last chance. I will cut my hand off sooner than she will lose it. So much the worse for the others! One becomes capable of anything at last."

"So, madame, you would commit murder to get your daughter married?"

She rose to her full height.

“Yes!” said she furiously.

Then she smiled. The uncle had to quell the storm. What was the use of wrangling? It was far better to agree together. And, still trembling from the quarrel, bewildered and worn out, Monsieur Josserand ended by promising to talk the matter over with Duveyrier, on whom everything depended, according to Madame Josserand. Only to get hold of the counselor when he was in good humor, the uncle offered to put his brother-in-law in the way of meeting him at a house where he could refuse nothing.

“It is merely to be an interview,” declared Monsieur Josserand, still struggling. “I swear that I will not enter into any engagements.”

“Of course, of course,” said Bachelard. “Eléonore does not wish you to do anything dishonorable.”

Berthe just then returned. She had seen some boxes of preserved fruits, and, after some lively caresses, she tried to get one given her. But the uncle’s speech again became thick; impossible, they were counted, and had to leave that very evening for Saint-Petersburg. He slowly got them in the direction of the street, whilst his sister lingered before the activity of the vast warehouses, full to the rafters with every imaginable commodity, suffering from the sight of that fortune made by a man without any principles, and bitterly comparing it with her husband’s incapable honesty.

“Well! to-morrow night, then, toward nine o’clock, at the Café de Mulhouse,” said Bachelard outside, as he shook Monsieur Josserand’s hand.

It so happened that, on the morrow, Octave and Trublot, who had dined together before going to see Clarisse, Duveyrier’s mistress, entered the Café de Mulhouse, so as not to call too early, although she lived in the Rue de la Cerisaie, which was some distance off. It was scarcely eight o’clock. As they entered, the sound of a violent quarrel attracted them to a rather out-of-the-way room at the end. And there they beheld Bachelard already drunk, enormous in size, and his cheeks flaring red, having an altercation with a little gentleman, pale and quarrelsome.

“You have again spat in my beer!” roared he in his voice of thunder. “I’ll not stand it, sir!”

“Go to blazes, do you hear? or I’ll give you a thrashing!” said the little man, standing on the tips of his toes.

Then Bachelard raised his voice very provokingly, without drawing back an inch.

“If you think proper, sir! As you please!”

And the other having with a blow knocked in his hat, which he always

wore swaggeringly on the side of his head, even in the cafés, he repeated more energetically still:

“As you please, sir! If you think proper!”

Then, after picking up his hat, he sat himself down with a superb air, and called to the waiter:

“Alfred, change my beer!”

Octave and Trublot, greatly astonished, had caught sight of Gueulin seated at the uncle’s table, his back against the wall, smoking with a tranquillity amounting to indifference. As they questioned him on the cause of the quarrel.

“I don’t know,” replied he, watching the smoke ascend from his cigar. “Always a lot of rot! Oh! a mania for getting his head punched! He never retreats.”

Bachelard shook hands with the new-comers. He adored young people. When he heard that that they were going to call on Clarisse, he was delighted, for he himself was going there with Gueulin; only he had to wait for his brother-in-law, Josserand, whom he had an appointment with. And he filled the little room with the sounds of his voice, covering the table with every drink imaginable for the benefit of his young friends, with the insane prodigality of a man who does not care what he spends when out on pleasure. Illformed, with his teeth too new and his nose in a blaze beneath his short, snow-white hair, he talked familiarly to the waiters and thoroughly tired them out, and made himself unbearable to his neighbors to such a point that the landlord came twice to beg him to leave, if he could not keep quiet. The night before, he had been turned out of the Café de Madrid.

But a girl having put in an appearance, and then gone away, after walking round the room with a wearied air, Octave began to talk of women. This set Bachelard off again. Women had cost him too much money; he flattered himself that he had had the best in Paris. In his business, one never bargained about such things; just to show that one had something to fall back upon. Now he was giving all that up, he wished to be loved. And, in presence of this bawler chucking bank notes about, Octave thought with surprise of the uncle who exaggerated his stuttering drunkenness to escape the family extortions.

“Don’t boast, uncle,” said Gueulin. “One can always have more women than one wants.”

“Then, you silly fool, why do you never have any?” asked Bachelard.

Gueulin contemptuously shrugged his shoulders.

“Why? Listen! Only yesterday I dined with a friend and his mistress. The mistress at once began to kick me under the table. It was an opportunity,

wasn’t it? Well! when she asked me to see her home, I made off, and I haven’t been near her since. Oh! I don’t deny that, for the time being, it might have been very agreeable. But afterward, afterward, uncle! Perhaps one of those women a fellow can never get rid of. I’m not such a fool!”

Trublot nodded his head approvingly, for he also had renounced women of society, through a dread of the troublesome morrows. And Gueulin, coming out of his shell, continued to give examples. One day in the train, a superb brunette, whom he did not know, had fallen asleep on his shoulder; but he had thought twice, what would he have done with her on arriving at the station? Another day, after a wedding, he had found a neighbor’s wife in his room, eh? that was rather cool; and he would have made a fool of himself had it not been for the idea that afterward she would have wanted him to keep her in boots.

“Opportunities, uncle!” said he, coming to an end, “no one has such opportunities as I! But I keep myself in check. Every one, moreover, does the same; one is afraid of what may follow. Were it not for that, it would, of course, be very pleasant! Good morning! good evening! one would see nothing else in the streets.”

Bachelard, becoming wrapped in thought, was no longer listening to him. His bluster had calmed down, his eyes were wet.

“If you are very good,” said he suddenly, “I will show you something.”

And, after paying, he led them out. Octave reminded him of old Josserand. That did not matter, they would come back for him.

Then, after leaving the room, the uncle, casting a furious glance around, stole the sugar left by a customer on a neighboring table.

“Follow me,” said he, when he was outside. “It’s close by.”

He walked along, grave and thoughtful, without uttering a word. He drew up before a door in the Rue Saint-Mare. The three young men were about to follow him, when he appeared to give way to a sudden hesitation.

“No, let us go off, I won’t.”

But they cried out at this. Was he trying to make fools of them?

“Well! Gueulin mustn’t come up, nor you either, Monsieur Trublot. You’re not nice enough, you respect nothing, you’d joke. Come, Monsieur Octave, you’re a serious sort of fellow.”

He made Octave walk up before him, whilst the other two laughed, and called to him from the pavement to give their compliments to the ladies. On reaching the fourth floor, he knocked, and an old woman opened the door.

“What! it’s you, Monsieur Narcisse? Fifi did not expect you this evening,”

said she, with a smile.

She was fat, with the calm, white face of a nun. In the narrow dining-room into which she ushered them, a tall, fair young girl, pretty and simple looking, was embroidering an altar cloth.

“Good day, uncle,” said she, rising to offer her forehead to Bachelard’s thick, trembling lips.

When the latter had introduced Monsieur Octave Mouret, a distinguished young man whom he counted amongst his friends, the two women curtesied in an old-fashioned way, and then they all seated themselves round the table, lighted by a petroleum lamp. It was like a quiet country home, two regulated existences, out of sight of all, and living upon next to nothing. As the room overlooked an inner courtyard, one could not even hear the sound of the passing vehicles.

Whilst Bachelard paternally questioned the child on her feelings and her occupations since the night before, the aunt, Mademoiselle Menu, at once began to tell Octave their history, with the familiarity of a worthy woman who thinks she has nothing to hide.

“Yes, sir, I came from Villeneuve, near Lille. I am well known to Messieurs Mardienne Frères, in the Rue Saint-Sulpice, where I worked as an embroiderer for thirty years. Then, a cousin having left me a house in our part of the country, I was lucky enough to let it as a life interest at a thousand francs a year, sir, to people who thought they would bury me on the morrow, and who are nicely punished for their wicked idea, for I am still alive, in spite of my seventy-five years.”

She laughed, displaying teeth as white as a young girl’s.

“I was doing nothing, my eyes being quite worn put,” continued she, “when my niece, Fanny, came to me. Her father, Captain Menu, had died without leaving a sou, and no other relation, sir. So, I at once took the child away from her school, and made an embroiderer out of her—a very unprofitable craft; but what could be done? whether that, or something else, women always have to starve. Fortunately, she met Monsieur Narcisse. Now, I can die happy.”

And, her hands clasped on her stomach, in her inaction of an old workwoman who has sworn never again to touch a needle, she looked tenderly at Bachelard and Fifi with tearful eyes. The old man was just then saying to the child:

“Really, you thought of me! And what did you think?”

Fifi raised her limpid eyes, without ceasing to draw her golden thread.

“Why, that you were a good friend, and that I loved you very much.”

She had scarcely looked at Octave, as though indifferent to the youth of so handsome a fellow. Yet he smiled on her, surprised, and moved by her gracefulness, not knowing what to think; whilst the aunt, who had grown old in a celibacy and a chastity which had cost her nothing, continued, lowering her voice:

“I might have married her, might I not? A workman would have beaten her, a clerk would have given her no end of children. It is better far that she should behave well with Monsieur Narcisse, who looks a very worthy man.”

And, raising her voice:

“Ah! Monsieur Narcisse, it will not have been my fault if she does not please you. I am always telling her: do all you can to please him, show yourself grateful. It is but natural, I am so thankful to know that she is at last provided for. It is so difficult to get a young girl settled in life, when one has no friends!”

Then Octave abandoned himself to the happy simplicity of this home. In the still atmosphere of the room floated an odor of fruit. Fifi’s needle, as it pierced the silk, alone made a slight monotonous noise, like the ticking of a little clock, which might have regulated the placidity of the uncle’s amours. Moreover, the old maid was honesty itself; she lived on the thousand francs of her income, never touching Fifi’s money, which the latter spent as she chose. Her scruples yielded only to white wine and chestnuts, which her niece occasionally treated her to, after opening the money box in which she collected four sou pieces, given as medals by her good friend.

“My little duck,” at length said Bachelard, rising, “we have business to attend to. Good-bye till to-morrow. Now, mind you are very good.”

He kissed her on the forehead. Then, after looking at her with emotion, he said to Octave:

“You may kiss her too, she is a mere child.”

The young man pressed his lips to her fair skin. She smiled, she was very modest; however, it was merely like a family gathering, he had never seen such sober-minded people. The uncle was going off, when he re-entered the room, exclaiming:

“I was forgetting, I’ve a little present.”

And, turning out his pocket, he gave Fifi the sugar which he had just stolen at the café. She thanked him very heartily, and, as she crunched up a piece, she became quite red with pleasure. Then, becoming bolder, she asked:

“Do you not happen to have some four sou pieces?”

Bachelard searched his pockets without result. Octave had one, which the young girl accepted as a memorial. She did not accompany them to the door, no doubt out of propriety; and they heard her drawing her needle, having at once resumed her altar cloth, whilst Mademoiselle Menu saw them to the landing, with her good old woman’s amiability.

“Eh? it’s worth seeing,” said uncle Bachelard, stopping on the stairs. “You know, it doesn’t cost me five louis a month. I’ve had enough of the hussies who almost devoured me. On my word! what I required was a heart.”

But, as Octave laughed, he became mistrustful.

“You’re a decent fellow; you won’t take advantage of what I have shown you. Not a word to Gueulin, you swear it on your honor? I am waiting till he is worthy of her to show her to him. An angel, my dear fellow! No matter what is said, virtue is good: it refreshes one. I have always gone in for the ideal.”

His old drunkard’s voice trembled; tears swelled his heavy eyelids. Down below, Trublot chaffed, pretending to take the number of the house, whilst Gueulin shrugged his shoulders, asking Octave, who was astounded, what he thought of the little thing. Whenever the uncle’s feelings had been softened by a booze, he could not resist taking people to see these ladies, divided between the vanity of showing his treasure and the fear of having it stolen from him; then, on the morrow, he forgot all about it, and returned to the Rue-Saint-Marc with an air of mystery.

“Everyone knows Fifi,” said Gueulin, quietly.

Meanwhile, Bachelard was looking out for a cab, when Octave exclaimed:

“And Monsieur Josserand, who is waiting at the café?”

The others had forgotten him entirely. Monsieur Josserand, very annoyed at wasting his evening, was impatiently waiting at the entrance, for he never took anything but of doors. At length they started for the Rue de la Cerisaie. But they had to take two cabs; the commission agent and the cashier in the one, and the three young men in the other.

Gueulin, his voice drowned by the jingling noise of the old vehicle, at first talked of the insurance company where he was employed. Insurance companies and stockbrokers were equally unpleasant, affirmed Trublot. Then the conversation turned to Duveyrier. Was it not unfortunate that a rich man, a magistrate, should let himself be fooled by women in that way? He always wanted them in out-of-the-way neighborhoods, right at the end of the omnibus routes; modest little ladies in their own apartments, playing the parts of widows; unknown milliners, having shops and no customers; girls picked out

of the gutter, clothed and shut up, as though in a convent, whom he would go to see regularly once a week, like a clerk trudging to his office.

Trublot, however, found excuses for him: to begin with, it was the fault of his constitution; then, it was impossible to put up with a confounded wife like his. On the very first night, so it was said, she could not bear him, affecting to be disgusted at his red blotches, so that she willingly allowed him to have mistresses, whose complacencies relieved her of him, though at times she accepted the abominable burden, with the resignation of a virtuous woman who makes a point of accomplishing all her duties.

“Then, she is virtuous, is she?” asked Octave, interested.

“Virtuous? Oh! yes, my dear fellow! Every good quality; pretty, serious, well brought up, learned, full of taste, chaste, and unbearable!”

A block of vehicles at the bottom of the Rue Montmartre stopped the cab. The young men, who had let down the windows, could hear Bachelard’s voice, furiously abusing the coachman. Then, when the cab moved on again, Gueulin gave some information about Clarisse. Her name was Clarisse Bocquet, and she was the daughter of a former toy merchant in a small way, who now attended all the fairs with his wife and quite a troop of dirty children. Duveyrier had come across her one night when it was thawing, just as her lover had chucked her out. No doubt, this strapping wench answered to an ideal long sought after; for as early as the morrow he was hooked; he wept as he kissed her eyelids, all shaken by his need to cultivate the little blue flower of romance in his huge masculine appetites. Clarisse had consented to live in the Rue de la Cerisaie, so as not to expose him; but she led him a fine dance—had made him buy her twenty-five thousand francs’ worth of furniture, and was devouring him heartily, in company with some actors of the Montmartre Theater.

“I don’t care a hang!” said Trublot, “so long as one amuses oneself at her place. Anyhow, she doesn’t make you sing, and she isn’t forever strumming away on a piano like the other. Oh! that piano! Listen, when one is deafened at home, when one has had the misfortune to marry a mechanical piano which frightens everybody away, one would be precious stupid not to arrange a pleasant little nest elsewhere, where one could receive one’s friends in their slippers.”

“Last Sunday,” related Gueulin, “Clarisse wanted me to lunch alone with her. I declined. After those sort of lunches, one always does something foolish; and I was afraid of seeing her take up her quarters with me the day she left Duveyrier for good. You know, she detests him. Oh! her disgust almost makes her ill. Well, the girl doesn’t care much for pimples either. But she hasn’t the resource of sending him elsewhere like his wife has; otherwise, if she could

pass him over to her maid, I assure you she'd get rid of the job precious quick."

The cab stopped. They alighted before a dark and silent house in the Rue de la Cerisaie. But they had to wait for the other cab fully ten minutes, Bachelard having taken his driver with him to drink a grog after the quarrel in the Rue Montmartre. On the staircase, as severe-looking as those of the middle classes, Monsieur Josserand again asked some questions respecting Duveyrier's lady friend, but the uncle merely answered:

"A woman of the world, a very decent girl. She won't eat you."

It was a little maid, with a rosy complexion, who opened the door to them. She took the gentlemen's coats with familiar and and tender smiles. For a moment, Trublot kept her in a corner of the ante-room, whispering things in her ear which almost made her choke, as though being tickled. But Bachelard had pushed open the drawing-room door, and he at once introduced Monsieur Josserand. The latter stood for a moment embarrassed, finding Clarisse ugly, and not understanding how the counselor could prefer this sort of creature—black and skinny, and with a head of hair like a poodle—to his wife, one of the most beautiful women of society. Clarisse, however, was charming. She had preserved the Parisian cackle, a superficial and borrowed wit, an itch of drollery caught by rubbing up against men, but was able to put on a grand lady sort of air when she chose.

"Sir, I am charmed. All Alphonse's friends are mine. Now you are one of us, the house is yours."

Duveyrier, warned by a note from Bachelard, also greeted Monsieur Josserand very amiably. Octave was surprised at the counselor's youthful appearance. He was no longer the severe and ill-at-ease individual, who never seemed to be in his own home in the drawing-room of the Rue de Choiseul. The deep red blotches on his face were turning to a rosy hue, his oblique eyes shone with a childish delight, whilst Clarisse related in the midst of a group how he sometimes hastened to come and see her during a short adjournment of the court—just time to jump into a cab, to kiss her, and start back again. Then he complained of being overworked. Four sittings a week, from eleven to five; always the same skein of bickerings to unravel, it ended by destroying all feeling in one's heart.

"It is true," said he, laughing, "one requires a few roses amongst all that. I feel better afterward."

However, he did not wear his bit of red ribbon, but always took it off when visiting his mistress; a last scruple, a delicate distinction, which his sense of decency obstinately persisted in. Clarisse, without wishing to say so, felt very

much hurt at it.

Octave, who had at once shook hands with the young woman like a comrade, listened and looked about him. Clarisse never received other women, out of decency, she said. When her acquaintances complained that her drawing-room was in want of a few ladies, she would answer with a laugh:

“Well! and I—am I not enough?”

She had arranged a decent home for Alphonse, very middle-class in the main, having a mania for what was proper all through the ups and downs of her existence. When she received she would not be addressed familiarly.

The little maid handed round some glasses of punch, with her agreeable air. Octave took one, and, leaning toward his friend, whispered in his ear:

“The servant is better than the mistress.”

“Why, of course! always!” said Trublot, with a shrug of the shoulders, full of a disdainful conviction.

Clarisse came and talked with them for a moment. She multiplied herself, going from one to another, casting a word here, a laugh or gesture there. As each new-comer lighted a cigar the drawing-room was soon full of smoke.

“Oh! the horrid men!” exclaimed she, prettily, as she went and opened a window.

Without losing any time, Bachelard made Monsieur Josserand comfortable in the recess of this window, to enable him to breathe, said he. Then, thanks to a masterly maneuver, he brought Duvey-rier to an anchor there also, and quickly broached the affair. So the two families were about to be united by a close tie; he felt highly honored. Then he inquired what day the marriage contract was going to be signed, and that led him up to the matter in hand.

“We intended calling on you to-morrow, Josserand and I, to settle everything, for we are aware that Monsieur Auguste would do nothing without you. It is with respect to the payment of the dowry; and, really, as we are so comfortable here——”

Monsieur Josserand, again suffering the greatest anguish, looked out into the gloomy depths of the Rue de la Cerisaie, with its deserted pavements, and its dark façades. He regretted having come. They were again going to take advantage of his weakness and engage him in some disgraceful affair, which would cause him no end of suffering afterward. A feeling of revolt made him interrupt his brother-in-law.

“Another time; this is not a fitting place, really.”

“But why, pray?” exclaimed Duveyrier, very graciously. “We are better

here than anywhere else. You were saying, sir?”

“We give Berthe fifty thousand francs,” continued the uncle. “Only, these fifty thousand francs are represented by a dotal insurance at twenty years’ date, which Josserand took out for his daughter when she was four years old. She will, therefore, only receive the money in three years’ time——”

“Allow me!” again interrupted the cashier, with a scared look.

“No, let me finish; Monsieur Duveyrier understands perfectly. We do not wish the young couple to wait three years for money they may need at once, and we engage ourselves to pay the dowry in installments of ten thousand francs every six months, on the understanding that we repay ourselves later on with the insurance money.”

A pause ensued. Monsieur Josserand, feeling frozen and choking, again looked into the dark street.

“All that seems to me very reasonable,” said he, at length. “It is for us to thank you. It is very seldom that a dowry is paid at once in full.”

“Never, sir!” affirmed the uncle, energetically. “Such a thing is never done.”

And the three men shook hands as they arranged to meet on the Thursday at the notary’s. When Monsieur Josserand came back into the light, he was so pale that he was asked if he was unwell. As a matter of fact he did not feel very well, and he withdrew, without being willing to wait for his brother-in-law, who had just gone into the dining-room where the classic tea was represented by champagne.

Gueulin, stretched on a sofa near the window, murmured:

“That scoundrel of an uncle!”

He had overheard some words about the insurance, and he chuckled as he confided the truth of the matter to Octave and Trublot. It had been done at his office; there was not a sou to receive, the Vabres were being taken in. Then, as the two others laughed at this good joke, holding their sides meanwhile, he added, with comical earnestness.

“I want a hundred francs. If the uncle doesn’t give me a hundred francs, I’ll split.”

The voices were becoming louder, the champagne was upsetting the good behavior established by Clarisse. In her drawing-room the conclusion of all the parties was invariably rather lively. She herself would make a mistake sometimes. Trublot drew Octave’s attention to her as she stood behind a door with her arms round the neck of a fellow with the build of a peasant, a stone

carver just arrived from the South, and whom his native town wished to make an artist of. But, Duveyrier having pushed the door, she quickly removed her arms, and recommended the young man to him: Monsieur Payan, a sculptor with a very graceful talent; and Duveyrier, delighted, promised to obtain some work for him.

“Work, work,” repeated Gueulin, in a low voice; “he has as much here as he can want, the big ninny!”

Toward two o’clock, when the three young men and the uncle left the Rue de la Cerisaie, the latter was completely drunk.

“Hang it all, uncle! keep yourself up! you’re breaking our arms!”

He, with his throat full of sobs, had become very tender hearted and very moral.

“Go away, Gueulin,” stuttered he; “go away! I won’t have you see your uncle in such a state. No, my boy, it’s not right; go away!”

And as his nephew called him an old rogue:

“Rogue! that’s nothing. One must make oneself respected. I esteem women —always decent women; and when there’s no feeling it disgusts me. Go away, Gueulin, you’re making your uncle blush. These gentlemen are sufficient.”

“Then,” declared Gueulin, “you must give me a hundred francs. Really, I want them for my rent. They’re going to turn me out.”

At this unexpected demand, Bachelard’s intoxication increased to such an extent that he had to be propped up against the shutters of a warehouse. He stuttered:

“Eh! what! a hundred francs! Don’t search me. I’ve nothing but coppers. You want ’em to squander in bad places! No, I’ll never encourage you in your vices. I know my duty; your mother confided you to my care on her death-bed. You know, I’ll call out if I am searched.”

He continued, his indignation increasing against the dissolute life led by youth, and returning to the necessity there was for the display of virtue.

“I say,” Gueulin ended by saying, “I’ve not got to the point of taking families in. Ah! you know what I mean! If I were to talk, you’d soon give me my hundred francs!”

But the uncle at once became deaf to everything. He went grunting and stumbling along. In the narrow street where they then were, behind the church of Saint-Gervaise, a white lantern alone burned with the palish glimmer of a night-light, displaying a gigantic number painted on its roughened glass. A stifled trepidation issued from the house, whilst the closed shutters emitted a

tew narrow rays of light.

“I’ve had enough of it,” declared Gueulin, abruptly. “Excuse me, uncle, I forgot my umbrella up there.”

And he entered the house. Bachelard was indignant and full of disgust. He demanded at least a little respect for women. With such morals France was done for. On the Place de l’Hôtel-de-Ville, Octave and Trublot at length found a cab, inside which they shoved him like some bundle.

“Rue d’Enghien,” said they to the driver. “You must pay yourself. Search him.”

The marriage contract was signed on the Thursday before Maitre Renandin, notary in the Rue de Grammont. At the moment of starting, there had been another awful row at the Josserands’, the father having, in a supreme revolt, made the mother responsible for the lie they had forced him to countenance; and they had once more cast their families in each other’s teeth. How did they expect him to earn another ten thousand francs every six months? The obligation was driving him mad. Uncle Bachelard, who was there, kept placing his hand on his heart, full of fresh promises, now that he had so managed that he would not have to part with a sou, and overflowing with affection, and swearing that he would never leave his little Berthe in an awkward position. But the father, in his exasperation, had merely shrugged his shoulders, asking Bachelard if he really took him for a fool.

On the evening of that day, a cab came to fetch Saturnin away. His mother had declared that it was too dangerous for him to be at the ceremony; one could not cast loose a madman who talked of spitting people in the midst of a wedding party; and, Monsieur Josserand, broken-hearted, had been obliged to apply for the admission of the poor fellow into the Asile des Moulineaux, kept by Doctor Chassagne. The cab was brought under the porch at twilight. Saturnin came down holding Berthe’s hand, and thinking he was going with her into the country. But when he was inside the cab, he struggled furiously, breaking the windows and thrusting his bloody fists through them. And Monsieur Josserand returned up-stairs weeping, all upset by this departure in the dark, his ears ringing with the wretched creature’s yells, mingled with the cracking of the whip and the gallop of the horse.

CHAPTER VIII.

The marriage before the mayor had taken place on the Thursday. On the Saturday morning, as early as a quarter past ten, some ladies were already

waiting in the Josserands' drawing-room, the religious ceremony being fixed for eleven o'clock, at Saint-Roch. There were Madame Juzeur, always in black silk; Madame Dambreville, tightly laced in a costume of the color of dead leaves; and Madame Duveyrier, dressed very simply in pale blue. All three were conversing in low tones amongst the scattered chairs; whilst Madame Josserand was finishing dressing Berthe in the adjoining room, assisted by the servant and the two bridesmaids, Hortense and little Campardou.

"Oh! it is not that," murmured Madame Duveyrier; "the family is honorable. But, I admit, I rather dreaded on my brother Auguste's account the mother's domineering spirit. One cannot be too careful, can one?"

"No doubt," said Madame Juzeur; "one not only marries the daughter, one often marries the mother as well, and it is very unpleasant when the latter interferes in the home."

This time Angèle and Hortense opened the folding doors wide so that the bride should not catch her dress in anything; and Berthe appeared in a white silk dress, all gay with white flowers, with a white wreath, a white bouquet, and a white garland, which crossed the skirt, and was lost in the train in a shower of little white buds. She looked charming amidst all this whiteness, with her fresh complexion, her golden hair, her laughing eyes, and her candid mouth of an already enlightened girl.

"Oh! delicious!" exclaimed the ladies.

They all embraced her with an air of ecstasy. The Josserands, at their wits' end, not knowing where to obtain the two thousand francs which the wedding would cost them, five hundred francs for dress, and fifteen hundred francs for their share of the dinner and ball, had been obliged to send Berthe to Doctor Chassagne's to see Saturnin, to whom an aunt had just left three thousand francs; and Berthe, having obtained permission to take her brother out for a drive, by way of amusing him, had smothered him with caresses in the cab, and had then gone with him for a minute to the notary, who was unaware of the poor creature's condition, and who had everything ready for his signature. The silk dress and the abundance of flowers surprised the ladies, who were reckoning up the cost whilst giving vent to their admiration.

"Perfect! in most exquisite taste!"

Madame Josserand appeared, beaming, in a mauve dress of an unpleasant hue, which made her look taller and rounder than ever, with the majesty of a tower. She fumed about Monsieur Josserand, called to Hortense to find her shawl, and vehemently forbade Berthe to sit down.

"Take care, you will crush your flowers!"

“Do not worry yourself,” said Clothilde, in her calm voice. “We have plenty of time. Auguste is coming for us.”

They were all waiting in the drawing-room, when Théophile abruptly burst in, his dress-coat askew, his white cravat tied like a piece of cord, and without his hat. His face, with its few hairs and bad teeth, was livid; his limbs, like an ailing child’s, were trembling with fury.

“What is the matter with you?” asked his sister, in amazement.

“The matter is—the matter is——”

But a fit of coughing interrupted him, and he stood there for a minute, choking, spitting in his handkerchief, and enraged at being unable to give vent to his anger. Valérie looked at him, confused, and warned by a sort of instinct. At length, he shook his fist at her, without even noticing the bride and the other ladies around him.

“Yes, whilst looking everywhere for my necktie, I found a letter in front of the wardrobe.”

He crumpled a piece of paper between his febrile fingers. His wife had turned pale. She realized the situation; and, to avoid the scandal of a public explanation, she passed into the room that Berthe had just left.

“Ah! well,” said she, simply, “I prefer to leave if he is going mad.”

“Let me alone!” cried Théophile to Madame Duveyrier, who was trying to quiet him. “I intend to confound her. This time I have proof, and there is no doubt, oh, no! It shall not pass off like that, for I know him——”

His sister had seized him by the arm, and squeezing it, shook him authoritatively.

“Hold your tongue! don’t you see where you are? This is not the proper time, understand!”

But he started off again:

“It is the proper time! I don’t care a hang for the others. So much the worse that it happens to-day! It will serve as a lesson to every one.”

However, he lowered his voice, his strength failing him, he had dropped onto a chair, ready to burst into tears. An uncomfortable feeling had invaded the drawing-room. Madame Dambreville and Madame Juzeur had politely gone to the other end of the apartment, and pretended not to understand. Madame Josserand, greatly annoyed at an adventure, the scandal of which would cast a gloom over the wedding, had passed into the bed-room to cheer up Valérie. As for Berthe, who was studying her wreath before the looking-glass, she had not heard anything. Therefore, she questioned Hortense in a low

voice. They whispered together; the latter indicated Théophile with a glance, and added some explanations, while pretending to arrange the fall of the veil.

“Ah!” simply said the bride, with a chaste and amused look, her eyes fixed on the husband, without the least sign of confusion in her halo of white flowers.

Clotilde softly asked her brother for particulars. Madame Josserand reappeared, exchanged a few words with her, and then returned to the adjoining room. It was an exchange of diplomatic notes. The husband accused Octave, that counter-jumper, whom he would chastise in church, if he dared to come there. He swore he had seen him the previous day with his wife on the steps of Saint-Roch; he had had a doubt before, but now he was sure of it—everything tallied, the height, the walk. Yes, madame invented luncheons with lady friends, or else she went inside Saint-Roch with Camille, through the same door as every one, as though to say her prayers; then leaving the child with the woman who let out the chairs, she would make off with her gentleman by the old way, a dirty passage, where no one would have gone to look for her. However, Valérie had smiled on hearing Octave’s name mentioned; never with that one, she pledged her oath to Madame Josserand, with nobody at all for the matter of that, she added, but less with him than with any one else; and, this time, with truth on her side, she, in her turn, talked of confounding her husband, by proving to him that the note was no more in Octave’s handwriting than that Octave was the gentleman of Saint-Roch. Madame Josserand listened to her, studying her with her experienced glance, and solely preoccupied with finding some means of helping her to deceive Théophile. And she gave her the very best advice.

“Leave all to me, don’t move in the matter. As he chooses, it shall he Monsieur Mouret, well! it shall be Monsieur Mouret. There is no harm in being seen on the steps of a church with Monsieur Mouret, is there? The letter alone is compromising. You will triumph when our young friend shows him a couple of lines of his own handwriting. Above all, say just the same as I say. You understand, I don’t intend to let him spoil such a day as this.”

When she returned into the room with Valérie, who was greatly affected, Théophile, on his side, was saying to his sister in a choking voice:

“I will do so for you, I promise not to disfigure her here, as you assure me it would scarcely be proper, on account of this wedding. But I cannot be answerable for what may take place at church. If the counter-jumper comes and beards me there, in the midst of my own family, I will exterminate them one after the other.”

Auguste, looking very correct in his black dress-coat, his left eye shrunk up, suffering from a headache which he had been dreading for three days past,

arrived at this moment, accompanied by his father and his brother-in-law, both looking very solemn, to fetch his bride. There was a little jostling, for they had ended by being late.

At Saint-Roch the big double doors were opened wide. A red carpet covered the steps down to the pavement. It was raining; the May morning was very cold.

“Thirteen steps,” said Madame Juzeur in a low voice to Valérie, when they had passed through the doorway. “It is not a good sign.”

“Are you sure you have the ring?” inquired Madame Josserand of Auguste, who was seating himself with Berthe on the arm-chairs placed before the altar.

He had a fright, fancying he had forgotten it, then felt it in his waistcoat pocket. She had, however, not waited for his answer. Ever since she entered, she had been standing on tip-toe, searching the company with her glance. There were Trublot and Gueulin, both best men; Uncle Bachelard and Campardon, the bride’s witnesses; Duveyrier and Doctor Juillerat, the bridegroom’s witnesses, and all the crowd of acquaintances of whom she was proud. But she had just caught sight of Octave, who was assiduously opening a passage for Madame Hédouin, and she drew him behind a pillar, where she spoke to him in low and rapid tones. The young man, a look of bewilderment on his face, did not appear to understand. However, he bowed with an air of amiable obedience.

“It is settled,” whispered Madame Josserand in Valérie’s ear, returning and seating herself in one of the arm-chairs placed for the members of the family, behind those of Berthe and Auguste. Monsieur Josserand, the Vabres, and the Duveyriers were also there.

The organs were now giving forth scales of clear little notes, broken by big pants. There was quite a crush; the choir was filling up, and men remained standing in the aisles. The Abbé Mauduit had reserved to himself the joy of blessing the union of one of his dear penitents. When he appeared in his surplice, he exchanged a friendly smile with the congregation, every face there being familiar to him. Some voices commenced the Veni Creator, the organs resumed their song of triumph, and it was at this moment that Théophile discovered Octave, to the left of the chancel, standing before the chapel of Saint-Joseph.

His sister Clotilde tried to detain him.

“I cannot,” stammered he; “I will never submit to it.”

And he made Duveyrier follow him, to represent the family. The Veni Creator continued. A few persons looked round.

Théophile, who had talked of blows, was in such a state of agitation, when planting himself before Octave, that he was unable at first to say a word, vexed at being short, and raising himself up on tiptoe.

“Sir,” said he at length, “I saw you yesterday with my wife——”

But the Veni Creator was just coming to an end, and he was quite scared on hearing the sound of his own voice. Moreover, Duveyrier, very much annoyed by the incident, tried to make him understand that the time was badly chosen for an explanation. The ceremony had now begun before the altar. After addressing an affecting exhortation to the bride and bridegroom, the priest took the wedding-ring to bless it.

“Benedic, Domine Deus noster, annulum nuptialem hunc, quem nos in tuo nomine benedieimus——”

Then Théophile plucked up courage to repeat his words in a low voice:

“Sir, you were in this church yesterday with my wife.”

Octave, still bewildered by what Madame Josserand had said to him, and without having thoroughly understood her, related the little story, however, in an easy sort of way.

“Yes, I did indeed meet Madame Vabre, and we went and looked at the repairing of the Calvary which my friend Campardon is directing.”

“You admit it,” stammered the husband, again overcome with fury, “you admit it——”

Duveyrier was obliged to slap him on the shoulder to calm him. The shrill voice of one of the boy choristers was responding:

“Amen.”

“And you no doubt recognize this letter,” continued Théophile, offering a piece of paper to Octave.

“Come, not here!” said the counselor, thoroughly scandalized. “You are going out of your mind, my dear fellow.”

Octave unfolded the letter. The emotion had increased amongst the congregation. There were whisperings, and nudgings of elbows, and glancing over the tops of prayer-books; no one was now paying the least attention to the ceremony. The bride and bridegroom alone remained grave and stiff before the priest. Then Berthe, turning her head, caught sight of Théophile getting whiter and whiter as he addressed Octave; and, from that moment, her mind was absent—she kept casting bright side glances in the direction of the chapel of Saint-Joseph.

Meanwhile, the young man was reading in a low voice:

“My duck, what bliss yesterday! Tuesday next, in the confessional of the chapel of the Holy Angels.”

The priest, after having obtained from the bridegroom the “yes” of a serious man who signs nothing without reading it, had turned toward the bride.

“You promise and swear to be faithful to Monsieur Auguste Vabre in all things, like a true wife should be to her husband, in accordance with God’s commandment?”

But Berthe, having seen the letter, and full of the thought of the blows she was expecting would be given, was not listening, but was following the scene from beneath her veil. There was an awkward silence. At length she became aware that they were waiting for her.

“Yes, yes,” she hastily replied, in a happen-what-may manner.

The abbé followed the direction of her glance with surprise; and, guessing that something unusual was taking place in one of the aisles, he in turn became singularly absent-minded. The story had now circulated; every one knew it. The ladies, pale and grave, did not withdraw their eyes from Octave. The men smiled in a discreetly waggish way. And, whilst Madame Josserand reassured Madame Duveyrier, with slight shrugs of her shoulders, Valérie alone seemed to give all her attention to the wedding, beholding nothing else, as though overcome by emotion.

“My duck, what bliss yesterday—” Octave read again, affecting intense surprise.

Then, returning the letter to the husband, he said:

“I do not understand it, sir. The writing is not mine. See for yourself.”

And taking from his pocket a note-book in which he wrote down his expenses, like the careful fellow he was, he showed it to Théophile.

“What! not your writing!” stammered the latter. “You are making a fool of me; it must be your writing.”

The priest had to make the sign of the cross on Berthe’s left hand. His eyes elsewhere, he mistook the hand and made it on the right one.

“In nomine Patris, et Filii, et Spiritus Sancti.”

“Amen,” responded the boy chorister, also raising himself up to see.

In short, the scandal was prevented. Duveyrier proved to poor, bewildered Théophile that the letter could not have been written by Monsieur Mouret. It was almost a disappointment for the congregation. There were sighs, and a

few hasty words exchanged. And when every one, still in a state of excitement, turned again toward the altar, Berthe and Auguste were man and wife, she without appearing to have been aware of what was going on, he not having missed a word the priest had uttered, giving his whole attention to the matter, only disturbed by his headache, which closed his left eye.

“The dear children!” said Monsieur Josserand, absorbed in mind and his voice trembling, to Monsieur Vabre, who ever since the commencement of the ceremony had been busy counting the lighted tapers, always making a mistake, and beginning his calculations over again.

“Admit nothing,” said Madame Josserand to Valérie, as the family moved toward the vestry after the mass.

In the vestry the married couple and their witnesses first of all wrote their signatures. They were kept waiting, however, by Campardon, who had taken some ladies to inspect the works at the Calvary, at the end of the choir, behind a wooden hoarding. He at length arrived, and, apologizing, proceeded to cover the register with a big flourish. The Abbé Manduit had wished to honor the two families by handing round the pen himself, and pointing out with his finger the place where each one was to sign; and he smiled with his air of amiable, worldly tolerance in the center of the grave apartment, the woodwork of which retained a continual odor of incense.

“Well! mademoiselle,” said Campardon to Hortense, “does not all this make you long to do the same?”

Then he regretted his want of tact. Hortense, who was the elder sister, bit her lips. She was expecting to have a decisive answer from Verdier that evening at the ball, for she had been pressing him to choose between her and his creature. Therefore she replied in an unpleasant tone of voice:

“I have plenty of time. Whenever I think proper.”

And, turning her back on the architect, she attacked her brother Léon, who had only just arrived, late as usual.

“You are nice! papa and mamma are very pleased. Not even able to be in time when one of your sisters is being married! We were expecting you at least with Madame Dambreville.”

“Madame Dambreville does what she pleases,” said the young man curtly, “and I do what I can.”

A coolness had arisen between them. Léon considered that she was keeping him too long for her own use, and was weary of a connection the burden of which he had accepted in the sole hope of its leading to some grand marriage; and for a fortnight past he had been requesting her to keep her

promises. Madame Dambreville, carried away by a passion of love, had even complained to Madame Josserand of what she termed her son's crotchets.

"Yet a marriage is so soon settled!" said Madame Dambreville, without thinking of her words, and bestowing on him an imploring look to soften him.

"Not always!" retorted he, harshly.

And he went and kissed Berthe, then shook his new brother-inlaw's hand, whilst Madame Dambreville turned pale with anguish, drawing herself up in her costume of the color of dead leaves, and smiling vaguely toward the persons who entered.

It was the procession of friends, of simple acquaintances, of all the guests gathered together in the church, which now passed through the vestry. The newly married couple, standing up, were continually distributing hand-shakes, and invariably with the same embarrassed and delighted air. The Josserands and the Duveyriers were not always able to go through the introductions. At times they looked at each other in surprise, for Bachelard had brought persons whom nobody knew, and who talked too loud. Little by little everything gave way to confusion; there was quite a crush, hands were held out over the heads, young girls squeezed between pot-bellied gentlemen, left pieces of their white skirts on the legs of these fathers, these brothers, these uncles, still sweating with some vice, enfranchised in a quiet neighborhood. Away from the crowd, Gueulin and Trublot were relating to Octave how Clarisse had almost been caught by Duveyrier the night before, and had now resigned herself to smothering him with caresses, so as to shut his eyes.

"Hallo!" murmured Gueulin, "he is kissing the bride; it must smell nice."

Valérie, who kept Madame Juzeur near her to help her to keep her countenance, listened with emotion to the conciliatory words which the Abbé Manduit also considered it his duty to address to her. Then, as they were at length leaving the church, she paused before the two fathers, to allow Berthe to pass on her husband's arm.

"You ought to be satisfied," said she to Monsieur Josserand, wishing to show how free her mind was. "I congratulate you."

"Yes, yes," declared Monsieur Vabre in his clammy voice, "it is a very great responsibility the less."

And, whilst Trublot and Gueulin rushed about seeing all the ladies to the carriages, Madame Josserand, whose shawl attracted quite a crowd, obstinately insisted on remaining the last on the pavement, publicly to display her maternal triumph.

The repast that evening at the Hôtel du Louvre was likewise marred by

Théophile's unlucky affair. The latter was quite a plague, it had been the topic of conversation all the afternoon in the carriages during the drive in the Bois de Boulogne; and the ladies always came to this conclusion, that the husband ought at least to have waited until the morrow before finding the letter. None but the most intimate friends of both families sat down to table. The only lively episode was a speech from uncle Bachelard, whom the Josserands could not very well avoid inviting, in spite of their terror. He was drunk, indeed, as early as the roast: he raised his glass, and commenced with these words: "I am happy in the joy I feel," which he kept repeating, unable to say anything further. The other guests smiled complacently. Auguste and Berthe, already worn out, looked at each other every now and then, with an air of surprise at seeing themselves opposite one another; and, when they remembered how this was, they gazed in their plates in a confused way.

Nearly two hundred invitations had been issued for the ball. The guests began to arrive as early as half-past nine. Three chandeliers lit up the large red drawing-room, in which only some seats along the wall had been left, whilst at one end, in front of the fireplace, the little orchestra was installed; moreover, a bar had been placed at the farthest end of an adjoining room, and the two families also had a small apartment into which they could retire.

As Madame Duveyrier and Madame Josserand were receiving the first arrivals, that poor Théophile, who had been watched ever since the morning, was guilty of a most regrettable piece of brutality. Campardon was asking Valérie to grant him the first waltz. She laughed, and the husband took it as a provocation.

"You laugh! you laugh!" stammered he. "Tell me who the letter is from? it must be from somebody, that letter must."

He had taken the entire afternoon to disengage that one idea from the confusion into which Octave's answers had plunged him. Now, he stuck to it: if it was not Monsieur Mouret, it was then some one else, and he demanded a name. As Valerie was walking off without answering him, he seized hold of her arm and twisted it spitefully, with the rage of an exasperated child, repeating the while:

"I'll break it. Tell me, who is the letter from?"

The young woman, frightened, and stifling a cry of pain, had become quite white. Campardon felt her abandoning herself against his shoulder, succumbing to one of those nervous attacks which would shake her for hours together. He had scarcely time to lead her into the apartment reserved for the two families, where he laid her on a sofa. Some ladies had followed him—Madame Juzeur, Madame Dambreville—who unlaced her, whilst he discreetly retired.

“Sir, I beg your pardon,” said Théophile, going up to Octave, whose eyes he had encountered when twisting his wife’s arm. “Every one in my place would have suspected you; is it not so? But I wish to shake hands with you, to prove to you that I admit myself to have been in the wrong.”

He shook hands with him, and led him one side, tortured by a necessity to unbosom himself, to find a confidant for the outpourings of his heart.

“Ah! sir, if I were to tell you——”

And he talked for a long while of his wife. When a young girl, she was delicate, it was said jokingly that marriage would set her right. She had not sufficient air in her parents’ shop, where, every evening for three months, she had appeared to him very nice, obedient, of a rather sad disposition, but charming.

“Well! sir, marriage did not set her right—far from it. After a few weeks she became terrible; we could no longer agree together. There were quarrels about nothing at all. Changes of temper at every minute—laughing, crying, without my knowing why. And absurd sentiments, ideas that would knock a person down, a perpetual mania for making people wild. In short, sir, my home has become a hell.”

“It is very remarkable,” murmured Octave, who felt a necessity for saying something.

Then, the husband, ghastly pale, and drawing himself up on his short legs, to override the ridiculous, came to what he called the wretched woman’s bad behavior. Twice he had suspected her; but he was too honorable; he could not retain such an idea in his head. This time, though, he was obliged to yield to evidence. It was not possible to doubt, was it? And, with his trembling fingers, he felt the pocket of his waistcoat which contained the letter.

“If she did it for money, I might understand it,” added he. “But they never gave her any; I am sure of that; I should know it. Then, tell me what it can be that she has in her skin? I am very nice myself; she has everything at home. I cannot understand it. If you can understand it, sir, explain it to me, I beg of you.”

“It is very curious, very curious,” repeated Octave, embarrassed by all these disclosures, and trying to make his escape.

But the husband, in a state of fever, and tormented by a want of certitude, would not let him go. At this moment, Madame Juzeur, reappearing, went and whispered a word to Madame Josserand, who was greeting the arrival of a big jeweler of the Palais-Royal with a grand curtesy; and she, quite upset, hastened to follow her.

“I think that your wife has a very violent attack,” observed Octave to Théophile.

“Never mind her!” replied the latter in a fury, vexed at not being ill, so as to be coddled up also; “she is only to pleased to have an attack! It always puts every one on her side. My health is no better than hers, yet I have never deceived her!”

Madame Josserand did not return. The rumor circulated among the intimate friends that Valérie was struggling in frightful convulsions. There should have been men present to hold her down; but, as they had been obliged to half undress her, they declined Trublot’s and Gueulin’s offers of assistance.

“Doctor Juillerat! where is Doctor Juillerat?” asked Madame Josserand, rushing back into the room.

The doctor had been invited, but no one had as yet seen him. Then she no longer strove to hide the slumbering rage which had been collecting within her since the morning. She spoke out before Octave and Campardon, without mincing her words.

“I am beginning to have enough of it. It is not very pleasant for my daughter, all this cuckoldom paraded before us!”

She looked about for Hortense, and at length caught sight of her talking to a gentleman, of whom she could only see the back, but whom she recognized by its breadth. It was Verdier. This increased her ill-humor. She sharply called the young girl to her, and, lowering her voice, told her that she would do better to remain at her mother’s disposal on such a day as that. Hortense did not listen to the reprimand. She was triumphant; Verdier had just fixed their marriage at two months from then, in June.

“Shut up!” said the mother.

“I assure you, mamma. He already sleeps out three nights a week so as to accustom the other to it, and in a fortnight he will stop away altogether. Then it will be all over, and I shall have him.”

“Shut up! I have already had more than enough of your romance! You will just oblige me by waiting near the door for Doctor Juillerat, and by sending him to me the moment he arrives. And, above all, not a word of all this to your sister!”

She returned to the adjoining room, leaving Hortense muttering that, thank goodness! she required no one’s approbation, and that they would all be nicely caught one day, when they saw her make a better marriage than the others. Yet, she went to the door, and watched for the doctor’s arrival.

The orchestra was now playing a waltz. Berthe was dancing with one of

her husband's young cousins, so as to dispose of the relations in turn. All the guests had an air of amusing themselves immensely, and expatiated before them on the liveliness of the ball. It was, according to Campardon, a liveliness of a good standard.

The architect, with an effusion of gallantry, concerned himself a great deal about Valérie's condition, without, however, missing a dance. He had the idea to send his daughter Angèle for news in his name. The child, whose fourteen years had been burning with curiosity since the morning around the lady that every one was talking about, was delighted at being able to penetrate into the little room. And, as she did not return, the architect was obliged to take the liberty of slightly opening the door and thrusting his head in. He beheld his daughter standing up beside the sofa, deeply absorbed by the sight of Valérie, whose bosom, shaken by spasms, had escaped from the unhooked bodice. Protestations arose, the ladies called to him not to come in; and he withdrew, assuring them that he merely wished to know how she was getting on.

"She is no better, she is no better," said he, in a melancholy way to the persons who happened to be near the door. "There are four of them holding her. How strong a woman must be, to be able to bound about like that without hurting herself!"

But Doctor Juillerat quickly crossed the ball-room, accompanied by Hortense, who was explaining matters to him. Madame Duveyrier followed them. Some persons showed their surprise, more rumors circulated. Scarcely had the doctor disappeared than Madame Josserand left the little room with Madame Dambreville. Her rage was increasing; she had just emptied two water bottles over Valerie's head; never before had she seen a woman as nervous as that. Then she had decided to make the round of the ball-room, so as to stop all remarks by her presence. Only, she walked with such a terrible step, she distributed such sour smiles, that every one behind her was let into the secret.

Madame Dambreville did not leave her. Ever since the morning she had been speaking to her of Léon, making vague complaints, trying to bring her to speak to her son, so as to patch up their connection. She drew her attention to him, as he was conducting a tall, scraggy girl back to her place, and to whom he made a show of being very assiduous.

"He abandons us," said she, with a slight laugh, trembling with suppressed tears. "Scold him now, for not so much as looking at us."

"Léon!" called Madame Josserand.

When he came to her, she added roughly, not being in the temper to choose her words:

“Why are you angry with madame? She bears you no ill-will. Make it up with her. It does no good to be ill-tempered.”

And she left them embarrassed before each other. Madame Dambreville took Léon’s arm, and they went and conversed in the recess of a window; then they tenderly left the ball-room together. She had sworn to arrange his marriage in the autumn.

Madame Josserand, who continued to distribute smiles, was overcome by emotion when she found herself before Berthe, who was out of breath at having danced so much, and looked quite rosy in her white dress, which was becoming rumpled. She clasped her in her arms, and almost fainted away at a vague association of ideas, recalling, no doubt, the other one, whose face was so frightfully convulsed:

“My poor darling, my poor darling!” murmured she, giving her two big kisses.

Then Berthe calmly asked:

“How is she?”

At this, Madame Josserand at once became very sour again. What! Berthe knew it! Why of course she knew it, every one knew it. Her husband alone, whom she pointed out conducting an old lady to the refreshment bar, was still ignorant of the story. She even intended to get some one to tell him everything, for it made him appear too stupid to be always behind every one else, and never to know anything.

“And I, who have been slaving to hide the catastrophe” said Madame Josserand, beside herself. “Ah, well! I shall not put myself out any more, it must be put a stop to. I will not tolerate their making you ridiculous.”

Every one did indeed know it. Only, so as not to cast a gloom over the ball, it was not talked about.

“She is better,” Campardon, who had taken another peep, hastened to say. “One can go in.”

A few male friends ventured to enter. Valerie was still lying down, only the attack was passing off; and, out of decency, they had covered her bosom with a napkin, found lying on a sideboard. Madame Juzeur and Madame Duveyrier were standing before the window listening to Doctor Juillerat, who was explaining that the attacks sometimes yielded to hot water applications to the neck.

But the invalid, having seen Octave enter with Campardon, called him to her by a sign, and spoke a few incoherent words to him in a final hallucination. He had to sit down beside her, at the doctor’s express order, who

was desirous above all not to thwart her; and thus the young man listened to her disclosures, he who, during the evening, had already heard the husband's. She trembled with fright, she took him for her lover, and implored him to hide her. Then she recognized him, and burst into tears, thanking him for his lie of the morning during mass. Octave thought of that other attack, of which he had wished to take advantage, with the greedy desire of a school-boy. Now, he was her friend, and she would tell him everything, perhaps it would be better.

At this moment, Théophile, who had continued to wander up and down before the door, wished to enter. Other men were there, so he could very well be there himself. But his appearance created a regular panic. On hearing his voice, Valérie was again seized with a fit of trembling, every one thought she was about to have another attack. He, imploring, and struggling amongst the ladies, whose arms thrust him back, kept obstinately repeating:

"I only ask her for the name. Let her tell me the name."

Then, Madame Josserand, arriving, gave vent to her wrath. She drew Théophile into the little room, to hide the scandal; and said to him furiously:

"Look here! will you shut up? Ever since this morning you have been badgering us with your stupidities. You have no tact, sir; yes, you have absolutely no tact at all! One should not harp on such things on a wedding day."

"Excuse me, madame," murmured he, "this is my business, and does not concern you!"

"What! it does not concern me? but I form part of your family now, sir, and do you think your affair amuses me on account of my daughter? Ah! you have given her a pretty wedding! Not another word, sir, you are deficient in tact!"

This cry closed his mouth. He was so scared, so feeble looking, with his slender limbs, and his face like a girl's, that the ladies smiled slightly. When one had not the facilities for making a woman happy, one ought not to marry. Hortense weighed him with a disdainful glance; little Angèle, whom they had forgotten, hovered round him, with her sly air, as though she had been looking for something; and he drew back embarrassed, and blushed when he saw them all, so big and plump, hemming him in with their sturdy hips. But they felt the necessity of patching up the matter. Valérie had started off sobbing again, whilst the doctor continued to bathe her temples. Then they understood one another with a glance, a common feeling of defense drew them together. They puzzled their brains, trying to explain the letter to the husband.

"Pooh!" murmured Trublot, who had just rejoined Octave, "it is easy enough; they have only to say the letter was addressed to the servant."

Madame Josserand heard him. She turned round and looked at him with a glance full of admiration. Then, turning toward Théophile:

“Does an innocent woman lower herself to give explanations, when accused with such brutality? Still, I may speak. The letter was dropped by Françoise, that maid whom your wife had to pack off on account of her bad conduct. There, are you satisfied? do you not blush with shame?”

At first the husband shrugged his shoulders. But the ladies all remained serious, answering his objections with very strong reasoning. He was shaken, when, to complete his discomfiture, Madame Duveyrier got angry, telling him that his conduct had been abominable, and that she disowned him. Then, vanquished, and feeling a longing to be kissed, he threw his arms round Valérie’s neck, and begged her pardon. It was most touching. Even Madame Josserand was deeply affected.

“It is always best to come to an understanding,” said she, with relief. “The day will not end so badly, after all.”

When they had dressed Valérie again, and she appeared in the ball-room on Theophile’s arm, the joy seemed to be redoubled. It was close upon three o’clock, the guests were beginning to leave; but the orchestra continued to get through the quadrilles with great gusto. Some of the men smiled behind the backs of the reconciled couple. A medical remark of Campardon’s, respecting that poor Théophile, quite delighted Madame Juzeur. The young girls hastened to stare at Valérie; then they put on their stupid looks before their mothers’ scandalized glances. Berthe, who was at length dancing with her husband, must have whispered a word or two in his ear; for Auguste, made aware of what had been taking place, turned his head round, and, without getting out of step, looked at his brother Théophile with the surprise and the superiority of a man to whom such things cannot happen. There was a final galop, the guests were getting more free in the stifling heat and the reddish light of the candles, the vacillating flames of which caused the pendants of the chandeliers to sparkle.

“You are very intimate with her?” asked Madame Hédouin, as she whirled round on Octave’s arm, having accepted his invitation to dance.

The young man fancied he felt a slight quiver in her frame, so erect and so calm.

“Not at all,” said he. “They mixed me up in the matter, which annoys me immensely. The poor devil swallowed everything.”

“It is very wrong,” declared she, in her grave voice.

No doubt Octave was mistaken. When he withdrew his arm from her waist,

Madame Hédouin was not even panting, her eyes were clear, and her hair not the least disarranged. But a scandal upset the end of the ball. Uncle Bachelard, who had finished himself off at the refreshment bar, ventured on a lively idea. He had suddenly been seen dancing, a most indecent step before Gueulin. Some napkins rolled round and stuffed in front of his buttoned-up coat, gave him the bosom of a wet-nurse, and two big oranges placed on the napkins, behind the lapels, displayed their roundness, in the sanguineous redness of an excoriated skin. This time every one protested: though one may earn heaps of money, yet there are limits which a man who respects himself should never go beyond, especially before young persons. Monsieur Josserand, ashamed and in despair, drew his brother-in-law away. Duveyrier displayed the greatest disgust.

At four o'clock the newly married couple returned to the Rue de Choiseul. They brought Théophile and Valérie back in their carriage. As they went up to the second floor, where an apartment had been prepared for them, they came across Octave, who was also retiring to rest. The young man wished to draw politely on one side, but Berthe made a similar movement, and they knocked up against each other.

"Oh! excuse me, mademoiselle," said he.

The word "mademoiselle" amused them immensely. She looked at him, and he recalled the first glance exchanged between them on that same staircase, a glance of gayety and daring, the charming welcome of which he again beheld. They understood each other perhaps; she blushed, whilst he went up alone to his room, in the midst of the death-like peacefulness of the upper floors.

Auguste, with his left eye closed up, half mad with the headache which had been clinging to him since the morning, was already in the apartment, where the other members of the family were arriving. Then, at the moment of quitting Berthe, Valérie yielded to a sudden fit of emotion, and pressing her in her arms, and completing the rumpling of her white dress, she kissed her, saying, in a low voice:

"Ah! my dear, I wish you better luck than I have had!"

CHAPTER IX.

Two days later, toward seven o'clock, as Octave arrived at the Campardons' for dinner, he found Rose by herself, dressed in a cream-color dressing-gown, trimmed with white lace.

“Are you expecting any one?” asked he.

“No,” replied she, rather confused. “We will have dinner directly Achille comes in.”

The architect was abandoning his punctual habits; was never there at the proper time for his meals, arrived very red in the face, with a wild expression, and cursing business. Then he went off again every evening, on all kinds of pretexts, talking of appointments at cafés, inventing distant meetings. Octave, on these occasions, would often keep Rose company till eleven o’clock, for he had understood that the husband had him there to board to amuse his wife, and she would gently complain, and tell him her fears: ah! she left Achille very free, only she was so anxious when he came home after midnight!

“Do you not think he has been rather sad lately?” asked she, in a tenderly frightened tone of voice.

The young man had not noticed it.

“I think he is rather worried, perhaps. The works at Saint-Roch cause him some anxiety.”

But she shook her head, without saying anything further about it. Then she was very kind to Octave, questioning him with a motherly and sisterly affection as to how he had employed the day. During nearly nine months that he had been boarding with them, she had always treated him thus as a child of the house.

At length the architect appeared.

“Good evening, my pet; good evening, my duck,” said he, kissing her with his doting air of a good husband. “Another fool has been detaining me in the street!”

Octave moved away, and he heard them exchange a few words in a low voice.

“Will she come?”

“No; what is the good? and, above all, do not worry yourself.”

“You declared to me that she would come.”

“Well! yes; she is coming. Are you pleased? It is for your sake that I have done it.”

They took their seats at the table. During the whole of dinnertime they talked of the English language, which little Angèle had been learning for a fortnight past.

They were taking their dessert, when a ring at the bell caused Madame

Campardou to start.

“It is madame’s cousin,” Lisa returned and said, in the wounded tone of a servant whom one has omitted to let into a family secret.

And it was indeed Gasparine who entered. She wore a black woolen dress, looking very quiet, with her thin face, and her air of a poor shop-girl. Rose, tenderly enveloped in her dressing-gown of cream-color silk, and plump and fresh, rose up so moved that tears filled her eyes.

“Ah! my dear,” murmured she, “you are good. We will forget everything; will we not?”

She took her in her arms and gave her two hearty kisses. Octave discreetly wished to retire. But they grew angry: he could remain; he was one of the family. So he amused himself by looking on. Campardon, at first greatly embarrassed, turned his eyes away from the two women, puffing about, and looking for a cigar; whilst Lisa, who was roughly clearing the table, exchanged glances with surprised Angèle.

“It is your cousin,” at length said the architect to his daughter. “You have heard us speak of her. Come, kiss her now.”

She kissed her with her sullen air, troubled by the sort of governess glance with which Gasparine took stock of her, after asking some questions respecting her age and education. Then, when the others passed into the drawing-room, she preferred to follow Lisa, who slammed the door, saying, without even fearing that she might be heard:

“Ah, well! it’ll become precious funny here now!”

In the drawing-room, Campardon, still restless, began to excuse himself.

“On my word of honor! the happy idea was not mine. It is Rose who wished to be reconciled. Every morning, for more than a week past, she has been saying to me: ‘Now, go and fetch her.’ So I ended by fetching you.”

And, as though he had felt the necessity of convincing Octave, he took him up to the window.

“Well! women are women. It bothered me, because I have a dread of rows. One on the right, the other on the left, there was no squabbling possible. But I had to give in. Rose says we shall be far happier thus. Anyhow, we will try. It depends on these two, now, to make my life comfortable.”

Meanwhile Rose and Gasparine had seated themselves side by side on the sofa. They were talking of the past, of the days lived at Plassans, with good papa Domergue.

“And your health?” asked she, in a low voice. “Achille spoke to me about

it. Is it no better?”

“No, no,” replied Rose, in a melancholy tone. “You see, I eat; I look very well. But it gets no better; it will never get any better.”

As she began to cry, Gasparine, in her turn, took her in her arms and pressed her against her flat and ardent breast, whilst Campardon hastened to console them.

“Why do you cry?” asked she maternally. “The main thing is that you do not suffer. What does it matter if you have always people about you to love you?”

Rose was becoming calmer, and already smiling amidst her tears. Then the architect, carried away by his feelings, clasped them both in the same embrace, kissing them alternately, and stammering:

“Yes, yes, we will love each other very much, we will love you such a deal, my poor little duck. You will see how well everything will go, now that we are united.”

And, turning toward Octave, he added:

“Ah! my dear fellow, people may talk, there is nothing, after all, like family ties!”

The end of the evening was delightful. Campardon, who usually fell asleep on leaving the table if he remained at home, recovered all his artist’s gayety, the old jokes and the broad songs of the School of Fine Arts. When, toward eleven o’clock, Gasparine prepared to leave, Rose insisted on accompanying her to the door, in spite of the difficulty she experienced in walking that day: and, leaning over the balustrade, in the grave silence of the staircase, she called after her:

“Come and see us often!”

On the morrow, Octave, feeling interested, tried to make the cousin talk at “The Ladies’ Paradise,” whilst they were receiving a consignment of linen goods together. But she answered curtly, and he felt that she was hostile, annoyed at his having been a witness the evening before. Moreover, she did not like him; she even displayed a sort of rancor toward him in their business relations.

Octave had given himself six months, and, though scarcely four had passed, he was becoming impatient. Every morning he asked himself whether he should not hurry matters forward, seeing the little progress he had made in the affections of this woman, always so icy and gentle. She had ended, however, by showing a real esteem for him, won over by his enlarged ideas, his dreams of vast modern warehouses discharging millions of merchandise

into the streets of Paris. Often, when her husband was not there, and she opened the correspondence with the young man of a morning, she would detain him beside her and consult him, profiting a great deal by his advice, and a sort of commercial intimacy was thus gradually established between them. Their hands met amidst bundles of invoices, their breaths mingled as they added up columns of figures, and they yielded to moments of emotion before the open cash-box after some extra fortunate receipts. He even took advantage of these occasions, his tactics being now to reach her heart through her good trader's nature, and to conquer her on a day of weakness, in the midst of the great emotion occasioned by some unexpected sale. So he remained on the watch for some surprising occurrence which should deliver her up to him.

About this time, Monsieur Hédouin, having fallen ill, went to pass a season at Vichy to take the waters. Octave, to speak frankly, was delighted. Though as cold as marble, Madame Hédouin would become more tender-hearted during her enforced widowhood. But he fruitlessly awaited a quiver, a languidness of desire. Never had she been so active, her head so free, her eye so clear.

At heart, though, the young man did not despair. At times he thought he had reached the goal, and was already arranging his mode of living for the near day when he would be the lover of his employer's wife. He had kept up his connection with Marie to help him to wait patiently; only, though she was convenient and cost him nothing, she might perhaps one day become irksome, with her faithfulness of a beaten cur. Therefore, at the same time that he took her in his arms on the nights when he felt dull, he would be thinking of a way of breaking off with her. To do so abruptly seemed to him to be worse than foolish. One holiday morning, when about to rejoin his neighbor's wife, the neighbor himself having gone out early, the idea had at length come to him of restoring Marie to Jules, of sending them in a loving way into each other's arms, so that he might withdraw with a clear conscience. It was, moreover, a good action, the touching side of which relieved him of all remorse. He waited a while, however, not wishing to find himself without a female companion of some kind.

At the Campardons' another complication was occupying Octave's mind. He felt that the moment was arriving when he would have to take his meals elsewhere. For three weeks past Gasparine had been making herself quite at home there, with an authority daily increasing. At first she had begun by coming every evening; then she had appeared at lunch: and, in spite of her work at the shop, she was commencing to take charge of everything, of Angèle's education, and of the household affairs. Rose was ever repeating in Campardon's presence:

"Ah! if Gasparine only lived with us!"

But each time the architect, blushing with conscientious scruples, and tormented with shame, cried out:

“No, no; it cannot be. Besides, where would you put her to sleep?”

And he explained that they would have to give his study as a bedroom to their cousin, whilst he would move his table and plans into the drawing-room. It would certainly not inconvenience him in the least; he would, perhaps, decide to make the alteration one day, for he had no need of a drawing-room, and his study was becoming too cramped for all the work he had in hand. Only, Gasparine might very well remain as she was. What need was there to live all in a heap?

“When one is comfortable,” repeated he to Octave, “it is a mistake to wish to be better.”

About that time he was obliged to go and spend two days at Evreux. He was worried about the work in hand at the bishop’s palace. He had yielded to the bishop’s desires without a credit having been opened for the purpose, and the construction of the range for the new kitchens and of the heating apparatus threatened to amount to a very large figure, which it would be impossible to include in the cost of repairs. Besides that, the pulpit, for which three thousand francs had been granted, would come to ten thousand at least. He wished to talk the matter over with the bishop, so as to take certain precautions.

Rose was only expecting him to return on the Sunday night. He arrived in the middle of lunch, and his sudden entrance caused quite a scare. Gasparine was seated at the table, between Octave and Angèle. They pretended to be all at their ease; but there reigned a certain air of mystery. Lisa had closed the drawing-room door at a despairing gesture from her mistress, whilst the cousin kicked beneath the furniture some pieces of paper that were lying about.

When Campardon talked of changing his things, they stopped him.

“Wait a while. Have a cup of coffee, as you lunched at Evreux.”

At length, as he noticed Rose’s embarrassment, she went and threw her arms around his neck.

“My dear, you must not scold me. If you had not returned till this evening, you would have found everything straight.”

She tremblingly opened the doors, and took him into the drawingroom and the study. A mahogany bedstead, brought that morning by a furniture dealer, occupied the place of the drawing-table, which had been moved into the middle of the adjoining room; but as yet nothing had been put straight; portfolios were knocking about amongst some of Gasparine’s clothes; the Virgin with the Bleeding Heart was lying against the wall, kept in position by

a new wash-stand.

“It was a surprise,” murmured Madame Campardon, her heart bursting, as she hid her face in her husband’s waistcoat.

He, deeply moved, looked about him. He said nothing, and avoided encountering Octave’s eyes. Then, Gasparine asked, in her sharp voice:

“Does it annoy you, cousin? It is Rose who pestered me. But, if you think I am in the way, it is not too late for me to leave.”

“Oh! cousin!” at length exclaimed the architect. “All that Rose does is well done.”

And, the latter having burst out sobbing on his breast, he added:

“Come, my duck, how foolish of you to cry! I am very pleased. You wish to have your cousin with you; well! have your cousin with you. Everything suits me. Now, do not cry any more! See! I kiss you like I love you, so much! so much!”

He devoured her with caresses. Then, Rose, who melted into tears for a word, but who smiled at once, in the midst of her sobs, was consoled. She kissed him in her turn, on his beard, saying to him, gently:

“You were harsh. Kiss her also.”

Campardon kissed Gasparine. They called Angèle, who had been looking on from the dining-room, her eyes bright and her mouth wide open; and she had to kiss her also. Octave had moved away, having arrived at the conclusion that they were becoming far too loving in that family. He had noticed with surprise Lisa’s respectful attitude and smiling attentiveness toward Gasparine. She was decidedly an intelligent girl, that hussy with the blue eyelids!

Meanwhile, the architect had taken off his coat, and whistling and singing, as lively as a boy, he spent the afternoon in arranging the cousin’s room. Then Octave understood that his presence interfered with the free expansion of their hearts; he felt he was one too many in such a united family, so mentioned that he was going to dine out that evening. Moreover, he had made up his mind; on the morrow he would thank Madame Campardon for her kind hospitality, and invent some story for no longer trespassing upon it.

Toward five o’clock, as he was regretting that he did not know where to find Trublot, he had the idea to go and ask the Pichons for some dinner, so as not to pass the evening alone. But, on entering their apartments, he found himself in the midst of a deplorable family scene. The Vuillaumes were there, trembling with rage and indignation.

“It is disgraceful, sir!” the mother was saying, standing up with her arm

thrust out toward her son-in-law, who was sitting in a chair in a state of collapse. “You gave me your word of honor.”

“And you,” added the father, causing his daughter to draw back trembling as far as the sideboard, “do not try to defend him, you are quite as guilty. Do you wish to die of hunger!”

Madame Vuillaume had put on her bonnet and shawl again.

“Good-bye!” uttered she, in a solemn tone. “We will at least not encourage your dissoluteness by our presence. As you no longer pay the least attention to our wishes, we have nothing to detain us here. Good-bye!”

And, as through force of habit her son-in-law rose to accompany them, she added:

“Do not trouble yourself, we shall be able to find the omnibus very well without you. Pass first, Monsieur Vuillaume. Let them eat their dinner, and much good may it do them, for they won’t always have one!”

Octave, thoroughly bewildered, drew on one side. When they had gone, he looked at Jules, who was still in a state of collapse on his chair, and at Marie leaning against the sideboard and looking very pale. Neither of them said a word.

“What is the matter?” asked he.

But, without answering him, the young woman commenced scolding her husband in a doleful voice.

“I told you how it would be. You should have waited, and let them learn the thing by degrees. There was no hurry, it does not show as yet.”

“What is the matter?” repeated Octave.

Then, without even turning her head, she said bluntly, in the midst of her emotion!

“I am in the family way.”

“I have had enough of them!” cried Jules, rising indignantly. “I thought it right to tell them at once of this bother. I wonder if they think it amuses me! I am more taken in by it all than they are. More especially, by Jove! as it is through no fault of mine. Is it not true, Marie, that we have no idea how it has come about?”

“That is so, indeed,” affirmed the young woman.

It quite affected Octave; and he felt a violent desire to do something nice for the Pichons. Jules continued to grumble: they would receive the child all the same, only it would have done better to have remained where it was. On

her side, Marie, generally so gentle, became angry, and ended by agreeing with her mother, who never forgave disobedience. And the couple were coming to a quarrel, throwing the youngster from one to the other, accusing each other of being the cause of it, when Octave gayly interfered.

“It is no use quarreling, now that it is there. Come, we won’t dine here; it would be too sad. I will take you to a restaurant, if you are agreeable.”

The young woman blushed. Dining at a restaurant was her delight. She spoke, however, of her little girl, who invariably prevented her from having any pleasure. But it was decided that, for this once, Lilitte should go too. And they spent a very pleasant evening. Octave took them to the “Bouf à la Mode,” where they had a private room, to be more at their ease, as he said. There, he overwhelmed them with food, with an earnest prodigality, without thinking of the bill, happy at seeing them eat. He even, at dessert, when they had laid Lilitte down between two of the sofa cushions, called for champagne; and they sat there, their elbows on the table, their eyes dim, all three full of heart, and feeling languid from the suffocating heat of the room. At length, at eleven o’clock, they talked of going home; but they were red, and the fresh air of the street intoxicated them. Then, as the child, heavy with sleep, refused to walk, Octave, to do things handsomely until the end, insisted on hailing a cab, though the Rue de Choiseul was close by. In the cab, he was scrupulous to the point of not pressing Marie’s knees. Only, upstairs, whilst Jules was tucking Lilitte in, he imprinted a kiss on the young woman’s forehead, the farewell kiss of a father parting with his daughter to a son-in-law. Then, seeing them very loving and looking at each other in a drunken sort of way, he left them to themselves, wishing them a good-night and many pleasant dreams as he closed the door.

“Well!” thought he, as he jumped all alone into bed, “it has cost me fifty francs, but I owed them quite that. After all, my only wish is that her husband may make her happy, poor little woman!”

And, with his heart full of emotion, he resolved, before falling asleep, to make his grand attempt on the following evening.

Every Monday, after dinner, Octave assisted Madame Hédouin to examine the orders of the week. For this purpose they both withdrew to the little closet at the back, a narrow apartment which merely contained a safe, a desk, two chairs and a sofa. But it so happened that on the Monday in question the Duveyriers were going to take Madame Hédouin to the Opéra-Comique. So, toward three o’clock, she sent for the young man. In spite of the bright sunshine, they were obliged to burn the gas, for the closet only received a pale light from an inner courtyard. He bolted the door, and, as she looked at him in surprise, he murmured:

“No one can come and disturb us.”

She nodded her head approvingly, and they set to work. The new summer goods were going splendidly, the business of the house continued increasing. That week especially the sale of the little woolens seemed so promising that she heaved a sigh.

“Ah! if we only had enough room!”

“But,” said he, commencing the attack, “it depends upon yourself. I have had an idea for some time past, which I wish to lay before you.”

It was the stroke of andacity he had been waiting for. His idea was to purchase the adjoining house in the Rue Neuve-Saint-Augustin, to give notice to an umbrella-dealer and to a toy-merchant, and then to enlarge the warehouses, to which they could add several other vast departments. And he warmed up as he spoke, showing himself full of disdain for the old way of doing business in the depths of damp, dark shops, without any display, evoking a new commerce with a gesture, piling up in palaces of crystal all the luxury pertaining to woman, turning over millions in the light of day, and illuminating at night-time in a princely style.

“You will crush the other drapers of the Saint-Roch neighborhood,” said he; “you will secure all the small customers.”

Madame Hédouin listened to him, her elbow on a ledger, her beautiful, grave head buried in her hand. She was born at “The Ladies’ Paradise,” which had been founded by her father and her uncle. She loved the house; she could see it expanding, swallowing up the neighboring houses, and displaying a royal frontage, and this dream suited her active intelligence, her upright will, her woman’s delicate intuition of the new Paris.

“Uncle Deleuze would never give his consent,” murmured she. “Besides, my husband is too unwell.”

Then, seeing her wavering, Octave assumed his most seductive voice—an actor’s voice, soft and musical. At the same time he looked tenderly at her, with his eyes the color of old gold, which some women thought irresistible. But, though the gas-jet flared close to the nape of her neck, she remained as cool as ever; she merely fell into a revery, half stunned by the young man’s inexhaustible flow of words. He had come to studying the affair from the money point of view, already making an estimate with the impassioned air of a romantic page declaring a long pent up love. When she suddenly awoke from her reflections, she found herself in his arms. He was thinking that she was at length yielding.

“Dear me! so this is what it all meant!” said she in a sad tone of voice,

freeing herself from him as from some tiresome child.

“Well! yes, I love you,” cried he. “Oh! do not repel me. With you I will do great things——”

And he went on thus to the end of the tirade, which had a false ring about it. She did not interrupt him; she was standing up and again scanning the pages of the ledger. Then, when he had finished, she replied:

“I know all that—I have already heard it before. But I thought you were more sensible than the others, Monsieur Octave. You grieve me, really you do, for I had counted upon you. However, all young men are foolish. We need a great deal of order in such a house as this, and you begin by desiring things which would disturb us from morning to night. I am not a woman here, I have too much to occupy me. Come, you who are so well organized, how is it you did not comprehend that it could never be, because in the first place it is stupid, in the second useless, and, moreover, luckily for me, I do not care the least about it!”

He would have preferred her to have been indignantly angry, displaying grand sentiments. Her calm tone of voice, her quiet reasoning of a practical woman, sure of herself, disconcerted him. He felt himself becoming ridiculous.

“Have pity, madame,” stammered he, before losing all hope. “See how I suffer.”

“No, you do not suffer. Anyhow, you will get over it. Hark! there is some one knocking, you would do better to open the door.”

Then he had to draw the bolt. It was Mademoiselle Gasparine, who wished to know if any lace-trimmed chemises were expected. The bolted door had surprised her. But she knew Madame Hédouin too well; and, when she saw her with her cold air standing in front of Octave, who was full of uneasiness, a slight mocking smile played about her lips as she looked at him. It exasperated him, and in his own mind he accused her of having been the cause of his ill-success.

“Madame,” declared he, abruptly, when Gasparine had withdrawn, “I leave your employment this evening.”

This was a surprise for Madame Hédouin. She looked at him.

“Why so? I do not discharge you. Oh! it will not make any difference; I have no fear.”

These words decided him. He would leave at once; he would not endure his martyrdom a minute longer.

“Very good, Monsieur Octave,” resumed she as serenely as ever. “I will settle with you directly. However, the firm will regret you, for you were a good assistant.”

Once out in the street, Octave perceived that he had behaved like a fool. Four o’clock was striking, the gay spring sun covered with a sheet of gold a whole corner of the Place Gaillon. And, angry with himself, he wandered at hap-hazard down the Rue Saint-Roch, discussing the way in which he ought to have acted. He would go and see if Campardon happened to be in the church, and take him to the café to have a glass of Madeira. It would help to divert his thoughts. He entered by the vestibule into which the vestry door opened, a dark, dirty passage such as is to be met with in houses of ill-repute.

“You are perhaps looking for Monsieur Campardon?” said a voice close beside him, as he stood hesitating, scrutinizing the nave with his glance.

It was the Abbé Manduit, who had just recognized him. The architect being away, he insisted on showing the works, about which he was most enthusiastic, to the young man.

“Walk in,” said the Abbé Manduit, gathering up his cassock. “I will explain everything to you.”

“Here we are,” continued the priest. “I had the idea of lighting the central group of the Calvary from above by means of an opening in the cupola. You can fancy what an effect it will have.”

“Yes, yes,” murmured. Octave, whose thoughts were diverted by this stroll amidst building materials.

The Abbé Manduit, speaking in a loud voice, had the air of a stage-carpenter directing the placing of some gorgeous scenery.

And he turned round to call out to a workman:

“Move the Virgin on one side; you will be breaking her leg directly.”

The workman called a comrade. Between them they got hold of the Virgin round the small of her back, and carried her to a place of safety, like some tall white girl who had fallen down under a nervous attack.

“Be careful!” repeated the priest, following them through the rubbish, “her dress is already cracked. Wait a while!”

He gave them a hand, seizing Mary round the waist, and then, all covered with plaster, withdrew from the embrace.

“Then,” resumed he, returning to Octave, “just imagine that the two bays of the nave there before us are open, and go and stand in the chapel of the Virgin. Over the altar, and through the chapel of Perpetual Adoration, you will

behold the Calvary right at the back. Just fancy the effect: these three enormous figures, this bare and simple drama in this tabernacle recess, beyond the dim, mysterious light of the stained-glass windows, the lamps and the gold candelabra. Eh? I think it will be irresistible!”

He was waxing eloquent, and, proud of his idea, he laughed joyfully.

“The most skeptical will be moved,” observed Octave, to please him.

“That is what I think!” cried he. “I am impatient to see everything in place.”

“I am going to see Monsieur Campardon this evening,” at length said the Abbe Manduit. “Ask him to wait in for me. I wish to speak to him about an improvement without being disturbed.”

And he bowed with his worldly air. Octave was calmed now. Saint-Roch, with its cool vaults, had unbraced his nerves. He looked curiously at this entrance to a church through a private house, at the doorkeeper’s room, from whence at night time the door was often opened for the cause of the faith, at all that corner of a convent lost amidst the black conglomeration of the neighborhood. Out in the street, he again raised his eyes; the house displayed its bare frontage, with its barred and curtainless windows; but boxes of flowers were fixed by iron supports to the windows of the fourth floor; and, down below, in the thick walls, were narrow shops, which helped to fill the coffers of the clergy—a cobbler’s, a clock-maker’s, an embroiderer’s, and even a wine shop, where the mutes congregated whenever there was a funeral. Octave, who, from his rebuff, was in a mood to renounce the world, regretted the quiet lives which the priests’ servants led up there in those rooms enlivened with verbenas and sweet peas.

That evening, at half past six, as he entered the Campardons’ apartments without ringing, he came suddenly upon the architect and Gasparine kissing each other in the ante-room. The latter, who had just come from the warehouse, had not even given herself time to close the door. Both stood stock-still.

“My wife is combing her hair,” stammered the architect, for the sake of saying something. “Go in and see her.”

Octave, feeling as embarrassed as themselves, hastened to knock at the door of Rose’s room, where he usually entered like a relation. He really could no longer continue to board there, now that he caught them behind the doors.

“Come in!” cried Rose’s voice. “So it is you, Octave. Oh! there is no harm.”

She had not, however, donned her dressing-gown, and her arms and

shoulders, as white and delicate as milk, were bare. Sitting attentively before the looking-glass, she was rolling her golden hair in little curls.

“So you are making yourself beautiful again to-night,” said Octave, smiling.

“Yes, for it is the only amusement I have,” replied she. “It occupies me. You know I have never been a good housewife; and, now that Gasparine will be here—Eh? don’t you think that curl suits me? It consoles me a little when I am well dressed and I feel that I look pretty.”

As the dinuer was not ready, he told her of his having left “The Ladies’ Paradise.” He invented a story about some other situation he had long been on the look-out for; and thus reserved to himself a pretext for explaining his intention of taking his meals elsewhere. She was surprised that he could give up a berth which held out great promises for the future. But she was busy at her glass, and did not catch all he said.

“Look at this red place behind my ear. Is it a pimple?”

He had to examine the nape of her neck, which she held toward him with her grand tranquillity of a sacred woman.

“It is nothing,” said he. “You must have dried yourself too roughly.”

And, when he had assisted her to put on her dressing-gown of blue satin embroidered with silver, they passed into the diningroom. As early as the soup, Octave’s departure from the Hédouins’ was discussed. Campardon did not repress his surprise, whilst Gasparine smiled faintly; they were quite at their ease together.

At dessert Gasparine sharply rated Lisa, who had answered her mistress rudely respecting a piece of cheese that was missing. The maid became very humble. Gasparine had already taken the household arrangements in hand, and had mastered the servants; with a word, she could make Victoire herself quake amongst her saucepans. So that Rose looked at her gratefully with moist eyes; she was respected, now that her cousin was there, and her longing was to get her also to leave “The Ladies’ Paradise,” and take charge of Angèle’s education.

“Come,” murmured she, caressingly, “there is quite enough to occupy you here. Angèle, implore your cousin, tell her how pleased you will be.”

The young girl implored her cousin, whilst Lisa nodded her head approvingly. But Campardon and Gasparine remained grave; no, no, they must wait, one should not take a leap in life without having something to hold on to.

The evenings in the drawing-room were now delightful. The architect had altogether given up going out. That evening he had arranged to hang some

engravings, which had come back from the framer, in Gasparine's room. Then Octave, finding himself alone with Rose, resumed his story, and explained that at the end of the month he would be obliged to take his meals away from them. She seemed surprised, but her thoughts were elsewhere; she returned at once to her husband and her cousin, whom she heard laughing.

"Ah! how it amuses them to hang those pictures! What would you have! Achille no longer stays out; for a fortnight past he has not left me of an evening. No, no more going to the café, no more business meetings, no more appointments; and you remember how anxious I used to be, when he was out after midnight! Ah! it is a great ease to my mind now! I at least have him by me."

"No doubt, no doubt," murmured Octave.

And she continued speaking of the economy of the new arrangement. Everything went on better in the house, they laughed from morning to night.

"When I see Achille pleased," resumed she, "I am satisfied." Then, returning to the young man's affairs, she added:

"So you are really going to leave us? You should stay, though, as we are all going to be so happy."

He recommenced his explanations. She comprehended, and lowered her eyes: the young fellow would indeed interfere with their family effusions, and she herself felt a certain relief at his departure, no longer requiring him, moreover, to keep her company of an evening. He had to promise to come and see her very often.

"There you are, Mignon, supplicating Heaven!" cried Campardon joyously. "Wait a moment, cousin; I will help you down."

They heard him take her in his arms and place her somewhere. There was a short silence, and then a faint laugh. But the architect was already entering the drawing-room; and he held his hot cheek to his wife.

"It is done, my duck. Kiss your old pet for working so well." But the architect suddenly became virtuously indignant. He had just noticed that, instead of studying her Scripture history, the child was reading the "Gazette de France," lying on the table.

"Angèle," said he, severely, "what are you doing? This morning, I crossed out that article with a red pencil. You know very well that you are not to read what is crossed out."

"I was reading beside it, papa," replied the young girl.

All the same, he took the paper away from her, complaining in low tones to

Octave of the demoralization of the press. That number contained the report of another abominable crime. If families could no longer admit the “Gazette de France,” then what paper could they take in? And he was raising his eyes to heaven, when Lisa announced the Abbé Manduit.

“Ah! yes,” observed Octave, “he asked me to tell you he was coming.”

The priest entered smiling. As the architect had forgotten to take off his paper cross, he stammered in the presence of that smile. The Abbé Manduit happened to be the person whose name was kept a secret and who had the matter in hand.

“The ladies did it,” murmured Campardon, preparing to take the cross off. “They are so fond of a joke.”

“No, no, keep it,” exclaimed the priest, very amiably. “It is well where it is, and we will replace it by a more substantial one.”

He at once asked after Rose’s health, and greatly approved Gasparine’s coming to live with one of her relations. Single young ladies ran so many risks in Paris! He said these things with all his good priest’s unction, though fully aware of the real state of affairs.

When the Abbé Manduit appeared, Octave had wished the Cam-pardons good evening. As he crossed the ante-room, he heard Angèle’s voice in the now dark dining-room, she having also made her escape.

“Was it about the butter that she was kicking up such a row?” asked she.

“Of course,” answered another voice, which was Lisa’s. “She’s as spiteful as can be. You saw how she went on at me at dinner time. But I don’t care a fig! One must pretend to obey, with a person of that sort, but that doesn’t prevent our amusing ourselves all the same!”

Then, Angèle must have thrown her arms round Lisa’s neck, for her voice was drowned in the servant’s bosom.

“Yes, yes. And, afterward, so much the worse! it’s you I love!”

Octave was going up to bed, when a desire for fresh air brought him down again. It was not more than ten o’clock, he would stroll as far as the Palais-Royal. Now, he was single again: both Valérie and Madame Hédouin had declined to have anything to do with his heart, and he had been too hasty in restoring Marie to Jules, the only woman he had succeeded in conquering, and without having done anything for it.

As he was placing his foot on the pavement, a woman’s voice called to him; and he recognized Berthe at the door of the silk warehouse, the shutters of which were being put up by the porter.

“Is it true, Monsieur Mouret?” asked she, “have you really left ‘The Ladies’ Paradise?’”

He was surprised that it was already known in the neighborhood.

The young woman had called her husband. As he intended speaking to Monsieur Mouret on the morrow, he might just as well do so then. And Auguste abruptly offered Octave in a sour way a berth in his employ. The young man, taken unawares, hesitated and was on the point of refusing, thinking of the small importance of the house. But he caught sight of Berthe’s pretty face, as she smiled at him with her air of welcome, with the gay glance he had already twice encountered, on the day of his arrival and the day of the wedding.

“Well! yes,” said he resolutely.

CHAPTER X.

Then, Octave found himself brought into closer contact with the Duveyriers. Often, when Madame Duveyrier returned from a walk, she would come through her brother’s shop, and stop to talk a minute with Berthe; and, the first time that she saw the young man behind one of the counters, she amiably reproached him for not keeping his word, reminding him of his long-standing promise to come and see her one evening, and try his voice at the piano. She wished to give a second performance of the “Benediction of the Daggers,” at one of her first Saturdays at home of the coming winter, but with two extra tenors, something very complete.

“If it does not interfere with your arrangements,” said Berthe one day to Octave, “you might go up to my sister-in-law’s after dinner. She is expecting you.”

She maintained toward him the attitude of a mistress, simply polite.

“The fact is,” he observed, “I intended arranging these shelves this evening.”

“Do not trouble about them,” resumed she, “there are plenty of people here to do that. I give you your evening.”

Toward nine o’clock, Octave found Madame Duveyrier awaiting him in her grand white and gold drawing-room. Everything was ready, the piano open, the candles lit. A lamp placed on a small round table beside the instrument only imperfectly lighted the room, one half of which remained in shadow. Seeing the young woman alone, he thought it proper to ask after

Monsieur Duveyrier. She replied that he was very well; his colleagues had selected him to report on a very grave affair, and he had just gone out to obtain certain information respecting it.

“You know; the affair of the Rue de Provence,” said she simply.

“Ah! he has that in hand!” exclaimed Octave.

It was a scandal which was the talk of all Paris, quite a clandestine prostitution, young girls of fourteen procured for high personages. Clotilde added:

“Yes, it gives him a great deal of work. For a fortnight past all of his evenings have been taken up with it.”

“No doubt! for he too has the cure of souls,” murmured he, embarrassed by her clear glance.

“Well! sir, shall we begin?” resumed she. “You will excuse my importunity, will you not? And open your lungs, display all your powers, as Monsieur Duveyrier is not here. You, perhaps, heard him boast that he did not like music.”

She put such contempt into the words, that he thought it right to risk a faint laugh. Moreover, it was the sole bitter feeling which at times escaped her before other people with respect to her husband, when exasperated by his jokes on her piano, she who was strong enough to hide the hatred and the physical repulsion with which he inspired her.

“How can one help liking music?” remarked Octave with an air of ecstasy, so as to make himself agreeable.

Then she seated herself on the music-stool. A collection of old tunes was open on the piano. She had already selected an air out of “Zémire and Azor,” by Grétry. As the young man could only just manage to read his notes, she made him go through it first in a low voice. Then she played the prelude, and he sang the first verse.

“Perfect!” cried she with delight, “a tenor, there is not the least doubt of it, a tenor! Pray continue, sir.”

Octave, feeling highly flattered, gave out the two other verses. She was beaming. For three years past she had been seeking for one! And she told him of all her vexations, Monsieur Trublot, for instance; for it was a fact, the causes of which were worth studying, that there were no longer any tenors among the young men of society: no doubt it was owing to tobacco.

“Be careful, now!” resumed she, “we must put some expression into it. Begin it boldly.”

Her cold face assumed a languid expression, her eyes turned toward him with an expiring air. Thinking that she was warming, he became more animated also, and considered her charming.

“You will get along very well,” said she. “Only, accentuate the time more. See, like this.”

And she herself sang, repeating quite twenty times: “More trembling than you,” bringing out the notes with the rigor of a sinless woman, whose passion for music was not more than skin deep in her mechanism. Her voice rose little by little, filling the room with shrill cries, when they both suddenly heard some one exclaiming loudly behind their backs:

“Madame! madame!”

She started, and, recognizing her maid Clémence, exclaimed:

“Eh? what?”

“Madame, your father has fallen with his face in his papers, and he doesn’t move. We are so frightened.”

Then, without exactly understanding, and greatly surprised, she quitted the piano and followed Clémence. Octave, who was uncertain whether to accompany her, remained walking about the drawing-room. However, after a few minutes of hesitation and embarrassment, as he heard people rushing about and calling out distractedly, he made up his mind, and, crossing a room that was in darkness, he found himself in Monsieur Vabre’s bedchamber.

“He is in a fit,” said Octave. “He must not be left there. We must get him onto his bed.”

But Madame Duveyrier was losing her head. Emotion was little by little seizing upon her cold nature. She kept repeating:

“Do you think so? do you think so? O good heavens! O my poor father!”

Hippolyte, a prey to an uneasy feeling, to a visible repugnance to touch the old man, who might go off in his arms, did not hurry himself. Octave had to call to him to help. Between them they laid him on the bed.

“Bring some warm water!” resumed the young man, addressing Julie. “Wipe his face.”

Now, Clotilde became angry with her husband. Ought he to have been away? What would become of her if anything happened?

“To leave me alone like this!” continued Clotilde. “I don’t know, but there must be all sorts of affairs to settle. O my poor father!”

“Would you like me to inform the other members of the family?” asked

Octave. “I can fetch your brothers. It would be prudent.” She did not answer. Two big tears swelled her eyes, whilst Julie and Clémence tried to undress the old man.

“Madame,” observed Clémence, “one side of him is already quite cold.”

This increased Madame Duveyrier’s anger. She no longer spoke, for fear of saying too much before the servants. Her husband did not, apparently, care a button for their interests! Had she only been acquainted with the law! And she could not remain still; she kept walking up and down before the bed. Octave, whose attention was diverted by the sight of the tickets, looked at the formidable apparatus which covered the table; it was a big oak box, filled with a series of cardboard tickets, scrupulously sorted, the stupid work of a lifetime. Just as he was reading on one of these tickets: “‘Isidore Charbotel;’ ‘Exhibition of 1857,’ ‘Atalanta;’ ‘Exhibition of 1859,’ ‘The Lion of Androcles;’ ‘Exhibition of 1861,’ ‘Portrait of Monsieur P——-,’” Clotilde went and stood before him and said resolutely, in a low voice:

“Go and fetch him.”

And, as he evinced his surprise, she seemed, with a shrug of her shoulders, to cast off the story about the report of the affair of the Rue dc Provence, one of those eternal pretexts which she invented for her acquaintances. She let out everything in her emotion.

“You know, Rue de la Cerisaie. All our friends know it.”

He wished to protest.

“I assure you, madame———-”

“Do not stand up for him!” resumed she. “I am only too pleased; he can stay there. Ah! good heavens! if it were not for my poor father!”

Octave bowed. Julie was wiping Monsieur Vabre’s eye with the corner of a towel; but the ink had dried, and the smudge remained in the skin, which was marked with livid streaks. Madame Duvey-rier told her not to rub so hard; then she returned to the young man, who was already at the door.

“Not a word to any one,” murmured she. “It is needless to upset the house. Take a cab, call there, and bring him back in spite of everything.”

When he had gone, she sank onto a chair beside the patient’s pillow. He had not recovered consciousness; his breathing alone, a deep and painful breathing, troubled the mournful silence of the chamber. Then, the doctor not arriving, finding herself alone with the two servants, who stood by with frightened looks, she burst out into a terrible fit of sobbing, in a paroxysm of deep grief.

It was at the Café Anglais that uncle Bachelard had invited Duveyrier to dine, without any one knowing why, perhaps for the pleasure of treating a counselor, and of showing him that tradespeople knew how to spend their money. He had also invited Trublot and Gueulin—four men and no women—for women do not know how to eat; they interfere with the truffles, and spoil digestion.

“Drink away! drink away, sir!” he kept saying to Duveyrier; “when wines are good they never intoxicate. It’s the same with food; it never does one harm so long as it’s delicate.”

He, however, was careful. On this occasion he was posing for the gentleman, shaved and brushed up, and with a rose in his buttonhole, restraining himself from breaking the crockery, which he was in the habit of doing. Trublot and Gueulin eat of everything. The uncle’s theory seemed the right one, for Duveyrier, who suffered a great deal from his stomach, had drank considerably, and had returned to the crayfish salad, without feeling the least indisposed, the red blotches on his face merely assuming a purple hue.

Then, when the coffee had been served, with some liquors and cigars, and all the attendants had withdrawn, uncle Bachelard suddenly leaned back in his chair and heaved a sigh of satisfaction.

“Ah!” declared he, “one is comfortable.”

Trublot and Gueulin, also leaning back in their chairs, opened their arms.

“Completely!” said the one.

“Up to the eyes!” added the other.

Duveyrier, who was puffing, nodded his head, and murmured:

“Oh! the crayfish!”

All four looked at each other and chuckled. Their skins were well-nigh bursting, and they were digesting in the slow and selfish way of four worthy citizens who had just had a tuckout away from the worries of their families. It had cost a great deal; no one had partaken of it with them; there was no girl there to take advantage of their emotion; and they unbuttoned their waistcoats, and laid their stomachs as it were on the table. With eyes half-closed, they even avoided speaking at first, each one absorbed in his solitary pleasure. Then, free and easy, and whilst congratulating themselves that there were no women present, they placed their elbows on the table, and, with their excited faces close together, they did nothing but talk incessantly of them.

“As for myself, I am disabused,” declared uncle Bachelard. “It is after all far preferable to be virtuous.”

This conversation tickled Duveyrier’s fancy. He was sipping kummel, whilst sharp twinges of sensuality kept shooting across his stiff, magisterial face.

“For my part,” said he, “I cannot bear vice. It shocks me. Now, to be able to love a woman, one must esteem her, is it not so? Love could not have a nobler mission. In short, a virtuous mistress, you understand me? Then, I do not deny I might succumb.”

“Virtuous mistresses! but I have had no end of them!” cried Bachelard. “They are a far greater nuisance than the others; and such sluts too! Wenches who, behind your back, lead a life fit to give you every possible ailment! Take, for instance, my last, a very respectable-looking little lady, whom I met at a church door. I set her up in business at Les Ternes as a milliner, just to give her a position. She never had a single customer, though. Well, sir, believe me or not as you like, but she had the whole street to sleep with her.”

Gueulin was chuckling, whilst his carroty hair bristled more than usual, and his forehead was bathed in perspiration from the heat of the candles. He murmured, as he sucked his cigar:

“And the other, the tall one at Passy, who had a sweet-stuff shop. And the other, she who had a room over there, with her outfits for orphan children. And the other, the captain’s widow, you surely remember her! she used to show the mark of a sword-thrust on her body. All, uncle, all of them played the fool with you! Now, I may tell you, may I not? Well! I had to defend myself one night against the one with the sword-thrust. She wanted to, but I was not such a fool! One never knows what such women may lead a man to!”

Bachelard seemed annoyed. He recovered his good humor, however, and, blinking his heavy eyelids, said:

“My little fellow, you can have them all; I have something far better.”

And he refused to explain himself further, delighted at having awakened the others’ curiosity. Yet he was burning to be indiscreet, to let them imagine what a treasure he possessed.

“A young girl,” said he at length, “and a genuine one, on my word of honor.”

“Impossible!” cried Trublot, “Such things no longer exist.”

“Of good family!” asked Duveyrier.

“Of most excellent family,” affirmed the uncle. “Imagine something stupidly chaste. A mere chance. She submitted quite innocently. She has no idea of anything even now.”

Gueulin listened to him in surprise; then, making a skeptical gesture, murmured:

“Ah! yes, I know.”

“What? you know!” said Bachelard angrily. “You know nothing at all, my little fellow; no one knows anything. She is for yours truly. She is neither to be seen nor touched. Hands off!” And, turning to Duveyrier, he added:

“You will understand, sir, you who have feeling. It affects me so much going there, that when I come away I feel quite young again. In short, it is a cozy little nook for me, where I can recruit myself after all those hussies. And, if you only knew, she is so polite and so fresh, with a skin like a flower, and a figure not in the least thin, sir, but as round and firm as a peach!”

The counselor’s red blotches were almost bleeding through the rush of blood to his face. Trublot and Gueulin looked at the uncle; and they felt a desire to slap him as they beheld him with his set of false teeth, which were too white, and at the corners of which the saliva trickled.

Bachelard became quite tender-hearted, and resumed, licking the brim of his liquor glass with the tip of his tongue:

“After all, my sole dream is to make the child happy! But there, my pot-belly tells me I am getting old; I’m like a father to her. I give you my word! if I found a very good young fellow, I’d give her to him, oh! in marriage, not otherwise.”

“You would make two happy ones,” murmured Duveyrier sentimentally.

It was almost stifling in the small apartment. A glass of chartreuse that had been upset had made the tablecloth all sticky, and it was also covered with cigar-ash. The gentlemen were in want of some fresh air.

“Would you like to see her?” abruptly asked the uncle, rising from his seat.

They consulted one another with a glance. Well, yes, they were willing, if it could afford him any pleasure; and their affected indifference hid a gluttonous satisfaction at the thought of going and finishing their dessert with the old fellow’s little one.

“Let’s get along, uncle! Which is the way?”

Bachelard became quite grave again, tortured by his ridiculously vain longing to exhibit Fifi, and by his terror of being robbed of her. For a moment he looked to the left, then to the right, in an anxious way. At length he boldly said:

“Well! no, I won’t.”

And he obstinately adhered to his determination, without caring a straw for Trublot's chaff, nor even deigning to explain by some pretext his sudden change of mind. They therefore had to turn their steps in Clarisse's direction. As it was a splendid evening, they decided to walk all the way, with the hygienic idea of hastening their digestion. Then they started off down the Rue de Richelieu, pretty steady on their legs, but so full that they considered the pavements far too narrow.

The house in the Rue de la Cerisaie seemed asleep amidst the solitude and the silence of the street. Duveyrier was surprised at not seeing any lights in the third-floor windows. Trublot said, with a serious air, that Clarisse had no doubt gone to bed to wait for them; or perhaps, Gueulin added, she was playing a game of bézique in the kitchen with her maid. They knocked. The gas on the staircase was burning with the straight and immovable flame of a lamp in some chapel. Not a sound, not a breath. But, as the four men passed before the room of the doorkeeper, the latter hastily came out.

"Sir, sir, the key!"

Duveyrier stood stock-still on the first step.

"Is madame not there, then?" asked he.

"No, sir. And, wait a moment, you must take a candle with you."

As he handed him the candlestick, the doorkeeper allowed quite a chuckle of ferocious and vulgar jocosity to pierce through the exaggerated respect depicted on his pallid countenance. Neither of the two young men nor the uncle had said a word. It was in the midst of this silence, and with bent backs, that they ascended the stairs in single file, the interminable noise of their footsteps resounding up each mournful flight. At their head, Duveyrier, who was puzzling himself trying to understand, lifted his feet with the mechanical movement of a somnambulist; and the candle, which he held with a trembling hand, cast their four shadows on the wall, resembling in their strange ascent a procession of broken puppets.

On the third floor, a faintness came over him, and he was quite unable to find the key-hole. Trublot did him the service of opening the door. The key turned in the lock with a sonorous and reverberating noise, as though beneath the vaulted roof of some cathedral.

"Jupiter!" murmured he, "it doesn't seem as if the place was inhabited."

"It sounds empty," said Bachelard.

"A little family vault," added Gueulin.

They entered. Duveyrier passed first, holding high the candle. The ante-room was empty, even the hat-pegs had disappeared. The drawing-room and

the parlor were also empty: not a stick of furniture, not a curtain at the windows, not even a brass rod. Duveyrier stood as one petrified, first looking down at his feet, then raising his eyes to the ceiling, and then searchingly gazing at the walls, as though he had been seeking the hole through which everything had disappeared.

“What a clear out!” Trublot could not help exclaiming.

“Perhaps the place is going to be done up,” observed Gueulin, without as much as a smile. “Let us see the bed-room. The furniture may have been moved in there.”

But the bed-room was also bare, with that ugly and chilly bareness of plaster walls from which the paper has been torn off. Where the bedstead had stood, the iron supports of the canopy, also removed, left gaping holes; and, one of the windows having been left partly open, the air from the street filled the apartment with the humidity and the unsavoriness of a public square.

“My God! my God!” stuttered Duveyrier, at length able to weep, unnerved by the sight of the place where the friction of the mattresses had rubbed the paper off the wall.

Uncle Bachelard became quite paternal.

“Courage, sir!” he kept repeating. “The same thing happened to me, and I did not die of it. Honor is safe, damn it all!”

The counselor shook his head, and went into the dressing-room, and then into the kitchen. The evidence of the disaster increased. The piece of American cloth behind the washstand in the dressing-room had been taken down, and the hooks had been removed from the kitchen.

“No, that is too much, it is pure capriciousness!” said Gueulin, in amazement. “She might have left the hooks.”

“I can’t stand this any longer, you know,” Trublot ended by declaring, as they visited the drawing-room for the third time.

“Really! I would give ten sous for a chair.”

All four came to a halt, standing.

“When did you see her last?” asked Bachelard.

“Yesterday, sir!” exclaimed Duveyrier.

Gueulin wagged his head. By Jove! it had not taken long, it had been neatly done. But Trublot uttered an exclamation. He had just caught sight of a dirty collar and a damaged cigar on the mantelpiece.

“Do not complain,” said he, laughing, “she has left you a keepsake. It is

always something."

Duveyrier looked at the collar with sudden emotion. Then he murmured:

"Twenty-five thousand francs' worth of furniture, there was twenty-five thousand francs' worth! Well! no, no, it is not that which I regret!"

"You will not have the cigar?" interrupted Trublot. "Then, allow me to. It has a hole in it, but I can stick a cigarette paper over that."

He lighted it at the candle which the counselor was still holding, and, letting himself drop down against the wall, he added:

"So much the worse! I must sit down a while on the floor. My legs will not bear me any longer."

"I beg of you," at length said Duveyrier, "to explain to me where she can possibly be."

Bachelard and Gueulin looked at each other. It was a delicate matter. However, the uncle came to a manly decision, and he told the poor fellow everything, all Clarisse's goings-on, her continual escapades, the lovers she picked up behind his back, at each of their parties. She had no doubt gone off with the last one, big Payan, that mason of whom a Southern town wished to make an artist. Duveyrier listened to the abominable story with an expression of horror. He allowed this cry of despair to escape him:

"There is, then, no honesty left on earth!"

And suddenly opening his heart, he told them all he had done for her.

"Leave her alone!" exclaimed Bachelard, delighted with the counselor's misfortune, "she will humbug you again. There is nothing like virtue, understand! It is far better to take a little one devoid of malice, as innocent as the child just born. Then, there is no danger, one may sleep in peace."

Trublot meanwhile was smoking, leaning against the wall with his legs stretched out. He was gravely reposing, the others had forgotten him.

"If you particularly want it, I can find the address for you," said he. "I know the maid."

Duveyrier turned round, surprised at that voice which seemed to issue from the boards; and, when he beheld him smoking all that remained of Clarisse, puffing big clouds of smoke, in which he fancied he beheld the twenty-five thousand francs' worth of furniture evaporating, he made an angry gesture and replied:

"No, she is unworthy of me. She must beg my pardon on her knees."

"Hallo! here she is coming back!" said Gueulin, listening.

And some one was indeed walking in the ante-room, whilst a voice said: “Well! what’s up? is every one dead?” And Octave appeared. He was quite bewildered by the open doors and the empty rooms. But his amazement increased still more when he beheld the four men in the midst of the denuded drawing-room, one sitting on the floor, and the other three standing up, and only lighted by the meager candle which the counselor was holding, like a taper at church. A few words sufficed to inform him of what had occurred.

“It isn’t possible!” cried he.

“Did they not tell you anything, then, down-stairs?” asked Gueulin.

“No, nothing at all; the doorkeeper quietly watched me come up. Ah! so she’s gone! It does not surprise me. She had such queer hair and eyes!”

He asked some particulars, and stood talking a minute, forgetful of the sad news which he had brought. Then, turning abruptly toward Duveyrier, he said:

“By the way, it’s your wife who sent me to fetch you. Your father-in-law is dying.”

“Ah!” simply observed the counselor.

“Old Vabre!” murmured Bachelard. “I expected as much.”

“Pooh! when one gets to the end of one’s reel!” remarked Gueulin, philosophically.

“Yes, it’s best to take one’s departure,” added Trublot, in the act of sticking a second cigarette paper round his cigar.

The gentlemen at length decided to leave the empty apartment. Octave repeated he had given his word of honor that he would bring Duveyrier back with him at once, no matter what state he was in. The latter carefully shut the door, as though he had left his dead affections there; but, down-stairs, he was overcome with shame, and Trublot had to return the key to the doorkeeper. Then, outside on the pavement, there was a silent exchange of hearty hand-shakes; and, directly the cab had driven off with Octave and Duveyrier, Uncle Bachelard said to Gueulin and Trublot, as they stood in the deserted street:

“Jove’s thunder! I must show her to you.”

For a minute past he had been stamping about, greatly excited by the despair of that big noodle of a counselor, bursting with his own happiness, with that happiness which he considered due to his own deep malice, and which he could no longer contain.

“You know, uncle,” said Gueulin, “if it’s only to take us as far as the door again, and then to leave us——”

“No, Jove’s thunder! you shall see her. It will please me. True, it’s nearly midnight, but she shall get up if she’s in bed. You know, she’s the daughter of a captain, Captain Menu, and she has a very respectable aunt, born at Villeneuve, near Lille, on my word of honor! Messieurs Mardienne Brothers, of the Rue Saint-Sulpice, will give her a character. Ah! Jove’s thunder! we’re in need of it; you’ll see what virtue is!”

And he took hold of their arms, Gueulin on his right, Trublot on his left, putting his best foot forward as he started off in quest of a cab, to arrive there the sooner.

Meanwhile Octave briefly related to the counselor all he knew of Monsieur Vabre’s attack, without hiding that Madame Duveyrier was acquainted with the address of the Rue de la Cerraise. After a pause, the counselor asked, in a doleful voice:

“Do you think she will forgive me?”

Octave remained silent. The cab continued to roll along, in the obscurity lighted up every now and then by a ray from a gas-lamp. Just as they were reaching their destination Duveyrier, tortured with anxiety, put another question:

“The best thing for me to do for the present is to make it up with my wife; do you not think so?”

“It would, perhaps, be wise,” replied the young man, obliged to answer.

Then, Duveyrier felt the necessity of regretting his father-in-law. He was a man of great intelligence, with an incredible capacity for work. However, they would, very likely, be able to set him on his legs again. In the Rue de Choiseul, they found the street-door open, and quite a group gathered before Monsieur Gourd’s room. But they held their tongues, directly they caught sight of Duveyrier.

“Well?” inquired the latter.

“The doctor is applying mustard poultices to Monsieur Vabre,” replied Hippolyte. “Oh! I had such difficulty to find him!”

Up-stairs in the drawing-room, Madame Duveyrier came forward to meet them. She had cried a great deal, her eyes sparkled beneath the swollen lids. The counselor, full of embarrassment, opened his arms; and he embraced her as he murmured:

“My poor Clotilde!”

Surprised at this unusual display of affection, she drew back. Octave had kept behind; but he heard the husband add, in a low voice:

“Forgive me, let us forget our grievances on this said occasion. You see, I have come back to you, and for always. Ah! I am well punished!”

She did not reply, but disengaged herself. Then, resuming in Octave’s presence her attitude of a woman who desires to ignore everything, she said:

“I should not have disturbed you, my dear, for I know how important that inquiry respect the Rue de Provence is. But I was all alone, I felt that your presence was necessary. My poor father is lost. Go and see him: you will find the doctor there.”

When Duveyrier had gone into the next room, she drew near to Octave, who, so as not to appear to be listening to them, was standing in front of the piano.

“Was he there?” asked she briefly.

“Yes, madame.”

“Then, what has happened? what is the matter with him?”

“The person has left him, madame, and taken all the furniture away with her. I found him with nothing but a candle between the bare walls.”

Clothilde made a gesture of despair. She understood. An expression of repugnance and discouragement appeared on her beautiful face. It was not enough that she had lost her father, it seemed as though this misfortune was also to serve as a pretext for a reconciliation with her husband! She knew him well, he would be forever after her, now that there would be nothing elsewhere to protect her; and, in her respect for every duty, she trembled at the thought that she would be unable to refuse to submit to the abominable service. For an instant, she looked at the piano. Bitter tears came to her eyes, as she simply said to Octave:

“Thank you, sir.”

They both passed in turn into Monsieur Vabre’s bed-chamber. Duveyrier, looking very pale, was listening to Doctor Juillerat, who was giving him some explanations in a low voice. It was an attack of serous apoplexy; the patient might last till the morrow, but there was not the slightest hope of his recovery. Clotilde just at that moment entered the room; she heard this giving over of the patient, and dropped into a chair, wiping her eyes with her handkerchief, already soaked with tears, and twisted up, and almost reduced to a pulp. She, however, found strength to ask the doctor if her poor father would recover consciousness. The doctor had his doubts; and, as though he had penetrated the object of the question, he expressed the hope that Monsieur Vabre had long since put his affairs in order.

“I presume the family knows what has happened,” said Doctor Juillerat.

“Well! no,” murmured Clotilde. “I received such a shock! My first thought was to send Monsieur Mouret for my husband.”

Duveyrier gave her another glance. Now they understood each other. He slowly approached the bed, and examined Monsieur Vabre, stretched out in his corpse-like stiffness, and whose immovable face was streaked with yellow blotches. One o’clock struck. The doctor talked of withdrawing, for he had tried all the usual remedies, and could do nothing more. He would call again early on the morrow. At length, he was going off with Octave, when Madame Duveyrier called the latter back.

“We will wait till to-morrow,” said she, “you can send Berthe to me under some pretext; I will also get Valérie to come, and they shall break the news to my brothers. Ah! poor things, let them sleep in peace this night! There is quite enough with our having to watch in tears.”

And she and her husband remained alone with the old man, whose death rattle chilled the chamber.

CHAPTER XI.

When Octave went down on the morrow at eight o’clock, he was greatly surprised to find the entire house acquainted with the attack of the night before, and the desperate condition of the landlord. The house, however, was not concerned about the patient: it was solely interested in what he would leave behind him.

The Pichons were seated before some basins of chocolate in their little dining-room. Jules called Octave in.

“I say, what a fuss there will be if he dies like that! We shall see something funny. Do you know if he has made a will?”

The young man, without answering, asked them where they had heard the news. Marie had learnt it at the baker’s; moreover, it crept from story to story, and even to the end of the street by means of the servants. Then, after slapping Lilitte, who was soaking her fingers in her chocolate, the young woman observed in her turn:

“Ah! all that money! If he only thought of leaving us as many sous as there are five franc pieces. But there is no fear of that!”

And, as Octave took his departure, she added:

“I have finished your books, Monsieur Mouret. Will you please take them

when convenient?”

He was hastening down-stairs, feeling anxious, as he recollected having promised Madame Duveyrier to send Berthe to her before anything was known of the matter, when, on the third floor, he came in contact with Campardon, who was going out.

“Well!” said the latter, “so your employer is coming in for something. I have heard that the old fellow has close upon six hundred thousand francs, besides this property. You see, he spent nothing at the Duveyriers’, and he had a good deal left of what he brought from Versailles, without counting the twenty and odd thousand francs received in rent from the house. Eh? it is a fine cake to share, when there are only three to partake of it!”

Whilst talking thus, he continued to go down behind Octave. But, on the second floor, they met Madame Juzeur, who was returning from seeing what her little maid, Louise, could be doing of a morning, taking over an hour to fetch four sous’ worth of milk. She entered naturally into the conversation, being very well informed.

“It is not known how he has settled his affairs,” murmured she in her gentle way. “There will perhaps be some bother.”

“Ah, well!” said the architect, gayly, “I should like to be in their shoes. It would not take long. One makes three equal shares, each takes his own, and there you are!”

Madame Juzeur leant over the balusters, then raised her head, and made sure that no one else was on the stairs. At length, lowering her voice, she observed:

“And if they did not find what they expected? There are rumors about.”

The architect opened his eyes wide with amazement. Then he shrugged his shoulders. Pooh! mere gossip! Old Vabre was a miser who hid his savings in worsted stockings. And he went off, as he had an appointment at Saint-Roch with the Abbé Manduit.

“My wife complains of you,” said he to Octave, looking back, after going down three stairs. “Call in and have a chat with her now and then.”

Madame Juzeur detained the young man a moment.

“And I, how you neglect me! I thought you loved me a little. When you come, I will let you taste a liquor from the West Indies, oh! something delicious!”

Octave at length entered the warehouse. The first person he beheld, seated at the cashier’s desk, was Madame Josserand under arms, polished up and

laced, and her hair already done. Close beside her, Berthe, who had no doubt come down in haste, in the charming deshabille of a dressing-gown, appeared to be very excited. But they stopped talking on catching sight of him, and the mother looked at him with a terrible eye.

“So, sir,” said she, “it is thus that you love the firm? You enter into the plots of my daughter’s enemies.”

He wished to defend himself, and state the facts of the case. But she prevented him from speaking, she accused him of having spent the night with the Duveyriers, looking for the will, to insert all sorts of things in it. And, as he laughed, asking what interest he could have had in doing such a thing, she resumed:

“Your own interest, your own interest. In short! sir, you should have hastened to inform us, as God was good enough to make you a witness of the occurrence. When one thinks that, had it not been for me, my daughter might still have been in ignorance of it! Yes, she would have been despoiled, had I not run down-stairs the moment I heard the news. Eh! your interest, your interest, sir, who knows? Though Madame Duveyrier is very faded, yet some people, not over particular, may still find her good enough, perhaps.”

“Oh! mamma!” said Berthe, “Clotilde, who is so virtuous!” But Madame Josserand shrugged her shoulders pityingly.

“Pooh! you know very well people will do anything for money!” Octave was obliged to relate to them all the circumstances of the attack. They exchanged glances: as the mother said, there had evidently been maneuvers. Clotilde was really too kind to wish to spare her relations’ emotions! However, they let the young man start on his work, though still having their doubts as to his conduct in the matter. Their lively explanation continued:

“And who will pay the fifty thousand francs agreed upon in the contract?” said Madame Josserand. “We are not likely to see a single one of them when he is dead and buried.”

“Oh! the fifty thousand francs!” murmured Berthe, in an embarrassed way. “You know he only agreed, as we did, to pay ten thousand francs every six months. The time is not up yet; the best thing is to wait.”

“Wait! wait till he comes back and brings them to you, I suppose! You great blockhead, do you want to be robbed? No, no! you must demand them at once out of the estate. As for us, we are still alive, thank goodness! It is not known whether we shall pay or not; but with him it is another thing; as he is dead, he must pay.”

And she made her daughter swear not to yield, for she had never given any

one the right to take her for a fool.

“Go up too!” she ended by exclaiming, in a cry from her heart: “Auguste is too weak; they are sure to be taking him in again!” Then Berthe went off up-stairs. Octave, who was arranging the display in the window, had listened to what they said. When he found himself alone with Madame Josserand, and saw her moving in the direction of the door, he asked her, in the hope of a holiday, whether it would not be proper to close the warehouse.

“Whatever for?” inquired she. “Wait till he is dead. It is not worth while losing a day’s sale.”

Then, as he folded a remnant of poppy-colored silk, she added, to soften the harshness of her words:

“Only, you may as well, I think, not put any red in the window.”

Up on the first floor, Berthe found Auguste with his father. The room had in no way changed since the day before; it was still dampish and silent, save for the same long and painful death-rattle. The old man on the bed continued perfectly rigid, in a complete annihilation of all feeling and movement.

“Ah! my dear, what a frightful visitation!” said Clotilde, going up to and embracing Berthe.

“Why not have informed us of it?” asked the latter, with her mother’s affected pout. “We were there to help you to bear it.” Auguste, with a glance, begged her to keep silent. The moment for quarreling had not arrived. They could wait. Doctor Juillerat, who had already been once, was to call again; but he still gave no hope; the patient would not live through the day. Auguste was informing his wife of this, when Théophile and Valérie entered in their turn. Clotilde at once advanced to meet them, and repeated, as she embraced Valérie:

“What a frightful visitation, my dear!”

But Théophile was in a state of great excitement. “So, now,” said he, without even lowering his voice, “when one’s father is dying one only hears of it through the charcoal dealer. Did you, then, require time to rifle his pockets?”

Duveyrier rose up indignantly. But Clotilde motioned him aside, whilst she answered her brother very gently:

“Unhappy man! is our father’s death agony not even sacred to you? Look at him; behold your work! yes, it is you who have brought him to this, by refusing to pay your overdue rent.”

Valérie burst out laughing.

“Come,” said she, “you are not speaking seriously.”

“What! not speaking seriously!” resumed Clotilde, filled with indignation. “You know how much he liked to collect his rents. Had you really wished to kill him, you could not have acted in a better way.”

And they came to high words; they reciprocally accused one another of wishing to lay hands on the estate, when Auguste, still sullen and calm, requested them to recollect where they were.

“Keep quiet! You have plenty of time. It is not decent at such a moment.”

Then the others, admitting the justice of this observation, settled themselves around the bed. A deep silence ensued; again nothing but the death rattle was heard in the moist atmosphere of the room. Berthe and Auguste were at the dying man’s feet; Valérie and Théophile, being the last comers, had been obliged to seat themselves at the table, some distance off; whilst Clotilde was at the head of the bed, with her husband behind her; and she had pushed her son Gustave, whom the old man adored, close up against the edge of the mattresses. They now all looked at one another, without exchanging a word. But the bright eyes, the tightly-compressed lips, told of the hidden thoughts, the surmises full of anxiety and irritation, which were passing in the pale-faced heads of those next-of-kin, with their red and swollen eyelids. The sight of the collegian, so close to the bed, especially exasperated the two young couples; for it was self-evident that the Duveyriers were counting on Gustave’s presence to influence the grandfather’s affections if he recovered consciousness.

Moreover, this maneuver was a proof that in all probability no will existed; and the Vabres glanced covertly at the old iron safe which the retired notary had brought with him from Versailles and had had fixed in the wall of his bed-chamber. He had a mania for shutting up all sorts of things inside it. No doubt the Duveyriers had hastened to ransack this safe during the night. Théophile had the idea of laying a trap for them to compel them to speak.

“I say,” he at length went and whispered in the counselor’s ear, “suppose we send for the notary. Papa may wish to alter his will.”

Duveyrier did not at first hear. As he felt excessively bored in that room, he had allowed his thoughts all through the night to revert to Clarisse. The wisest thing would decidedly be to make it up with his wife; but then the other was so funny, when she threw her chemise over her head, with the gesture of a street-arab; and with his vague glance fixed on the dying man, he still had visions of her, and would have given everything to have had her with him again. Théophile was obliged to repeat his question.

“I have questioned Monsieur Renandin,” at length answered the counselor in a bewildered way. “There is no will.”

“But here?”

“No more here than at the notary’s.”

Théophile looked at Auguste; was it not sufficiently evident? the Duveyriers had searched everything. Clotilde saw the glance, and was greatly irritated with her husband. What was the matter with him? was grief sending him to sleep? And she added:

“Papa has no doubt done what he thought right. We shall learn it only too soon, heaven knows!”

Meanwhile, the hours passed away. At eleven o’clock they had a diversion, Doctor Juillerat again calling. The patient’s condition was becoming worse and worse, it was now even doubtful whether he would be able to recognize his children before dying. And the sobbing started afresh when Clémence announced the Abbe Mand-uit. Clotilde, who rose to meet him, was the first to receive his consolations. He appeared to be deeply affected by the family visitation; he had an encouraging word for each. Then, with much tact, he talked of the rites of religion, insinuating that they should not let that soul pass away without the succor of the Church.

“I had thought of it,” murmured Clotilde.

But Théophile raised objections. The father was not at all religious; he had at one time very advanced ideas, for he was a reader of Voltaire’s works; in short, the best thing was to do nothing, as they were unable to consult him. In the heat of the discussion, he even added:

“It is as though you brought the sacrament to that piece of furniture.”

The three women compelled him to leave off. They were all trembling with emotion, and said that the priest was right, whilst they excused themselves for not having sent for him before, through the confusion in which the catastrophe had plunged them. Monsieur Vabre would certainly have consented had he been able to speak, for he had a horror of acting different to other people. Moreover, the ladies would take the responsibility on their own shoulders.

“It should be done, if only on account of the neighbors,” repeated Clotilde.

“No doubt,” said the Abbé Manduit, who hastened to give his approval. “A man of your father’s position should set a good example.”

Auguste had no opinion either way. But Duveyrier, aroused from his recollections of Clarisse, whose way of putting on her stockings with one leg in the air he was just then thinking of, energetically demanded the sacraments. They were absolutely necessary; not a member of the family should die without them. Doctor Juillerat, who had discreetly moved on one side, hiding his freethinker’s disdain, then went up to the priest, and said familiarly to him,

in a whisper, the same as to a colleague often encountered under similar circumstances:

“Be quick; you have no time to lose.”

The priest hastened to take his departure. He announced that he would bring the sacrament and the extreme unction, so as to be prepared for every emergency. And Théophile, in his obstinacy, murmured:

“Ah, well! so dying people are now made to receive the communion in spite of themselves!”

But they all at once experienced a great emotion. On regaining her place, Clotilde had found the dying man with his eyes wide open. She could not repress a faint cry; the others hastened to the bedside; and the old fellow’s glance slowly wandered round the circle, without the least movement of his head. Doctor Juillerat, with an air of surprise, came and bent over his patient, to follow this last crisis.

“Father, it is us; do you know us?” asked Clotilde.

Monsieur Vabre looked at her fixedly; then his lips moved, but not a sound came from them. They were all pushing one another, wishing to secure his last word. Valérie, who found herself right at the rear, and obliged therefore to stand on tip-toe, said, harshly:

“You are stifling him. Do move away from him. If he desired anything, no one would be able to know.”

The others had to draw on one side. And Monsieur Vabre’s eyes were indeed looking round the room.

“He wants something, that is certain,” murmured Berthe.

“Here’s Gustave,” said Clotilde. “You see him, do you not? He has come expressly from school to embrace you. Kiss your grandfather, my child.”

As the youngster drew back, frightened, she kept him there with her arm, whilst she waited a smile on the dying man’s distorted features. But Auguste, who had been watching his eyes, declared that he was looking at the table; no doubt he wished to write. This caused quite a shock. All tried to be first. They brought the table to the bedside, and fetched some paper, an inkstand, and a pen. Then they raised him, propping him up with three pillows. The doctor gave his consent to all this with a simple blink of the eyes.

“Give him the pen,” said Clotilde, quivering, and without leaving go of Gustave, whom she continued to hold toward him.

Then came a solemn moment. The relations, pressed round the bed, awaited anxiously. Monsieur Vabre, who did not appear to recognize any one,

had let the penholder drop from his fingers. For a moment his eyes wandered over the table, on which was the oak box full of tickets. Then, slipping from off his pillows, and falling forward like a piece of rag, he stretched out his arm in a final effort, and, plunging his hand among the tickets, he dabbled about in the happy manner of a baby playing with something dirty. He brightened up, and wished to speak, but he could only lisp one syllable, ever the same, one of those syllables into which brats in swaddling-clothes put a whole host of sensations.

“Ga—ga—ga—ga——-”

It was to the work of his life, to his great statistical study, that he was bidding good-bye. Suddenly his head rolled over. He was dead.

“I expected as much,” murmured the doctor, who, seeing how scared the relations were, carefully laid him out, and closed his eyes.

Was it possible? Auguste had removed the table; they all remained chilled and dumb. Soon their sobs burst forth. Well! as there was nothing more to hope for, they would manage all the same to share the fortune. And Clotilde, after hastening to send Gustave away, to spare him the frightful spectacle, gave free vent to her tears, her head leaning against Berthe, who was sobbing the same as Valérie. Standing at the window, Théophile and Auguste were roughly rubbing their eyes. But Duveyrier, especially, exhibited a most extraordinary amount of grief, stifling heart-rending sobs in his handkerchief. No, really, he could not live without Clarisse; he would rather die at once, like the other one there; and the loss of his mistress, coming in the midst of all this mourning, caused him immense bitterness.

“Madame,” announced Clémence, “here are the sacraments.”

Abbé Manduit appeared on the threshold. Behind his shoulder, one caught a glimpse of the face full of curiosity of a boy chorister. On beholding the display of grief, the priest questioned the doctor with a glance, whilst the latter extended his arms, as though to say it was not his fault. So, after mumbling a few prayers, Abbé Mand uit withdrew with an air of embarrassment, taking his paraphernalia along with him.

“It is a bad sign,” said Clémence to the other servants, standing in a group at the door of the ante-room. “The sacraments are not to be brought for nothing. You will see they will be back in the house before another year goes by.”

Monsieur Vabre’s funeral did not take place till the day after the morrow. Duveyrier, all the same, had inserted in the circulars announcing his demise, the words, “provided with the sacraments of the Church.”

As the warehouse did not open on that day, Octave was free. This holiday delighted him, as, for a long time past, he had wished to put his room straight, alter the position of some of the furniture, and arrange his few books in a little bookcase he had bought second-hand. He had risen earlier than usual, and was just finishing what he was about toward eight o'clock on the morning of the funeral, when Marie knocked at the door. She had brought him back a heap of books.

"As you do not come for them," said she, "I am delighted to take the trouble to return them to you."

But she blushingly refused to enter, shocked at the idea of being in a young man's room. Their intimate relations had, moreover, completely ceased, in quite a natural manner, because he had not returned to her. And she remained quite as affectionate with him, always greeting him with a smile whenever they met.

Octave was very merry that morning. He wished to tease her.

"So it is Jules who won't let you come into my room?" he kept saying. "How do you get on with Jules now? Is he amiable? Yes, you know what I mean. Answer now!"

She laughed, and was not at all scandalized.

"Why, of course! whenever you take him out, you treat him to vermouth, and tell him things which send him home like a madman. Oh I he is too amiable. You know, I don't ask for so much. Still, I prefer it should take place at home than elsewhere, that's very certain."

She became serious again, and added:

"Here, I have brought you back your Balzac, I was not able to finish it. It's too sad. That gentleman has nothing but disagreeable things to tell one!"

When Octave was dressed, he remembered his promise to go and see Madame Campardon. He had two good hours to while away, the funeral being timed for eleven o'clock, and he thought of utilizing his morning in making a few calls in the house. Rose received him in bed: he apologized, fearing that he disturbed her; but she herself called him in. They saw so little of him, and she was so delighted at having some one to talk to.

"Ah! my dear child," declared she at once, "it is I who ought to be below, nailed up between four planks!"

Yes, the landlord was very lucky, he had finished with existence. And Octave, surprised at finding her a prey to such melancholy, asked her if she felt worse.

“No, thank you. It is always the same. Only there are times when I have had enough of it. Achille has been obliged to have a bed put up in his work-room, because it annoyed me whenever he moved in the night. And you know that Gasparine has yielded to our entreaties, and has left the drapery establishment. I am very grateful to her, she nurses me so tenderly! Ah! I could no longer live were it not for all these kind affections around me!”

Just then, Gasparine, with her submissive air of a poor relation, fallen to the rank of a servant, brought her a cup of coffee and some bread and butter. She helped her to raise herself, propped her up against some cushions, and served her on a little tray covered with a napkin. And Rose, dressed in a little loose embroidered jacket, ate with a hearty appetite, amidst the linen, edged with lace. She was quite fresh, looking younger than ever, and very pretty, with her white skin, and short, fair, curly hair.

“Oh! the stomach is all right, it is not the stomach that is ailing,” she kept saying, as she soaked her slices of bread and butter.

Two tears dropped into her coffee. Then Gasparine scolded her.

“If you cry, I shall call Achille. Are you not pleased? are you not sitting there like a queen?”

When Madame Campardon had finished, and she again found herself alone with Octave, she was quite consoled. Out of coquetry, she again returned to the subject of death, but with the gentle gayety of a woman idling away the morning between her warm sheets. Well! she would go off all the same, when her turn came; only, they were right, she was not unhappy, she could let herself live; for, in point of fact, they spared her all the main cares of life.

Then, as the young man rose to leave, she added:

“Now, do try and come oftener? Amuse yourself well, don’t let the funeral make you too sad. One dies a trifle every day, the thing is to get used to it.”

It was the little maid Louise who opened the door to Octave at Madame Juzeur’s, on the same landing. She ushered him into the drawing-room, looked at him a moment as she laughed in her bewildered sort of way, and then ended by stating that her mistress was just finishing dressing. Madame Juzeur appeared almost at once, dressed in black, and looking gentler and more refined than ever in her mourning.

“I felt sure you would call this morning,” sighed she with a weary air. “All night long I have been dreaming and seeing you. It is impossible to sleep, you understand, with that corpse in the house!”

And she admitted that she had got up three times in the night to look under the furniture.

“But you should have called me!” said the young man, gallantly. “Two in a bed are never frightened.”

She assumed a charming air of shame.

“Hold your tongue, it’s naughty!”

And she held her open hand over his lips. He was naturally obliged to kiss it. Then she spread the fingers out, laughing the while as though being tickled. But he, excited by this play, sought to push matters farther. He had caught hold of her, and was pressing her against his breast, without her making the least attempt to free herself.

In her determination there was a sort of jesuitical reserve, a fear of the confessional, a certainty of having her minor sins forgiven, whilst the great one would cause her no end of unpleasantness with her spiritual director. Then, there were other unavowed sentiments, her honor and self-esteem blended together, the coquetry of always having the advantage of men by never satisfying them, and a shrewd personal enjoyment in being smothered with kisses, without any after consequences. She liked this better, and she stuck to it; not a man could flatter himself of having succeeded with her, since her husband’s cowardly desertion. And she was a respectable woman!

“No, sir; not one! Ah! I can hold up my head, I can! What a number of wretched women, in my position, would have misconducted themselves!”

She pushed him gently aside, and rose from the sofa.

“Leave me. It worries me so much, does that corpse downstairs. It seems to me that the whole house smells of it.”

Meanwhile the time for the funeral was approaching. She wished to be at the church beforehand, so as not to see all the funeral trappings. But, while escorting him to the door, she recollected having mentioned her liquor; she therefore made him come in again, and fetched the bottle and a couple of glasses herself. It was a very sweet cream, with a perfume of flowers. When she had drank of it, a greediness, like that of a little girl, gave an air of languid delight to her face. She could have lived on sugar; vanilla and rose-scented sweeties had the same effect on her as an amorous caress.

“It will sustain us,” said she.

And, when he kissed her on the mouth in the ante-room, she closed her eyes. Their sugary lips seemed to be melting like sweetmeats.

It was close upon eleven o’clock. The coffin had not been brought down for exhibition, as the undertaker’s men; after wasting their time at a neighboring wine shop, had not finished putting up the hangings. Octave went to have a look out of curiosity. The porch was already closed in at the back by

a large black curtain, but the men had still to fix the hangings over the door. And outside on the pavement a group of maid-servants were gossiping with their noses in the air; whilst Hippolyte, dressed in deep mourning, hastened on the work with a dignified air.

Then Madame Gourd, who had remained in her arm-chair on account of her poor legs, rose painfully on her feet. As she was quite unable to get even as far as the church, Monsieur Gourd had told her to be sure and salute the landlord's corpse when it passed their room. It was a matter of duty. She went to the door with a mourning cap on her head, and curtesied as the coffin went by.

At Saint-Roch, Doctor Juillerat made a show of not going inside during the ceremony. There was, however, a tremendous crowd, and quite a group of men preferred to remain on the steps. The weather was very mild—a superb June day. And, as they were unable to smoke, their conversation turned upon politics. The principal door was left open, and at moments the sound of the organs issued from the church, which was draped in black and filled with lighted tapers, looking like so many stars.

"You know that Monsieur Thiers will stand for our district next year," announced Léon Josserand, in his grave way.

"Ah!" said the doctor. "Of course you will not vote for him—you are a Republican?"

The young man, whose opinions cooled down the more Madame Dambreville introduced him into good society, curtly answered:

"Why not? He is the declared adversary of the Empire."

Then a heated discussion ensued. Léon talked of tactics, whilst Doctor Juillerat stuck to principles. According to the latter, the middle classes had had their day; they were an obstacle in the road of the Revolution; now that they had acquired property, they barred the future with greater obstinacy and blindness than the old nobility.

"You are afraid of everything; you go in for the very worst reaction the moment you fancy yourself threatened!"

At this Campardon flew into a passion.

"I, sir, have been a Jacobin and an atheist like you. But, thank heaven! reason came to me. No, I will not even stoop to your Monsieur Thiers. A blunderhead—a man who amuses himself with chimeras!"

However, all the Liberals present—Monsieur Josserand, Octave, Trublot even, who did not care a straw, declared that they would vote for Monsieur Thiers. The official candidate was a great chocolate manufacturer of the Rue

Saint-Honoré, Monsieur Dewinck, whom they chaffed immensely. This Monsieur Dewinck had not even the support of the clergy, who were uneasy at his relations with the Tuileries. Campardon, decidedly gone over to the priests, greeted his name with reserve. Then, suddenly changing the subject, he exclaimed:

“Look here! the bullet which wounded your Garibaldi in the foot ought to have pierced his heart!”

And, so as not to be seen any longer in the company of these gentlemen, he entered the church, where the Abbé Manduit’s shrill voice was responding to the lamentations of the chanters.

“He sleeps there now,” murmured the doctor, shrugging his shoulders. “Ah! what a clean sweep ought to be made of it all!” The Roman question interested him immensely. Then, as Léon reminded them of the words of the Cabinet Minister to the Senate that the Empire had sprung from the Revolution, only in order to keep it within bounds, they returned to the coming elections. All were agreed upon the necessity of giving the Emperor a lesson; but they were beginning to be troubled with anxiety, they were already divided respecting the candidates, whose names gave rise to visions of the red specter at night time. Close to them Monsieur Gourd, dressed as correctly as a diplomatist, listened with supreme contempt to what they were saying; he was for the powers that be, pure and simple.

The service was drawing to a close; a long, melancholy wail which issued from the depths of the church, silenced them.

“Requiescat in pace!”

“Amen!”

Whilst the body was being lowered into the grave at the Père-Lachaise cemetery, Trublot, who had not let go of Octave’s arm, saw him exchange another smile with Madame Juzeur.

“Ah! yes,” murmured he, “the very unhappy little woman. Anything you like except that!”

Octave started. What! Trublot also! The latter made a gesture of disdain: no, not he, one of his friends. And, moreover, everybody who cared for that kind of thing.

“Excuse me,” added he. “As the old fellow’s now stowed away, I will go and render Duveyrier an account of something which I undertook to see after for him.”

The relations were retiring, silent and doleful. Then Trublot detained the counselor behind the others, to tell him that he had seen Clarisse’s maid; but

he did not know the new address, the maid having left Clarisse the day before she moved out, after a battle royal. It was the last hope which had flown. Duveyrier buried his face in his handkerchief, and rejoined the other relations.

That very evening quarrels commenced, The family found itself in the presence of a disaster. Monsieur Vabre, with that skeptical carelessness which notaries occasionally display, had not left any will. All the furniture was ransacked in vain, and the worst was that there was not a rap of the expected six or seven hundred thousand francs, neither money, title-deeds nor shares; they discovered merely seven hundred and thirty-four francs in ten-sou pieces, the hoard of a silly, paralytic old man. And undeniable traces, a note-book covered with figures, letters from stockbrokers, opened the eyes of the next-of-kin, pale with passion, to the old fellow's secret vice, an ungovernable passion for gambling, an unskillful and desperate craving for stock-jobbing, which he hid behind the innocent mania for his great statistical work. All had been engulfed, the money he had saved at Versailles, the rents of his house, even the sous he had sneaked from his children; and, during the latter years, he had gone to the point of mortgaging the house for one hundred and fifty thousand francs, at three different periods. The family stood thunder-stricken before the famous safe, in which it thought the fortune was locked up, but which simply contained a host of singular things, broken scraps picked up in the various rooms, pieces of old iron, fragments of glass, ends of ribbon, jumbled amidst wrecked toys stolen from young Gustave in bygone days.

Then the most violent recriminations were indulged in. They called the old fellow a swindler. It was disgraceful to fritter away his money thus, like a sly person who does not care a straw for any one, and who acts an infamous comedy in order to get people to continue to coddle him. The Duveyriers were inconsolable at having boarded him for twelve years, without once asking him for the eighty thousand francs of Clotilde's dowry, of which they had only had ten thousand francs. It was always ten thousand francs, rejoined Théophile, who had not had a sou of the fifty thousand promised him at the time of his marriage. But Auguste, in his turn, complained more bitterly still, reproaching his brother with having at least secured the interest of the money during three months; whilst he would never have a shadow of the fifty thousand francs inserted in his contract. And Berthe, incited by her mother, said some very unpleasant things with an indignant air at having entered a dishonest family. And Valérie, bemoaning the rent she had so long been stupid enough to pay the old chap, for fear of being disinherited, could not stomach it, regretting the money as though it had been used for an immoral purpose, employed in supporting debauchery.

For fully a fortnight all these stories formed an exciting topic of conversation to the occupants of the house. The long and short of it was that

there remained nothing but the building, estimated to be worth three hundred thousand francs; when the mortgage had been paid off, there would be about half that sum to divide between Monsieur Vabre's three children. It was fifty thousand francs for each; a meager consolation, but they would have to make the most of it. Théophile and Auguste had already decided what they would do with their shares. It was settled that the building should be sold. Duveyrier undertook all the arrangements in his wife's name. Then, on the day of the sale, after five or six bids, Maître Renandin abruptly knocked the house down to Duveyrier for the sum of one hundred and forty-nine thousand francs. There was not even sufficient to pay the mortgage. It was the final blow.

One never knew the particulars of the terrible scene which was enacted that same evening at the Duveyriers'. The solemn walls of the house stifled the sounds. Théophile most probably called his brother-in-law a scoundrel: he publicly accused him of having fought over the notary, by promising to get him appointed a justice of the peace. As for Auguste, he simply talked of the assize-court, where he wished to drag Maître Renandin, whose rogueries were the talk of the neighborhood. But, though one always ignored how it was that the relatives got to the point of knocking each other about, as rumor said they did, one heard the last words exchanged on the threshold, words which had an unpleasant ring in the respectable severity of the staircase.

"Dirty scoundrel!" shouted Auguste. "You sentence people to penal servitude who have not done nearly so much!"

Théophile, who came out last, held the door, whilst he almost choked with rage and coughing. .

"Robber! robber! Yes, robber! And you, too, Clotilde; do you hear? robber!"

He swung the door to so roughly that all the other doors on the staircase shook. Monsieur Gourd, who was listening, was quite alarmed. He darted a searching glance at the different floors, but he merely caught sight of Madame Juzeur's sharp profile. Arching his back, he returned on tiptoe to his room, where he resumed his dignified demeanor. One could deny everything. He, delighted, considered the new landlord in the right.

A few days later there was a reconciliation between Auguste and his sister. The whole house was amazed. Octave had been seen to go to the Duveyriers. The counselor, feeling anxious, had agreed not to charge any rent for the warehouse for five years, thus shutting one of the grumbler's mouths. When Théophile learnt this, he went with his wife and had another row, this time with his brother. So he had sold himself; he had gone over to the bandits! But Madame Josserand happened to be in the shop, and he was soon shut up. She plainly advised Valérie not to sell herself any more than her daughter had sold

herself. And Valérie had to beat a retreat, exclaiming:

“Then, we’re the only ones who get nothing? May the devil take me if I pay my rent! I’ve a lease. The convict won’t dare to turn us out. And as for you, my little Berthe, we’ll see one day what it’ll cost to have you!”

The doors banged again. The two families were sworn enemies for life. Octave, who had rendered some services, was present, and entered into the private affairs of the family. Berthe almost fainted in his arms, whilst Auguste was ascertaining whether the customers had overheard anything. Even Madame Josserand confided in the young man. She, moreover, continued to judge the Duveyriers very severely.

“The rent is something,” said she. “But I want the fifty thousand francs.”

“Of course, if you paid yours,” Berthe ventured to observe.

The mother did not appear to understand.

“You hear me, I want them! No, no; he must be laughing too much in his grave, that old scoundrel Vabre. I will not let him boast of having taken me in. What rascals there are in the world! to promise money one does not possess! Oh! they will pay you, my daughter, or I will dig him up again and spit in his face!”

CHAPTER XII.

One morning that Berthe happened to be at her mother’s, Adèle came and said with a scared look that Monsieur Saturnin was there with a man. Doctor Chassagne, the director of the Asile des Moulineaux, had already warned the parents several times that he would he unable to keep their son, for he did not consider him sufficiently mad. And, hearing of the signature which Berthe had obtained from her brother for the three thousand francs, dreading being compromised in the matter, he suddenly sent him home to his family.

It created quite a scare. Madame Josserand, who was afraid of being strangled, wished to argue with the man. But all she could get out of him was:

“The director told me to inform you that when one is sufficiently sensible to give money to one’s parents, one is sensible enough to live with them.”

“But he is mad, sir! he will murder us.”

“Anyhow, he is not too mad to sign his name!” answered the man, going off.

However, Saturnin came home very quietly, with his hands in his pockets, just as though he had returned from a stroll in the Tuileries gardens. He did not even allude to where he had been staying. He embraced his father, who was crying, and likewise heartily kissed his mother and his sister Hortense, whilst they both trembled tremendously. Then, when he caught sight of Berthe, he was indeed delighted, and caressed her with all the pretty ways of a little boy. She at once took advantage of his affected and confused condition to inform him of her marriage. He displayed no anger, not appearing at first to understand, as though he had forgotten his former fits of passion. But when she wished to return to her home down-stairs, he began to howl; he did not mind whether she was married or not, so long as she remained where she was, always with him and close to him. Then, seeing her mother's frightened looks as she ran and locked herself in another room, it occurred to Berthe to take Saturnin to live with her. They would be able to find him something to do in the basement of the warehouse, though it were only to tie up parcels.

That same evening, Auguste, in spite of his evident repugnance, acceded to Berthe's desire. They had scarcely been married three months and a secret disunion was already cropping up between them; it was the collision of two different constitutions and educations, a surly, fastidious and passionless husband, and a lively woman who had been reared in the hot-house of false Parisian luxury, who played fast and loose with existence, so as to enjoy it all alone like a spoiled and selfish child.

The husband's main revolts were on account of these too glaring costumes, the usefulness of which he was unable to see. Why dress himself thus above one's means and position in life? What need was there to spend in such a manner the money that was so necessary for his business? He generally said that when one sold silks to other women, one should wear woolens oneself.

As a result of matrimony, Berthe was gradually acquiring her mother's build. She was growing fatter, and resembled her more than she had ever done before. She was no longer the girl who did not seem to care about anything and who quietly submitted to the maternal cuffs; she had grown into a woman, who was rapidly becoming more obstinate every day, and who had formed the intention of making everything bow to her pleasure. Auguste looked at her at times, astounded at such a sudden change. At first, she had felt a vain joy in throning herself at the cashier's desk, in a studied costume of elegant simplicity. Then she had soon wearied of trade, suffering from constant want of exercise, threatening to fall ill, yet resigning herself to it all the same, but with the attitude of a victim who sacrifices her life to the prosperity of her home. And, from that moment, a struggle at every hour of the day had commenced between her and her husband. She shrugged her shoulders behind his back, the same as her mother did behind her father's; she went again

through all the family quarrels which had disturbed her youth, treating her husband as the gentleman who had simply got to pay, overwhelming him with that contempt for the male sex which was, so to say, the basis of her education.

“Ah! mamma was right!” she would exclaim after each of their quarrels.

Yet, in the early days, Auguste had tried to please her. He liked peace, he longed for a quiet little home, he already had his whims like an old man, and had got thoroughly into the habits of his chaste and economical bachelor life. His old lodging on the “entresol” no longer sufficing, he had taken the suite of apartments on the second floor, overlooking the courtyard, and thought himself sufficiently insane in spending five thousand francs on furniture. Berthe, at first delighted with her room upholstered in thuja and blue silk, had shown the greatest contempt for it after visiting a friend who had just married a banker. Then quarrels arose with respect to the servants. The young woman, used to the waiting of poor semi-idiotic girls, who had their bread even cut for them, insisted on their doing things which set them crying in their kitchens for afternoons together. Auguste, not particularly tender-hearted as a rule, having imprudently gone and consoled one, had to turn her out of the place an hour later on account of madame’s tears, and her request that he should, choose between her and that creature.

Afterward a wench had come who appeared to have made up her mind to stop. Her name was Rachel, and she was probably a Jewess, but she denied it, and let no one know whence she had sprung. She was about twenty-five years old, with harsh features, a large nose, and very black hair. At first, Berthe declared that she would not allow her to stop two days; then, in presence of her dumb obedience, her air of understanding and saying nothing, she had little by little allowed herself to be satisfied, as though she had yielded in her turn, and was keeping her for her good qualities, and also through an unavowed fear. Rachel, who submitted without a murmur to the hardest tasks, accompanied by dry bread, took possession of the establishment, with her eyes open and her mouth shut, like a servant of foresight biding the fatal and foreseen hour when her mistress would be able to refuse her nothing.

Meanwhile, from the ground floor of the house to the servants’ story, a great calm had succeeded to the emotions caused by Monsieur Vabre’s sudden death. The staircase had again become as peaceful as a church; not a breath issued from behind the mahogany doors, which were forever closed upon the profound respectability of the various homes. There was a rumor that Duveyrier had become reconciled with his wife. As for Valérie and Théophile, they spoke to no one, but passed by stiff and dignified. Never before had the house exhaled a more strict severity of principles. Monsieur Gourd, in his cap and slippers, wandered about it with the air of a solemn beadle.

One evening, toward eleven o’clock, Auguste continued going to the door of the warehouse, stretching his head out, and glancing up and down the street. An impatience which had increased little by little was agitating him. Berthe, whom her mother and sister had fetched away during dinner, without even giving her time to finish her dessert, had not returned home after an absence of more than three hours, and in spite of her distinct promise to be back by closing time.

“Ah! good heavens! good heavens!” he ended by saying, clasping his hands together, and making his fingers crack.

And he stood still before Octave, who was ticketing some remnants of silk on a counter. At that late hour of the evening, no customer ever appeared in that out-of-the-way end of the Rue de Choiseul. The shop was merely kept open to put things straight.

“Surely you know where the ladies have gone?” inquired Auguste of the young man.

The latter raised his eyes with an innocent and surprised air.

“But, sir, they told you. To a lecture.”

“A lecture, a lecture,” grumbled the husband. “Their lecture was over at ten o’clock. Respectable women should be home at this hour!”

Then he resumed his walk, casting side glances at his assistant, whom he suspected of being an accomplice of the ladies, or at least of excusing them. Octave, also feeling anxious, slyly observed him. He had never before seen him so nervously excited. What was it all about? And, as he turned his head, he caught sight of Saturnin at the other end of the shop cleaning a looking-glass with a sponge dipped in spirit. Little by little, the family set the madman to do housework, so that he might at least earn his food. But that evening Saturnin’s eyes sparkled strangely. He crept behind Octave, and said, in a very low voice:

“Beware of him. He has found a paper. Yes, he has a paper in his pocket. Look out, if it’s anything of yours!”

And he quickly resumed rubbing his glass. Octave did not understand. For some time past the madman had been displaying a singular affection for him, like the caress of an animal yielding to an instinct. Why did he speak to him of a paper? He had written no letter to Berthe; as yet he only ventured to look at her with tender glances, watching for an opportunity of making her some trifling present. It was a tactic he had adopted after deep reflection.

“Ten minutes past eleven!—damnation! damnation!” suddenly exclaimed Auguste, who never swore.

But at that very moment the ladies returned. Berthe had on a delicious dress, of pink silk, embroidered over with white jet, whilst her sister, always in blue, and her mother, always in mauve, still wore their glaring and laboriously obtained costumes, altered every season. Madame Josserand, broad and imposing, entered first, so as at once to nip in the hud the reproaches which all three had just foreseen, at a council held at the end of the street, her son-in-law would begin to make. She even deigned to explain that they were late through having loitered before the shop-windows. But Auguste, who was very pale, did not utter a single complaint; he answered curtly; it was evident he was keeping it in and waiting. For a moment longer, the mother, who felt the coming storm through her great knowledge of domestic broils, tried to intimidate him; then she was obliged to go up-stairs, merely adding:

“Good night, my child. And sleep well, you know, if you wish to live long.”

Directly she had gone, Auguste, losing all patience, forgetting that Octave and Saturnin were present, withdrew a crumpled paper from his pocket, and thrust it under Berthe’s nose, whilst he stammered out:

“What’s that?”

Berthe had not even had time to take her bonnet off. She turned very red.

“That?” said she; “why, it’s a bill!”

“Yes, a bill! and for false hair, too! Is it possible? for hair! as though you had none left on your head! But that’s not all. You’ve paid the bill; tell me, what did you pay it with?”

The young woman, becoming more and more confused, ended by replying:

“With my own money, of course!”

“Your money! but you haven’t any. Some one must have given you some, or else you have taken it from here. And, listen! I know all; you’re in debt. I will tolerate what you like; but no debts, understand me, no debts!—never!”

And he put into these words all the horror of a prudent fellow, all his commercial integrity, which consisted in never owing anything. For a long while he relieved his pent-up feelings, reproaching his wife with her constant goings-out, her visits all over Paris, her dresses, her luxury, which he could not provide for. Was it sensible for people in their position to stop out till eleven o’clock at night, with pink silk dresses embroidered with white jet? When one had such tastes as those, one should bring five hundred thousand francs as a marriage portion. Moreover, he knew who was the guilty one; it was the silly mother who brought up her daughters to squander fortunes, without even being able to give them so much as a chemise on their wedding-day.

“Don’t say a word against mamma!” cried Berthe, raising her head and thoroughly exasperated at last. “No one can reproach her with anything; she has done her duty. And your family—it’s a nice one! People who killed their father!”

Octave had buried himself in his tickets, and pretended not to hear. But he followed the quarrel from out of the corner of his eye, and especially watched Saturnin, who was all in a tremble, and had left off rubbing the glass, his fists clenched, his eyes glaring, ready to spring at the husband’s throat.

“Let us leave our families alone,” resumed the latter. “We have quite enough with our own home. Listen! you must alter your ways, for I will not give another sou for all this tomfoolery. Oh! I have quite made up my mind. Your place is here at the till, in a quiet dress, like a woman who has some respect for herself. And if you incur any more debts, we’ll see.”

Berthe was almost stifling, in presence of that brutal husband’s foot set down upon her habits, her pleasures, and her dresses. It was the extinction of all she loved, of all she had dreamed of when marrying. But, with a woman’s tactics, she hid the wound from which her heart was bleeding; she gave a pretext to the passion which was swelling her face, and repeated more violently than ever:

“I will not permit you to insult mamma!”

Auguste shrugged his shoulders.

“Your mother! Listen? you’re like her, you’re quite ugly, when you put yourself in that state. Yes, I scarcely know you; it is she herself. On my word, it quite frightens me!”

At this, Berthe calmed down, and, looking him full in the face, exclaimed:

“Only go and tell mamma what you were saying just now, and see how quickly she’ll show you the door.”

“Ah! she’ll show me the door!” yelled the husband, in a fury. “Well, then! I’ll go up and tell her at once.”

And he did indeed move toward the door. It was time he went, for Saturnin, with his wolf-like eyes, was treacherously advancing to strangle him from behind. The young woman had dropped into a chair, where she was murmuring, in a low voice:

“Ah! good heavens! I’d take care not to marry him, if I had my choice over again!”

Up-stairs, Monsieur Josserand, greatly surprised, answered the door, Adèle having just gone up to bed. As he was then preparing to pass the night in

addressing wrappers, in spite of the ill-health he had been lately complaining of, it was with a certain embarrassment, a shame at being found out, that he ushered his son-in-law into the dining-room; and he spoke of some pressing work, a copy of the last inventory of the Saint Joseph glass factory. But, when Auguste deliberately accused his daughter, reproaching her with running into debt, relating all the quarrel brought about by the matter of the false hair, the poor old man's hands were seized with a nervous trembling. Struck to the heart, he could only manage to stammer out a few words, whilst his eyes filled with tears. His daughter in debt, living as he had lived himself, in the midst of constant matrimonial squabbles! All the unhappiness of his life was then going to be gone through again in the person of his daughter! And another fear almost froze him on his chair: he dreaded every minute to hear his son-in-law broach the money question, demand the dowry, and call him a thief. No doubt the young man knew everything, as he burst in upon them at past eleven o'clock at night.

"My wife is going to bed," stammered he, his head in a whirl. "It is useless to disturb her, is it not? I am really amazed at the things you have told me! Poor Berthe is not wicked, though, I assure you. Be indulgent. I will speak to her. As for ourselves, my dear Auguste, we have done nothing, I think, which can displease you."

And he sounded him, so to speak, with his glance, already reassured, as he saw that he could know nothing as yet, when Madame Josserand appeared on the threshold of the bed-room. She was in her night-gown, all white and terrible. Auguste, though greatly excited, drew back. No doubt she had been listening at the door, for she commenced with a direct thrust.

"It's not your ten thousand francs you've come for, I suppose? There are still two months before the time they become due. And in two months' time we will pay them to you, sir. We don't die to get out of our engagements."

This superb assurance completely overwhelmed Monsieur Josserand. However, Madame Josserand continued dumbfounding her son-in-law by the most extraordinary declarations, without allowing him time to speak.

"You're by no means smart, sir. When you've made Berthe ill, you'll have to call in the doctor, and that will occasion some expense at the chemist's, and it will still be you who'll have to pay. A little while ago, I went off, when I saw that you were bent on making a fool of yourself. Do as you like! Beat your wife, my maternal heart is easy, for God is watching, and retribution is never long in coming!"

At length Auguste was able to state his grievances. He returned to the constant goings-out, the dresses, and was even so bold as to condemn the way in which Berthe had been brought up. Madame Josserand listened to him with

an air of supreme contempt. Then, when he had finished, she retorted:

“What you say is so absurd that it does not deserve an answer, my dear fellow! I’ve my conscience, and that suffices me. A man to whom I confided an angel! I’ll have nothing more to do with the matter, as I’m insulted. Settle it between yourselves.”

“But your daughter will end by deceiving me, madame!” exclaimed Auguste, again overcome with passion.

Madame Josserand, who was going off, turned round, and looked him full in the face.

“You’re doing all you can to bring such a thing about, sir.”

And she retired into her room with the dignity of a colossal triple-breasted Ceres draped in white.

The father kept Auguste a few minutes longer. He was conciliatory, giving him to understand that with women it was best to put up with everything, and finally sent him off calmed and resolved to forgive. But when the poor old man found himself alone again in the dining-room, seated in front of his little lamp, he burst into tears. It was all over; there was no longer any happiness; he would never have time enough of a night to address sufficient wrappers to enable him to assist his daughter clandestinely. The thought that his child might run into debt crushed him like some personal fault. And he felt ill; he had just received another blow; strength would fail him one of those nights. At length, restraining his tears, he painfully recommenced his work.

Down-stairs in the shop, her face buried in her hands, Berthe had remained for a while immovable. After putting up the shutters, the porter had returned to the basement. Then Octave thought he might approach the young woman. Ever since the husband’s departure, Saturnin had been making signs to him over his sister’s head, as though inviting him to console her. Now he was beaming and multiplied his winks; fearing that he was not understood, he emphasized his advice by blowing kisses into space, with a child’s overflowing effusion.

“What! you want me to kiss her?” asked Octave by signs.

“Yes, yes,” replied the madman, with an enthusiastic nod of the head.

And, when he beheld the young man smiling before his sister, who had noticed nothing, he seated himself on the floor, behind a counter, hiding, so as not to be in their way. In the profound silence of the closed warehouse the gas-jets were still burning with tall flames. There reigned a death-like peacefulness, a closeness of atmosphere mingled with the unsavory odor of the dressed silk.

“Do not take it so much to heart, madame, I beg of you,” said Octave, in his caressing tones.

She started at finding him so close to her.

“Excuse me, Monsieur Octave. It is not my fault that you assisted at this painful scene. And I must ask you to excuse my husband, for he could not have been very well this evening. You know that in all families there are little unpleasantnesses——”

Sobs choked her utterance. The mere idea of extenuating her husband’s faults before the world had brought on a copious flood of tears, which quite unnerved her. Saturnin raised his anxious face on a level with the counter; but he dived down again directly he saw Octave take hold of his sister’s hand.

“I beg of you, madame, summon up a little courage,” said the assistant.

“No, I cannot help it,” stammered she. “You were there—you heard everything. For ninety-five francs’ worth of hair! As though all women did not wear false hair now! But he knows nothing—he understands nothing. He knows no more about women than the Grand Turk; he has never had anything to do with them, no never, Monsieur Octave! Ah! I am very miserable!”

She said all this in her feverish spite. A man whom she pretended she had married for love, and who would soon allow her to go without a chemise! Did she not fulfill her duties? Had he the least negligence to reproach her with? If he had not flown into a passion on the day when she asked him for some hair, she would never have been reduced to the necessity of paying for it out of her own pocket! And for the least thing there was the same story over again; she could never express a wish, desire the most insignificant article of dress, without coming into contact with his ferocious sullenness. She naturally had her pride, so she no longer asked for anything, preferring to go without necessaries rather than to humiliate herself to no purpose. Thus, for a fortnight past, she had been ardently longing for a fancy set of ornaments which she had seen with her mother in a jeweler’s window in the Palais-Royal.

“You know, three stars in paste for the hair. Oh! a mere trifle—a hundred francs, I think. Well! although I spoke of them from morning till night, don’t imagine that my husband understood!”

Octave would never have dared to hope for such an opportunity. He hastened matters.

“Yes, yes, I know. You mentioned the subject several times in my presence. And, dear me! madame, your parents received me so well; you yourself have welcomed me so kindly, that I thought I might venture——”

As he spoke he withdrew from his pocket an oblong box, in which the

three stars were sparkling on some cotton wool. Berthe had risen from her seat, deeply affected.

“But it is impossible, sir. I will not—you were very wrong indeed.”

He pretended to be very simple, inventing various pretexts. In the South such things were done constantly. And, besides, the ornaments were of no value whatever. She had turned quite rosy, and was no longer weeping, whilst her eyes, fixed on the box, acquired a fresh luster from the sparkling of the imitation gems.

“I beg of you, madame. Just to show me that you are satisfied with my work.”

“No, really, Monsieur Octave; do not insist. You pain me.”

Saturnin had reappeared, and he looked at the jewels in ecstasy, as though he were beholding some reliquary. But his sharp ear heard Auguste’s returning footsteps. He warned Berthe by making a slight noise with his tongue. Then the latter came to a decision just as her husband was about to enter.

“Well! listen,” murmured she rapidly, popping the box into her pocket, “I’ll say that my sister Hortense made me a present of them.”

Auguste gave orders for the gas to be turned out, and then went up with her to bed, without saying a word about the quarrel, delighted at heart at finding her all right again and very lively, as though nothing had taken place between them. The warehouse became wrapped in intense darkness; and, just as Octave was also retiring, he felt hot hands squeezing his own almost sufficient to crush them in the obscurity. It was Saturnin, who slept in the basement.

“Friend—friend—friend,” repeated the madman, with an outburst of wild tenderness.

Disconcerted in his expectations, Octave little by little became seized with a young and passionate desire for Berthe. If he had at first been merely following his old plan, his wish to succeed by the aid of women, he now no longer beheld in her the employer simply, whose possession would place the whole establishment in his hands; he desired above all the Parisian, that adorable creature of luxury and grace, which he had never had an opportunity of tasting at Marseilles; he felt a sudden hunger for her little gloved hands, her tiny feet encased in high-heeled boots, her delicate neck hidden by gewgaws, even for the questionable unseen, the make-shifts which, he suspected, were covered by her gorgeous costumes; and this sudden attack of passion went so far as to get the better of his shrewd economical nature to the extent of causing him to squander in presents and all sorts of other expenses the five thousand francs which he had brought with him from the South, and had already

doubled by financial operations which he never mentioned to anybody.

On the morrow of the quarrel, Octave, delighted at having prevailed on the young woman to accept his present, thought that it would be well for him to ingratiate himself with the husband. Therefore, as he took his meals at his employer's table—the latter being in the habit of feeding his assistants, so as always to have them at hand—he showed him the utmost attention, listened to him at desserts and warmly approved all he said. He even went so far in private as to appear to sympathize with his complaints against his wife, pretending, too, to watch her, and making him little reports. Auguste felt greatly touched; he admitted one night to the young man that he had been on the point of discharging him, under the idea that he was conniving with his mother-in-law.

"You understand me, you do!" he would say to the young man. "I merely want peace. Beyond that I don't care a hang, virtue excepted, of course, and providing my wife doesn't carry off the cash-box. Eh? am I not reasonable? I don't ask her for anything extraordinary?"

And Octave lauded his wisdom, and they celebrated together the sweetness of an uneventful existence, year after year, always the same, passed in measuring off silk. One evening he had alarmed Auguste by reverting to his dream of vast modern bazars, and by advising him, as he had advised Madame Hédouin, to purchase the adjoining house, so as to enlarge his premises. Auguste, whose head was already splitting between his four counters, had looked at him with the frightened air of a tradesman accustomed to dividing farthings into four, that he had hastened to withdraw his suggestion and to go into raptures over the honest security of small dealings.

Days passed by; Octave was making his little nest in the place, a cozy nest lined with wool which would keep him nice and warm. The husband esteemed him; Madame Josserand herself, with whom, however, he avoided being too polite, looked at him encouragingly. As for Berthe, she was becoming charmingly familiar with him. But his great friend was Saturnin, whose dumb affection he felt was increasing daily—a faithful dog's devotion which grew as his longing for the young woman became more intense. Toward every one else the madman displayed a gloomy jealousy; a man could not approach his sister without his becoming at once uneasy, curling up his lips, and preparing to bite. But if, on the contrary, Octave leant freely toward her, and caused her to laugh with the soft and tender laughter of a happy mistress, he laughed himself with delight, and his face reflected a little of their sensual joy. The poor creature seemed to feel a gratitude full of happiness for the chosen lover. He would detain the latter in all the corners, casting mistrustful glances about; then, if he found they were alone, he would speak to him of her, always repeating the same stories in broken phrases.

“When she was little, she had tiny limbs as large as that; and already plump, and quite rosy, and so gay; then, she used to sprawl about on the floor. It amused me; I would go down on my knees and watch her. Then, bang! bang! bang! she would kick me in the stomach, and I would be so pleased, oh! so pleased!”

Octave thus learnt all about Berthe’s childhood, with its little ailments, its playthings, its growth of a charming, uncontrolled little creature.

His eyes lighted up; he laughed and cried, just as though these events had occurred the day before. From his broken sentences the history of this strange affection could be spun together: his poor, half-witted devotion at the little patient’s bedside, when she had been given up by the doctors, his heart and body devoted to the dying darling, whom he nursed in her nudity with all the tenderness of a mother; his affection and his desires had been arrested there, checked forevermore by this drama of suffering, from the shock of which he never recovered; and, from that time, in spite of the ingratitude which followed the recovery, Berthe remained everything to him, a mistress before whom he trembled, a child and a sister whom he had saved from death, an idol which he worshiped with a jealous adoration. So that he pursued the husband with the furious hatred of a displeased lover, never at a loss for ill-natured remarks as he opened his heart to Octave.

“He’s got his eye bunged up again. His headache’s becoming a nuisance! —You heard him dragging his feet about yesterday—Look, there he is squinting into the street. Eh? isn’t he a fool?—Dirty beast, dirty beast!”

And Auguste could scarcely move without angering the madman. Then would come the disquieting proposals.

“If you like, we’ll bleed him like a pig between us.”

Octave would calm him. Then, on his quiet days, Saturnin would go from Octave to the young woman, with an air of delight, repeating what one had said about the other, doing their errands, and acting like a continual bond of tenderness between them. He would have thrown himself on the floor at their feet, to serve them as a carpet.

Berthe had not again alluded to the present. She did not seem to notice Octave’s trembling attentions, but treated him as a friend, without the least confusion. He had never before been so careful in his dress, and he was ever caressing her with his eyes of the color of old gold, and whose velvety softness he deemed irresistible.

One day, however, she experienced a great emotion. On returning from a dog-show, Octave beckoned to her to descend to the basement; and there handed her a bill, amounting to sixty-two francs, for some embroidered

stockings which had been brought during her absence. She turned quite pale, and in a cry that came from her heart, at once asked:

“Good heavens! has my husband seen this?”

He hastened to set her mind at rest, telling her what trouble he had had to get hold of the bill under Auguste’s very nose. Then, in an embarrassed way, he was obliged to add in a low voice:

“I paid it.”

Then she made a show of feeling in her pockets, and, finding nothing, said simply:

“I will pay you back. Ah! what thanks I owe you, Monsieur Octave! It would have killed me if Auguste had seen this.”

And, this time, she took hold of both his hands, and for a moment held them pressed between her own. But the sixty-two francs were never again mentioned.

Thus, little by little, the breach between the couple widened, in spite of the husband’s efforts, he being desirous of having no disturbance in his existence. He desperately defended his desire for a somnolent and idiotic peacefulness, he closed his eyes to small faults, and even stomached some big ones, with the constant dread of discovering something abominable which would drive him into a furious passion. He therefore tolerated Berthe’s lies, by which she attributed to her sister’s or her mother’s affection a host of little things, the purchase of which she could not have otherwise explained; he even no longer grumbled overmuch when she went out of an evening, thus enabling Octave to take her twice privately to the theater, accompanied by Madame Josserand and Hortense; delightful outings, after which these ladies agreed together that the young man knew how to live.

It was on a Saturday that a frightful quarrel occurred between the husband and wife, with respect to twenty sous which were deficient in Rachel’s accounts. While Berthe was balancing up the book, Auguste brought, according to his custom, the money necessary for the household expenses of the ensuing week. The Josserands were to dine there that evening, and the kitchen was littered with things—a rabbit, a leg of mutton, and some cauliflowers. Saturnin, squatting on the tiled floor beside the sink, was blacking his sister’s shoes and his brother-in-law’s boots. The quarrel began with long arguments respecting the twenty sou piece. What had become of it? How could one mislay twenty sous? Auguste would go over all the additions again. During this time, Rachel, always pliant in spite of her harsh looks, her mouth closed but her eyes on the watch, was quietly spitting the leg of mutton. At length he gave fifty francs, and was on the point of going down-stairs

again, when he returned, worried by the thought of the missing coin.

“It must be found, though,” said he. “Perhaps you borrowed it of Rachel, and have forgotten doing so.”

Berthe felt greatly hurt at this.

“Accuse me of cooking the accounts! Ah! you are nice!”

Everything started from that, and they soon came to high words. Auguste, in spite of his desire to purchase peace at a dear price, became aggressive, excited by the sight of the rabbit, the leg of mutton and the cauliflowers, beside himself before the pile of food, which she was going to thrust all at once under her parents’ noses. He looked through the account book, expressing astonishment at almost every item. It was incredible! She must be in league with the servant to make something on the marketing.

“I! I!” exclaimed the young woman, thoroughly exasperated; “I in league with the servant! But it’s you, sir, who pay her to spy upon me! Yes, I am forever feeling her about me; I can’t move a step without encountering her eyes. Ah! she may watch me through the key-hole, when I’m changing my under-linen. I do no harm, and I don’t care a straw for your system of police. Only, don’t you dare to reproach me with being in league with her.”

This unexpected attack quite dumbfounded the husband for a moment. Rachel turned round, still holding the leg of mutton; and, placing her hand upon her heart, she protested.

“Oh! madame, how can you think so? I who respect madame so much!”

“She’s mad!” said Auguste, shrugging his shoulders. “Don’t take the trouble to defend yourself, my girl. She’s mad!”

But a noise behind his back caused him some anxiety. It was Saturnin, who had violently thrown down one of the half-polished shoes to fly to his sister’s assistance. With a terrible expression in his face and his fists clenched, he stuttered out that he would strangle the dirty rascal if he again called her mad. Thoroughly frightened, Auguste sought refuge behind the filter, calling out:

“It’s really become unbearable; I can no longer make a remark to you without his thrusting himself in between us! I allowed him to come here, but he must leave me alone! He’s another nice present of your mother’s! She was frightened to death of him, and so she saddled him on me, preferring to see me murdered in her stead. Thanks for nothing! He’s got a knife now. Do make him desist!”

Berthe disarmed her brother, and calmed him with a look, whilst Auguste, who had turned very pale, continued to mumble angry words. Always knives being caught up! An injury is so soon done; and, with a madman, one could do

nothing; justice would even refuse to avenge it! In short, it was not proper to make a bodyguard of such a brother, rendering a husband powerless, even in circumstances of the most legitimate indignation, going as far as forcing him to submit to his shame.

“You’ve no tact, sir,” declared Berthe, disdainfully. “A gentleman would not discuss such matters in a kitchen.”

And she withdrew to her room, slamming the doors behind her. Rachel had returned to the roaster, as though no longer hearing the quarrel between her master and mistress.

“Do understand, my dear,” said Auguste to Berthe, whom he had rejoined in the bed-room, “it was not in reference to you that I spoke, it was for that girl who robs us. Those twenty sous ought certainly to be found.”

The young woman trembled nervously with exasperation. She looked him full in the face, very pale and resolute.

“Will you leave off bothering me about your twenty sous? It’s not twenty sous I want, it’s five hundred francs a month. Yes, five hundred francs for my dress. Ah! you discuss money matters in the kitchen, before the servant! Well! that has decided me to discuss them also! I’ve been restraining myself for a long time past. I want five hundred francs.”

He stood aghast at such a demand. And she commenced the grand quarrel which, during twenty years, her mother had picked with her father, regularly every fortnight. Did he expect to see her walk about barefoot? When one married a woman, one should at least arrange to clothe and feed her decently. She would sooner beg than resign herself to such a pauper existence! It was not her fault if he proved incapable of managing his business properly; oh! yes, incapable, without ideas or initiative, only knowing how to split farthings into four. A man who ought to have made it his glory to acquire a fortune quickly, so as to dress her like a queen, and make the people of The “Ladies’ Paradise” die with rage! But no! with such a poor head as his, bankruptcy was sure to come sooner or later. And from this flow of words emerged the respect, the furious appetite for money, all that worship of wealth, the adoration of which she had learnt in her family, when beholding the mean tricks to which one stoops, merely to appear to possess it.

“Five hundred francs!” said Auguste at length. “I would sooner shut up the shop.”

She looked at him coldly.

“You refuse. Very well, I will run up bills.”

“More debts, you wretched woman!”

In a sudden violent movement, he seized her by the arms, and pushed her against the wall. Then, without a cry, choking with passion, she ran and opened the window, as though to throw herself out; but she retraced her steps, and pushing him in her turn toward the door, turned him out of the room gasping:

“Go away, or I shall do you an injury!”

And she noisily pushed the bolt behind his back. For a moment he listened and hesitated. Then he hastened to go down to the warehouse, again seized with terror, as he beheld Saturnin’s eyes gleaming in the shadow, the noise of the short struggle having brought him from the kitchen.

Down-stairs, Octave, who was selling silk handkerchiefs to an old lady, at once noticed his agitated appearance. The assistant looked at him out of the corner of his eye as he feverishly paced up and down before the counters. When the customer had gone, Auguste’s heart quite overflowed. “My dear fellow, she’s going mad,” said he without naming his wife. “She has shut herself in. You ought to oblige me by going up and speaking to her. I fear an accident, on my word of honor, I do!”

The young man pretended to hesitate. It was such a delicate matter! Finally, he agreed to do so out of pure devotion. Up-stairs, he found Saturnin keeping guard before Berthe’s door. On hearing footsteps, the madman uttered a menacing grunt. But when he recognized the assistant, his face brightened.

“Ah! yes, you,” murmured he. “You’re all right. She mustn’t cry. Be nice, say something to her. And you know, stop there. There’s no danger. I’m here. If the servant tries to peep, I’ll settle her.”

And he squatted down on the floor, guarding the door. As he still held one of his brother-in-law’s boots, he commenced to polish it, to pass away the time.

Octave made up his mind to knock. No answer, not a sound.

Then he gave his name. The bolt was at once drawn. And, opening the door slightly, Berthe begged him to enter. Then she closed and bolted it again with a nervous hand.

“I don’t mind you,” said she; “but I won’t have him!”

She paced the room, carried away by passion, going from the bedstead to the window, which still remained open. And she muttered disconnected sentences: he might entertain her parents at dinner, if he liked; yes, he could account to them for her absence, for she would not appear at the table; she would sooner die! Besides, she preferred to go to bed. With her feverish hands, she already began to tear off the quilt, shake up the pillows, and turn

down the sheet, forgetful of Octave's presence to the extent that she was about to unhook her dress. Then she jumped to another idea.

"Just fancy! He beat me, beat me, beat me! And only because, ashamed of always going about in rags, I asked him for five hundred francs!"

Octave, standing up in the middle of the room, tried to find some conciliating words. She was wrong to allow it to upset her so much. Everything would come right again. And he ended by timidly offering her assistance.

"If you are worried about any bill, why not apply to your friends? I should be so pleased! Oh! simply a loan. You could return it to me some other time."

She looked at him. After a pause, she replied:

"Never! it cannot be. What would people think, Monsieur Octave?"

Her refusal was so decided that there was no further question of money. But her anger seemed to have left her. She breathed heavily, and bathed her face; and she looked quite pale, very calm, rather wearied, with large, resolute eyes. Standing before her, he felt himself overcome by that timidity of love, which he held in such contempt. Never before had he loved so ardently; the strength of his desire communicated an awkwardness to his charms of a handsome assistant. Whilst continuing to advise a reconciliation in vague phrases, he was reasoning clearly in his own mind, asking himself if he ought not to take her in his arms; but the fear of being again repulsed made him hesitate. She, without uttering a word, continued to look at him with her decided air, her forehead contracted by a faint wrinkle.

"Really!" he stammeringly continued, "you must be patient. Your husband is not a bad fellow. If you only go the right way to work with him, he will give you whatever you ask for."

And beneath the emptiness of these words, they both felt the same thought take possession of them. They were alone, free, safe from all surprise, with the door bolted. This security, the close warmth of the room, exercised its influence on them. Yet he did not dare; the feminine side of his nature, his womanly feeling, refined him in that moment of passion to the point of making him the woman in their encounter. Then, as though recollecting one of her former lessons, Berthe dropped her handkerchief.

"Oh! thank you," said she to the young man, who picked it up. Their fingers touched, they were drawn closer together by that momentary contact. Now she smiled tenderly, and gave an easy suppleness to her form, as she recollected that men detest sticks. It would never do to act the simpleton, one must permit a little playfulness without seeming to do so, if one would hook

one’s fish.

“Night is coming on,” resumed she, going and pushing the window to.

He followed her, and there, in the shadow of the curtains, she allowed him to take her hand. She laughed louder, bewildering him with her ringing tones, enveloping him with her pretty gestures; and, as he at length became bolder, she threw back her head, displaying her neck, her young and delicate neck all quivering with her gayety. Distracted by the sight, he kissed her under the chin.

“Oh! Monsieur Octave!” said she in confusion, making a pretense of prettily putting him back into his place.

His moment of triumph had come, but it was no sooner over than all the ferocious disdain of woman which was hidden beneath his air of wheedling adoration, returned. And when Berthe rose up, without strength in her wrists, and her face contracted by a pang, her utter contempt for man was thrown into the dark glance which she cast upon him. The room was wrapped in complete silence. One only heard Saturnin, on the other side of the door, polishing her husband’s boot with a regular movement of the brush.

Octave’s thoughts reverted to Valérie and Madame Hédouin. At last he was something more than little Pichon’s lover! It seemed like a rehabilitation in his own eyes. Then, encountering Berthe’s uneasy glance, he experienced a slight sense of shame, and kissed her with extreme gentleness. She was resuming her air of resolute recklessness, and, with a gesture, seemed to say: “What’s done can’t be undone.” But she afterward experienced the necessity of giving expression to a melancholy thought.

“Ah! If you had only married me!” murmured she.

He felt surprised, almost uneasy; but this did not prevent him from replying, as he kissed her again:

“Oh! yes, how nice it would have been!”

That evening the dinner with the Josserands was most delightful, Berthe had never shown herself so gentle. She did not say a word of the quarrel to her parents, she received her husband with an air of submission. The latter, delighted, took Octave aside to thank him; and he imparted so much warmth into the proceeding, pressing his hands and displaying such a lively gratitude, that the young man felt quite embarrassed. Moreover, they one and all overwhelmed him with marks of their affection. Saturnin, who behaved very well at table, looked at him with approving eyes. Hortense on her part deigned to listen to him, whilst Madame Josserand, full of maternal encouragement, kept filling his glass.

“Dear me! yes,” said Berthe at dessert, “I intend to resume my painting. For a long time past I have been wanting to decorate a cup for Auguste.”

The latter was deeply moved at this loving conjugal thought. Ever since the soup, Octave had kept his foot on the young woman’s under the table; it was like a taking of possession in the midst of this little middle-class gathering. Yet Berthe was not without a secret uneasiness before Rachel, whose eyes she always found looking her through and through. Was it, then, visible? The girl was decidedly one to be sent away or else to be bought over.

Monsieur Josserand, who was near his daughter, finished soothing her by passing her nineteen francs done up in paper under the tablecloth. He bent down and whispered in her ear:

“You know, they come from my little work. If you owe anything, you must pay it.”

Then, between her father, who nudged her knee, and her lover, who gently rubbed her boot, she felt quite happy. Life would now be delightful. And they united in throwing aside all reserve, enjoying the pleasure of a family gathering unmarred by a single quarrel. In truth, it was hardly natural, something must have brought them luck. Auguste, alone, had his eyes half closed, suffering from a headache, which he had moreover expected after so many emotions. Toward nine o’clock he was even obliged to retire to bed.

CHAPTER XIII.

For some time past, Monsieur Gourd had been prowling about with an uneasy and mysterious air. He was met gliding noiselessly along, his eyes open, his ears pricked up, continually ascending the two staircases, where lodgers had even encountered him going his rounds in the dead of night. The morality of the house was certainly worrying him; he felt a kind of breath of shameful things which troubled the cold nakedness of the courtyard, the calm peacefulness of the vestibule, the beautiful domestic virtues of the different stories.

One evening, Octave had found the doorkeeper standing motionless and without a light at the end of his passage, close to the door which opened onto the servants’ staircase. Greatly surprised, he questioned him.

“I wish to ascertain something, Monsieur Mouret,” simply answered Monsieur Gourd, deciding to go off to bed.

The young man was very much frightened. Did the doorkeeper suspect his

relations with Berthe? He was perhaps watching them. Their attachment encountered continual obstacles in that house, where there was always some one prying about and the inmates of which professed the most strict principles.

It happened to be a Tuesday night when Octave discovered Monsieur Gourd watching close to his room. This increased his uneasiness. For a week past, he had been imploring Berthe to come up and join him in his apartment, when all the house would be asleep. Had the doorkeeper guessed this? Octave went back to his room dissatisfied, tormented with fear and desire.

The night was a close one, and, overcome by the heat, Octave had dozed off in an easy-chair, when toward midnight he was roused by a gentle knocking.

“It’s I,” faintly whispered a woman’s voice.

It was Berthe. He opened the door and clasped her in his arms in the obscurity. When he had lighted his candle, he saw that she was deeply troubled about something. The day before, not having sufficient money in his pocket, he had been unable to pay for the bonnet at the time: and as in her delight she had so far forgotten herself as to give her name, they had sent her the bill that evening. Then, trembling at the thought that they might call on the morrow when her husband was there, she had dared to come up, gathering courage from the great silence of the house, and confident that Rachel was asleep.

“To-morrow morning, you will be sure to pay it to-morrow morning, won’t you?” implored she, trying to escape.

But he again clasped her in his arms.

“Stay!”

She remained. The clock slowly struck the hours in the voluptuous warmth of the room; and, at each sound of the bell, he begged her so tenderly to stay, that her strength seemed to desert her and she yielded to his entreaties. Then, toward four o’clock, just as she had at length determined to go, they both dropped off to sleep locked in each other’s arms. When they again opened their eyes, the bright daylight was entering at the window, it was nine o’clock. Berthe uttered a cry.

“Good heavens! I’m lost!”

Then ensued a moment of confusion. With her eyes half closed with sleep and fatigue, feeling vaguely about with her hands scarcely able to distinguish anything, she gave vent to stifled exclamations of regret. He, seized with a similar despair, had thrown himself before the door, to prevent her from going out at such an hour. Was she mad? people might meet her on the stairs, it was

too risky; they must think the matter over, and devise a way for her to go down without being noticed. But she was obstinate, simply wishing to get away; and she again made for the door, which he defended. Then he thought of the servants' staircase. Nothing could be more convenient; she could go quickly through her own kitchen into her apartment. Only, as Mario Pichon was always in the passage of a morning, Octave considered it prudent to divert her attention, whilst the other young woman made her escape.

He went out in his ordinary quiet way, and was surprised to find Saturnin making himself at home at Marie's, and calmly watching her do her housework. The madman loved thus to seek refuge beside her as in former days, delighted with the manner in which she left him to himself, and certain of not being jostled. Moreover, he was not in her way, and she willingly tolerated him, though his conversational powers were not great. It was company all the same, and she would still sing her ballad in a low and expiring voice.

"Hallo! so you're with your lover?" said Octave, maneuvering so as to keep the door shut behind his back.

Marie turned crimson. Oh! that poor Monsieur Saturnin! Was it possible? He who seemed to suffer even when any one touched his hand by accident! And the madman also got angry. He would not be any one's lover—never, never! Whoever told his sister such a lie would have him to deal with. Octave, amazed at his sudden irritation, felt it necessary to calm him.

Meanwhile Berthe made her way to the servants' staircase. She had two flights to descend. At the first step a shrill laugh, issuing from Madame Juzeur's kitchen below, caused her to stop; and she tremblingly stood against the landing window, opened wide onto the narrow courtyard.

Suddenly a voice exclaimed:

"Here's master coming for his hot water!"

And windows were quickly closed, and doors slammed. The silence of death ensued, yet Berthe did not at first dare to move. When she at length went down, the thought came to her that Rachel was probably in the kitchen, waiting for her. This caused her fresh anguish. She now dreaded to enter, she would have preferred to reach the street and fly away in the distance forever. She nevertheless pushed the door ajar, and felt relieved on beholding that the servant was not there. Then, seized with a childish joy on finding herself at home again and safe, she hurried to her room. But there was Rachel standing before the bed, which had not even been opened. She looked at the bed, and then at her mistress with her expressionless face. In her first moment of fright, the young woman lost her head to the point of trying to excuse herself, and

talked of an illness of her sister’s. She stammered out the words, and then, frightened at the poorness of her lie, understanding that denial was utterly useless, she suddenly burst into tears. Dropping onto a chair, she continued crying.

This lasted a good while. Not a word was exchanged, sobs alone disturbed the perfect quiet of the room. Rachel, exaggerating her habitual discretion, maintaining her cold manner of a girl who knows everything, but who says nothing, had turned her back, and was making a pretence of beating up the pillows, as though she was just finishing arranging the bed. At length, when madame, more and more upset by this silence, was giving too loud a vent to her despair, the maid, who was then dusting, said simply, in a respectful tone of voice:

“Madame is wrong to take on so, master is not so very pleasant.”

Berthe left off crying. She would pay the girl, that was all Without waiting further she gave her twenty francs. Then, not thinking that sufficient, and already feeling uneasy, having fancied she saw her curl her lips disdainfully, she rejoined her in the kitchen, and brought her back to make her a present of an almost new dress.

At the same moment, Octave, on his part, was again in a state of alarm, on account of Monsieur Gourd. On leaving the Pichons’, he had found him standing immovable, the same as the night before, listening behind the door communicating with the servants’ staircase. He followed him without even daring to speak to him. The doorkeeper gravely went back again down the grand staircase. On the floor below he took a key from his pocket and entered the room which was let to the distinguished individual, who came there to work one night every week. And through the door, which remained open for a moment, Octave obtained a clear view of that room which was always kept as closely shut as a tomb. It was in a terrible state of disorder that morning, the gentleman having no doubt worked there the night before. A huge bed, with the sheets stripped off, a wardrobe with a glass door, empty, save for the remnants of a lobster and two partly filled bottles, two dirty hand-basins lying about, one beside the bed and the other on a chair. Monsieur Gourd, with his calm air of a retired judge, at once occupied himself with emptying and rinsing out the basins.

As he hurried to the Passage de la Madeleine to pay for the bonnet, the young man was tormented by a painful uncertainty. Finally, he determined to engage the doorkeepers in conversation on his return. Madame Gourd, reclining in her commodious armchair, was getting a breath of fresh air between the two pots of flowers, at the open window of their room. Standing up beside the door, old mother Pérou was waiting in a humble and frightened

manner.

“Have you a letter for me?” asked Octave, as a commencement.

Monsieur Gourd just then came down from the room on the third floor. Seeing after that was the only work that he now condescended to do in the house; and he showed himself highly flattered by the confidence of the gentleman, who paid him well on condition that his basins should not pass through any other hands.

“No, Monsieur Mouret, nothing at all,” answered he.

He had seen old mother Pérou perfectly well, but he pretended not to be aware of her presence. The day before he had got into such a rage with her for upsetting a pail of water in the middle of the vestibule, that he had sent her about her business on the spot. And she had called for her money, but the mere sight of him made her tremble, and she almost sank into the ground with humility.

However, as Octave remained some time doing the amiable with Madame Gourd, the doorkeeper roughly turned toward the poor old woman.

“So, you want to be paid. What’s owing to you?”

But Madame Gourd interrupted him.

“Look, darling, there’s that girl again with her horrible little beast.”

It was Lisa, who, a few days before, had found a spaniel in the street. And this occasioned continual disputes with the doorkeepers. The landlord would not allow any animals in the house. No, no animals, and no women! The little dog was even forbidden to go into the courtyard; the street was quite good enough for him. As it had been raining that morning, and the little beast’s paws were sopping wet, Monsieur Gourd rushed forward, exclaiming:

“I will not have him walk up the stairs, you hear me! Carry him in your arms.”

“So that he shall make me all in a mess!” said Lisa, insolently. “What a great misfortune it’ll be if he wets the servants’ staircase a bit! Up you go, doggie.”

Monsieur Gourd tried to seize hold of her, and almost slipped, so he fell to abusing those sluts of servants. He was always at war with them, tormented with the rage of a former servant who wishes to be waited on in his turn. But Lisa turned upon him, and with the verbosity of a girl who had grown up in the gutters of Montmartre, she shouted out:

“Eh! just you leave me alone, you miserable old flunkey! Go and empty the duke’s jerries!”

It was the only insult capable of silencing Monsieur Gourd, and the servants all took advantage of it. He returned to his room quivering with rage and mumbling to himself, saying that he was certainly very proud of having been in service at the duke's, and that she would not have staid there two hours even, the baggage! Then he assailed mother Pérou, who almost jumped out of her skin.

"Well! what is it you're owed? Eh! you say twelve francs sixty-five centimes. But it isn't possible? Sixty-three hours at twenty centimes the hour. Ah! you charge a quarter of an hour. Never! I warned you, I only pay the hours that are completed."

And he did not even give her her money then, he left her perfectly terrified, and joined in the conversation between his wife and Octave. The latter was cunningly alluding to all the worries that such a house must cause them, hoping thus to get them to talk about the lodgers. Such strange things must sometimes take place behind the doors! Then the doorkeeper chimed in, as grave as ever:

"What concerns us, concerns us, Monsieur Mouret, and what doesn't concern us, doesn't concern us. Over there, for instance, is something which quite puts me beside myself. Look at it, look at it!"

And, stretching out his arm, he pointed to the boot-stitcher, that tall, pale girl who had arrived at the house in the middle of the funeral. She walked with difficulty; she was evidently in the family way, and her condition was exaggerated by the sickly skinniness of her neck and legs.

"On my word of honor! sir, if this sort of thing was likely to continue, we would prefer to retire to our home at Mort-la-Ville; would we not, Madame Gourd? for, thank heaven! we have sufficient to live on, we are dependent on no one. A house like this to be made the talk of the place by such a creature! for so it is, sir!"

"She seems very ill," said Octave, following her with his eyes, not daring to pity her too much. "I always see her looking so sad, so pale, so forlorn. But, of course, she has a lover."

At this, Monsieur Gourd gave a violent start.

"Now we have it! Do you hear, Madame Gourd? Monsieur Mouret is also of opinion that she has a lover. It's clear, such things don't come of themselves. Well, sir! for two months past I've been on the watch, and I've not yet seen the shadow of a man. How full of vice she must be! Ah! if I only found her chap, how I would chuck him out! But I can't find him, and it's that which worries me."

“Perhaps no one comes,” Octave ventured to observe.

The doorkeeper looked at him with surprise.

“That would not be natural. Oh! I’m determined I’ll catch him. I’ve still six weeks before me, for I got the landlord to give her notice to quit in October. Just fancy her being confined here!” and, with his arm still thrust out, he pointed to the young woman, who was painfully wending her way up the servants’ staircase. Madame Gourd was obliged to calm him: he took the respectability of the house too much to heart; he would end by making himself ill. Then, mother Pérou having dared to manifest her presence by a discreet cough, he returned to her, and coolly deducted the sou she had charged for the odd quarter of an hour. She was at length going off with her twelve francs sixty centimes, when he offered to take her back, but at three sous an hour only. She burst into tears, and accepted.

“I shall always be able to get some one,” said he. “You’re no longer strong enough; you don’t even do two sous’ worth.”

Octave felt his mind relieved as he returned to his room for a minute. On the third floor he caught up Madame Juzeur, who was also going to her apartments. She was obliged now to run down every morning after Louise, who loitered at the different shops.

“How proud you are becoming,” said she, with her sharp smile. “One can see very well that you are being spoilt elsewhere.”

These words once more aroused all the young man’s anxiety. He followed her into her drawing-room, pretending to joke with her the while. Only one of the curtains was slightly drawn back, and the carpet and the hangings before the doors subdued still more this alcove-like light; and the noise of the street did not penetrate more than to the extent of a faint buzz, in this room as soft as down. She made him seat himself beside her on the low, wide sofa. But, as he did not take her hand and kiss it, she asked him archly:

“Do you, then, no longer love me?”

He blushed, and protested that he adored her. Then she gave him her hand of her own accord, with a little stifled laugh; and he was obliged to raise it to his lips, so as to dispel her suspicions, if she had any. But she almost immediately withdrew it again.

“No, no; though you pretend to excite yourself, it gives you no pleasure. Oh, I feel it does not, and, besides, it is only natural!” What? what did she mean? He seized her round the waist, and pressed her with questions, but she would not answer; she abandoned herself to his embrace, and kept shaking her head. At length, to oblige her to speak, he commenced tickling her.

“Well, you see,” she ended by murmuring, “you love another.” She named Valérie, and reminded him of the evening at the Josserands when he devoured her with his eyes. Then, as he declared that Valérie was nothing to him, she retorted, with another laugh, that she knew that very well, and had been only teasing him. Only, there was another, and this time she named Madame Hédouin, laughing more than ever, and amused at his protestations, which were very energetic. Who, then? Was it Marie Pichon? Ah! he could not deny that one. Yet he did do so, but she shook her head. She assured him that her little finger never told stories. And to draw each of these women’s names from her, he was obliged to redouble his caresses.

But she had not named Berthe. He was loosening his hold of her, when she resumed:

“Now, there’s the last one.”

“What last one?” inquired he, anxiously.

Screwing up her mouth, she again obstinately refused to say anything more, so long as he had not opened her lips with a kiss.

He continued to hold her reclining in his arms. She languishingly alluded to the cruel being who had deserted her after having only been married a week. A miserable woman like her knew too much of the tempests of the heart! For a longtime past she had guessed what she styled Octave’s “little games;” for not a kiss could be exchanged in the house without her hearing it. And, in the depths of the wide sofa, they had quite a cozy little chat, interrupted now and then with all sorts of delightful caresses.

When Octave left her he felt more at ease. She had restored his good humor, and she amused him with her complicated principles of virtue. Downstairs, directly he entered the warehouse, he reassured Berthe with a sign, as her eyes questioned him with reference to the bonnet. Then all the terrible adventure of the morning was forgotten. When Auguste returned, a little before lunch-time, he found them both looking the same as usual, Berthe very much bored at the pay-desk, and Octave gallantly measuring off some silk for a lady.

But, after that day, the lovers’ private meetings became rarer still. As a practical fellow, he ended by thinking it stupid to be always paying, when she, on her side, only gave him her foot under the table. Paris had decidedly brought him ill-luck; at first, repulses, and then this silly passion, which was fast emptying his purse. He could certainly not be accused of succeeding through women. He now found a certain honor in it by way of consolation, in his secret rage at the failure of his plan so clumsily carried out up till then.

Yet Auguste was not much in their way. Ever since the bad turn affairs had

taken at Lyons, he had suffered more than ever with his headaches. On the first of the month, Berthe had experienced a sudden joy on seeing him, in the evening, place three hundred francs under the bed-room timepiece for her dress; and, in spite of the reduction on the amount which she had demanded, as she had given up all hope of ever seeing a sou of it, she threw herself into his arms, all warm with gratitude. On this occasion the husband had a night of hugging such as the lover never experienced.

September passed away in this manner, in the great calm of the house emptied of its occupants by the summer months. The people of the second floor had gone to the seaside in Spain, which caused Monsieur Gourd, full of pity, to shrug his shoulders: what a fuss! as though the most distinguished people were not satisfied with Trouville! The Duveyriers, since the beginning of Gustave's holidays, had been at their country house at Villeneuve-Saint-Georges. Even the Josserands went and spent a fortnight at a friend's, near Pontoise, spreading a rumor beforehand that they were going to some watering-place.

This clearance, these deserted apartments, the staircase slumbering in a greater silence than ever, seemed to Octave to offer less danger; and he argued and so wearied Berthe that she at last received him in her room one evening whilst Auguste was away at Lyons. But this meeting also nearly took a bad turn. Madame Josserand, who had returned home two days before, was seized with such an attack of indigestion after dining out, that Hortense, filled with anxiety, went down-stairs for her sister. Fortunately, Rachel was just finishing scouring her saucepans, and she was able to let the young man out by the servants' staircase. On the following days, Berthe availed herself of that alarm to again refuse him everything.

Besides, they were so foolish as not to reward the servant. She attended to them in her cold way, and with her superior respect of a girl who hears and sees nothing; only, as madame was forever crying after money, and as Monsieur Octave already spent too much in presents, she curled her lip more and more in that wretched establishment, where the mistress' lover did not even present her with ten sous when he stayed there.

Meanwhile, Madame Juzeur wept with that lovesick darling who could only gaze on his mistress from a distance; and she gave him the very best advice. Octave's passion reached such a pitch that he thought one day of imploring her to lend him her apartment; no doubt she would not have refused, but he feared rousing Berthe's indignation by his indiscretion. He also had the idea of utilizing Saturnin; perhaps the madman would watch over them like a faithful dog in some out-of-the-way room; only, he displayed such a fantastical humor, at one time overwhelming his sister's lover with the most awkward caresses, at another, sulking with him and casting suspicious glances gleaming

with a sudden hatred. One could almost have thought him jealous, with the nervous and violent jealousy of a woman.

Just as September was drawing to a close, and the lodgers were on the point of returning home, a wild idea came to Octave in the midst of his torment. Rachel had asked her permission to sleep out on one of the Tuesdays that her master would be at Lyons, in order to enable her to attend the wedding of one of her sisters in the country; and it was merely a question of passing the night in the servant's room, where no one in the world would think of seeking them. Berthe, feeling deeply hurt at the suggestion, at first displayed the greatest repugnance; but he implored her with tears in his eyes; he talked of leaving Paris, where he suffered too much; he confused and wearied her with such a number of arguments, that, scarcely knowing what she did, she ended by consenting. All was settled. The Tuesday evening, after dinner, they took a cup of tea at the Josserands', so as to dispel any suspicions. Trublot, Gueulin, and uncle Bachelard were there; and, very late in the evening, Duveyrier, who occasionally came to sleep at the Rue de Choiseul, on account of business which he pretended he had to attend to early in the morning, even put in an appearance. Octave made a show of joining freely in the conversation of these gentlemen; then, when midnight struck, he withdrew, and went and locked himself in Rachel's room, where Berthe was to join him an hour later when all the house was asleep.

Upstairs, the arrangement of the room occupied him during the first half-hour. He had provided himself with clean bed linen, and he proceeded to remake the bed, awkwardly, and occupying a long while over it, through fear of being overheard. Then, like Trublot, he sat down on a box and tried to wait patiently. The servants came up to bed, one by one; and through the thin partitions the sounds of women undressing themselves could be heard. One o'clock struck, then the quarter, then the half hour past. He began to feel anxious; why was Berthe so long in coming? She must have left the Josserands' about one o'clock at the latest; and it could not take her more than ten minutes to go to her rooms and come out again by the servants' staircase. When two o'clock struck, he imagined all sorts of catastrophes. At length, he heaved a sigh of relief, on fancying he recognized her footstep. And he opened the door, in order to light her. But surprise rooted him to the spot. Opposite Adèle's door, Trublot, bent almost double, was looking through the key-hole, and jumped up, frightened by that sudden light.

"What! it's you again!" murmured Octave, with annoyance.

Trublot began to laugh, without appearing the least surprised at finding him there at such a time of night.

"Just fancy," explained he, very softly, "that fool Adèle hasn't given me

her key, and she has gone and joined Duveyrier in his room. Eh? what's the matter with you? Ah! you didn't know Duveyrier slept with her. It is so, my dear fellow. He really is reconciled with his wife, who, however, only resigns herself to him now and then; so he falls back upon Adèle. It's convenient, whenever he comes to Paris."

He interrupted himself, and stooped down again, then added, between his clenched teeth.

"What a confounded brainless girl that Adèle is! If she had only given me her key, I could have made myself comfortable here."

Then he returned to the loft where he had been, previously waiting, taking Octave with him, who, moreover, desired to question him respecting the finish of the evening at the Josserands'. But, for some time, Trublot would not allow him to open his mouth.

Octave was at length able to question him as to the wind-up of the party. It seemed that Berthe had left her mother's shortly after midnight, looking very composed. No doubt, she was now in Rachel's room. But Trublot, delighted at the meeting, would not let him go.

"It's idiotic, keeping me waiting so long," continued he. "Besides, I'm almost asleep as it is. My governor has put me into the liquidation department, and I'm up all night three times a week, my dear fellow. If Julie were only there, she would make room for me. But Duveyrier only brings Hippolyte up from the country. And, by the way, you know Hippolyte, that tall, ugly chap! Well! I just saw him going to join Louise, that frightened brat of a foundling, whose soul Madame Juzeur wished to save. Eh? it's a fine success for Madame! 'Anything you like except that.'"

That night, Trublot, who was greatly bored, was full of philosophical reflections. He added, almost in a whisper:

"Well, you know! like master, like man. When landlords set the example, it's scarcely surprising if the servants' tastes are not exactly refined. Ah! everything's decidedly going to the dogs in France!"

"Good-bye," said Octave; "I'm off."

But Trublot still detained him, enumerating the servants' rooms where he might have slept, as the summer had emptied nearly the whole of them; only the worst was that they all double-locked their doors, even when they were merely going to the end of the passage, they had such a fear of being robbed by each other.

At length Octave was able to get free. He was on the point of leaving Trublot in the profound obscurity of the loft, when the latter suddenly

expressed his surprise.

“But you, what are you doing amongst the maids? Ah! rascal, you come here too!”

And he laughed with delight, and promising to keep Octave’s secret, sent him off, wishing him a pleasant night of it.

When Octave found himself back in Rachel’s room, he experienced a fresh deception. Berthe was not there. Anger got the better of him now: Berthe had humbugged him, she had promised him merely to get rid of his importunities. Whilst he was chafing there, she was sleeping, happy at being alone, occupying the whole breadth of the conjugal couch. Then, instead of returning to his room and going to sleep himself, he obstinately waited, throwing himself all dressed as he was on the bed, and passing the night in forming projects of revenge. Three o’clock chimed out in the distance. The snores of robust maid-servants arose on his left; while on his right there was a continual wail, a woman moaning with pain in the fever of a sleepless night. He ended by recognizing the boot-stitcher’s voice. The wretched woman was lying suffering all alone in one of those poverty-stricken closets next to the roof.

Just as day was breaking, Octave fell asleep. A profound silence reigned; even the boot-stitcher no longer moaned, but lay like one dead. The sun was peering through the narrow window, when the door opening abruptly awoke the young man.

It was Berthe, who, urged by an irresistible desire, had come up to see if he was still there; she had at first scouted the idea, then she had furnished herself with pretexts, the need for going to the room and putting everything straight, in case he had left it anyhow in his rage. Moreover, she no longer expected to find him there. When she beheld him rise from the little iron bedstead, ghastly pale and menacing, she stood dumbfounded; and she listened with bowed head to his furious reproaches. He pressed her to answer, to give him at least some explanation. At length she murmured:

“At the last moment I could not do it. It was too indelicate. I love you, oh! I swear it. But not here, not here!”

And, seeing him approach her, she drew back, afraid that he might wish to take advantage of the opportunity. Eight o’clock was striking, the servants had all gone down, even Trublot had departed. Then, as he tried to take hold of her hands, saying that, when one loves a person, one accepts everything, she complained that the closeness of the room made her feel unwell, and she slightly opened the window. But he again tried to draw her toward him, overpowering her with his importunities. At this moment a turbid torrent of foul words ascended from the inner courtyard.

“Pig! slut! have you done? Your dish-cloth’s again fallen on my head.”

Berthe, turning ghastly pale, and quivering from head to foot, released herself, murmuring:

“Do you hear those girls? They make me shiver all over. The other day, I thought I should have been ill. No, leave me alone, and I promise to see you, on Tuesday next, in your room.”

The two lovers, standing up and not daring to move, were compelled to hear everything.

“Show yourself a moment,” continued Lisa, who was furious, “so that I may shy it back in your ugly face!”

Then Adèle went and leant out of her kitchen window.

“There’s a fuss about a bit of rag! To begin with, I only used it for washing up with yesterday. And then it fell out by accident.” They made peace together, and Lisa asked her what they had had for dinner at her place the day before. Another stew! What misers! She would have ordered chops for herself, if she had been in such a hole! She was forever inciting Adèle to sneak the sugar, the meat, the candles, just to show that she could do as she liked; as for herself, never being hungry, she left Victoire to rob the Cam-pardons, without even taking her share.

“Oh!” said Adèle, who was gradually becoming corrupted, “the other night I hid some potatoes in my pocket. They quite burnt my leg. It was jolly, it was jolly! And, you know, I like vinegar, I do. I don’t care, I drink it out of the cruet now.”

Victoire came and leant out in her turn, as she finished drinking some cassis mixed with brandy, which Lisa treated her to now and then of a morning, to pay her for concealing her day and night escapades. And, as Louise thrust out her tongue at them from the depths of Madame Juzeur’s kitchen, Victoire was at once down upon her.

“Wait a bit! you street foundling; I’ll shove your tongue somewhere for you!”

“Come along, then, old swiller!” retorted the little one. “I saw you yesterday bringing it all up again in your plate.”

At this, the rush of foul words again rebounded from wall to wall of the pestiferous hole. Adèle herself, who was mastering the Paris gift of the gab, called Louise a filthy drab, whilst Lisa yelled out:

“I’ll make her shut up if she bothers us. Yes, yes, little strumpet, I’ll tell Clémence. She’ll settle you. But, hush! here’s the man. He’s a nice, dirty

beast, he is!”

Hippolyte, just then appeared at the Duveyriers’ window, blacking his master’s boots. The other servants, in spite of everything, were polite to him, for he belonged to the aristocracy, and he despised Lisa, who, in her turn, despised Adèle, with more haughtiness than rich masters show to masters in difficulties. They asked him for news of Mademoiselle Clémence and Mademoiselle Julie. Well! really, they were almost bored to death there, but they were pretty well. Then, jumping to another subject, he asked:

“Did you hear that girl last night, wriggling about with her stomach-ache? Wasn’t it annoying? Luckily she’s going to leave soon. I had half a mind to call out to her.”

This allusion to the boot-stitcher’s condition caused them to pass all the ladies of the house in review.

At first they talked of Madame Campardon, who at least had nothing more to fear; then of Madame Juzeur, who took her precautions; next of Madame Duveyrier, who was disgusted with her husband; and of Madame Valérie, who went and got her children away from home. And at each recital bursts of laughter arose in blasts from the squalid hole.

Berthe had again turned pale. She waited, no longer even daring to leave the room, her eyes cast down with shame, like one to whom violence was being offered in Octave’s presence. He, exasperated with the servants, felt that they were becoming too filthy, and that he could not again take her in his arms; his desire was giving place to a weariness and a great sadness. But suddenly the young woman started. Lisa had just uttered her name.

“Talking of enjoying oneself, there’s one who seems to me to go in for a rare dose of it! Eh! Adèle, isn’t it true that your Mademoiselle Berthe was up to all manner of tricks at the time you used to wash her petticoats?”

“And now,” said Victoire, “she gets her husband’s assistant to give her a dusting!”

“Hush!” exclaimed Hippolyte softly.

“What for? Her jade of a servant isn’t there to-day. A sly hussy who’d eat you, when one speaks of her mistress! You know she’s a Jewess, and she murdered some one once. Perhaps the handsome Octave dusts her also, in the corners. The governor must have engaged him just to increase the family, the big ninny!”

Then Berthe, suffering indescribable anguish, raised her eyes to her lover. And, cast down, imploring some aid, she stammered, in a painful voice:

“My God! my God!”

Octave took her hand and squeezed it tightly; he was choking with impotent rage. What was to be done? he could not show himself and force those women to leave off. The foul words continued, words which the young woman had never heard before, all the overflow of a sewer which every morning found an outlet there, close to her, and of which she had never had the least suspicion. Their love, so carefully hidden as they thought, was now being dragged amidst the vegetable parings and the kitchen slops. These women knew all, without any one having spoken. Lisa related how Saturnin held the candle. Victoire was highly amused by the husband's headaches, and said that he would do well to get himself another eye and have it placed somewhere; even Adèle had a fling at her mistress' young lady, whose ailments, private habits, and toilet secrets she ruthlessly exposed. And a filthy chaff soiled all that remained that was good and tender in their love.

"Look out below!" suddenly exclaimed Victoire; "here's some of yesterday's carrots which stink enough to poison one! They'll do for that crapulous old Gourd!"

The servants, out of spite, threw all the filth they could into the inner courtyard, so that the doorkeeper should have it to sweep up.

"And here's a bit of moldy kidney!" said Adèle in her turn.

All the scrapings of the saucepans, all the muck from the washing-up basins, found their way there, whilst Lisa continued to pull Berthe and Octave to pieces. The pair remained standing, hand-in-hand, face to face, unable to turn away their eyes; and their hands became as cold as ice, and their looks acknowledged the impurity of their intimacy. This was what their love had come to, this fornication beneath a downpour of putrid meat and stale vegetables!

"And you know," said Hippolyte, "the young gentleman doesn't care for the missis. He merely took her to help him along in the world. Oh! he's a miser at heart in spite of his airs, an unscrupulous fellow, who, with his pretensions of loving women, is not above slapping them!"

Berthe, her eyes on Octave, saw him turn pale, his face so upset, so changed, that he frightened her.

"On my word! the two make a nice pair," resumed Lisa. "I wouldn't give much for her skin either. Badly brought up, with a heart as hard as a stone, caring for nothing except her own pleasure, and sleeping with fellows for the sake of their money, yes, for their money! for I know the sort of woman."

The tears streamed from Berthe's eyes. Octave beheld her features all distorted. It was as if they had been flayed before each other, laid utterly bare, without any possibility of protesting. Then the young woman, suffocated by

this open cesspool which discharged its exhalations full in her face, wished to fly. He did not detain her, for disgust with themselves made their presence a torture, and they longed for the relief of no longer seeing each other.

“You promise to come, next Tuesday, to my room?”

“Yes, yes.”

And she hurried away, quite distracted. Left alone, he walked about the room, fumbling with his hands, putting the linen he had brought, into a bundle. He was no longer listening to the servants, when their last words attracted his attention.

“I tell you that Monsieur Hédouin died last night. If handsome Octave had foreseen that, he would have continued to cultivate Madame Hédouin, who’s worth a lot.”

This news, learnt there, amidst those surroundings, re-echoed in the innermost recesses of his being. Monsieur Hédouin was dead! And he was seized with an immense regret. He thought out loud, he could not restrain himself from saying:

“Ah! yes, by Jove! I’ve been a fool!”

When Octave at length went down, with his bundle, he met Rachel coming up to her room. Had she been a few minutes sooner, she would have caught them there. Down-stairs, she had again found her mistress in tears; but, this time, she had not got anything out of her, neither an avowal, nor a sou. And furious, understanding that they took advantage of her absence to see each other and thus to do her out of her little profits, she stared at the young man with a look black with menace. A singular schoolboy timidity prevented Octave from giving her ten francs; and, desirous of displaying perfect ease of mind, he went in to joke with Marie a while, when a grunt proceeding from a corner caused him to turn round: it was Saturnin, who rose up saying, in one of his jealous fits:

“Take care! we’re mortal enemies!”

That morning was the 8th of October, and the boot-stitcher had to clear out before noon. For a week past, Monsieur Gourd had been watching her with a dread that increased hourly.

The boot-stitcher had implored the landlord to let her stay a few days longer, so as to get over her confinement, but had met with an indignant refusal. Pains were seizing her at every moment; during the last night, she had fancied she would be brought to bed all alone. Then, toward nine o’clock, she had begun her moving, helping the youngster whose little truck was in the courtyard, leaning against the furniture or sitting down on the stairs, whenever

a formidable spasm doubled her up.

Monsieur Gourd, however, had discovered nothing. Not a man! He had been regularly humbugged. So that, all the morning, he prowled about in a cold rage. Octave, who met him, shuddered at the thought that he also must know of their intimacy.

At a quarter to twelve, the work-girl appeared, with her wax-like face, her perpetual sadness, her mournful despondency. She could scarcely move along. Monsieur Gourd trembled until she was safe out in the street. Just as she handed him her key, Duveyrier issued from the vestibule, so heated by his night's work that the red blotches on his forehead seemed almost bleeding. He put on a haughty air, an implacable moral severity, when the creature passed before him. Ashamed and resigned, she bowed her head; and, following the little truck, she went off with the same despairing step as she had come, the day when she had been engulfed by the undertaker's black hangings.

Then, only, did Monsieur Gourd triumph. As though this woman had carried off with her all the uneasiness of the house, the disreputable things with which the very walls shuddered, he called out to the landlord:

"A good riddance, sir! One will be able to breathe now, for, on my word of honor! it was becoming disgusting. It has lifted a hundred weight from off my chest. No, sir; you see, in a house which is to be respected, there should be no single women, and especially none of those women who work!"

CHAPTER XIV.

On the following Tuesday Berthe did not keep her promise to Octave. This time she had warned him not to expect her, in a rapid explanation they had had that evening, after the warehouse closed; and she sobbed; she had been to confession the day before, feeling a want of religious comfort, and was still quite upset by Abbé Manduit's grievous exhortations. Since her marriage she had thrown aside all religion, but, after the foul words with which the servants had sullied her, she had suddenly felt so sad, so abandoned, so unclean, that she had returned for an hour to the belief of her childhood, inflamed with a hope of purification and salvation. On her return, the priest having wept with her, her sin quite horrified her. Octave, impotent and furious, shrugged his shoulders.

Then, three days later, she again promised for the following Tuesday. At a meeting with her lover, in the Passage des Panoramas, she had seen some Chantilly lace shawls, and she was incessantly alluding to them, whilst her

eyes were filled with desire. So that, on the Monday morning, the young man laughingly said to her, in order to soften the brutal nature of the bargain, that, if she at last kept her word, she would find a little surprise for herself up in his room. She understood him, and again burst into tears. No! no! she would not go now; he had spoilt all the pleasure she had anticipated from their being together. She had spoken of the shawl thoughtlessly; she no longer wanted it; she would throw it on the fire if he gave it her. However, on the morrow, they made all their arrangements: she was to knock three times at his door very softly half an hour after midnight.

That day, when Auguste started for Lyons, he struck Berthe as being rather peculiar. She had caught him whispering with Rachel behind the kitchen door; besides which, he was quite yellow, and shivering, with one eye closed up; but, as he complained a good deal of his headache, she thought he was ill, and told him that the journey would do him good. Directly he had left, she returned to the kitchen, still feeling slightly uneasy, and tried to sound the servant. The girl continued to be discreet and respectful, and maintained the stiff attitude of her early days. The young woman, however, felt that she was vaguely dissatisfied, and she thought that she had been very foolish to give her twenty francs and a dress, and then to stop all further gratuities, although compelled to do so, for she was forever in want of a five franc piece herself.

“My poor girl,” said she to her, “I have not been very generous, have I? But it is not my fault. I have not forgotten you, and I shall recompense you by-and-by.”

“Madame owes me nothing,” answered Rachel, in her cold way.

Then Berthe went and fetched two of her old chemises, wishing at least to show her good nature. But the servant, on receiving them, observed that they would do for rags for the kitchen.

“Thank you, madame; calico irritates my skin; I only wear linen.”

Berthe, however, found her so polite, that she became more easy. She made herself very familiar with her, told her she was going to sleep out, and even asked her to leave a lamp alight, in case she required it. The door leading on to the grand staircase could be bolted, and she would go out by way of the kitchen, the key of which she would take with her. The servant received these instructions as coolly as if it had been a question of cooking a piece of beef for the morrow’s dinner.

By a refinement of discretion, as his mistress was to dine with her parents that evening, Octave accepted an invitation to the Campar-dons’. He counted on staying there till ten o’clock, and then going and shutting himself up in his room, and waiting for half-past twelve with as much patience as possible.

The dinner at the Campardons' was quite patriarchal. The architect, seated between his wife and her cousin, lingered over the dishes—regular family dishes—abundant and wholesome, as he described them.

"Eat away," cried the architect to Octave; "you may be eaten yourself some day."

Madame Campardon, bending toward the young man's ear, was once more congratulating herself on the happiness which the cousin had brought the household; an economy of quite cent. per cent.; the servants made to be respectful; Angèle looked after properly, and receiving good examples.

"In short," murmured she, "Achille continues to be as happy as a fish in water, and, as for me, I have absolutely nothing whatever left to do, absolutely nothing. Listen! she even washes me now. I can live without moving either arms or legs; she has taken all the cares of the household on her own shoulders."

Then the architect related how "he had settled those jokers of the Ministry of Public Instruction."

"Just fancy, my dear fellow, they made no end of a fuss about the work I've done at Evreux, You see, I wished, above all, to please the bishop. Only, the range for the new kitchens and the heating apparatus have come to more than twenty thousand francs. No credit was voted for them, and it is not easy to get twenty thousand francs out of the small sum allowed for repairs."

They laughed all round the table, without the least respect for the Ministry, of which they spoke with disdain, their mouths full of rice. Rose declared that it was best to be on the side of religion. Ever since the works at Saint-Roch, Achille was overwhelmed with orders; the greatest families would employ no one else; it was impossible for him to attend to them all; he would have to work all night as well as all day. God wished them well, most decidedly, and the family returned thanks to Him, both night and morning.

They were having dessert, when Campardon exclaimed:

"By the way, my dear fellow, you know that Duveyrier has found _____"

He was about to name Clarisse. But he recollected that Angèle was present, so, casting a side glance toward his daughter, he added:

"He has found his relative, you know."

And, biting his lip and winking his eye, he at length made himself understood by Octave, who at first did not in the least catch what he meant.

"Yes, Trublot, whom I met, told me so. The day before yesterday, when it

was pouring in torrents, Duveyrier stood up inside a doorway, and who do you think he saw there? why, his relative shaking out her umbrella. Trublot had been seeking her for a week past, so as to restore her to him."

Angèle had modestly lowered her eyes onto her plate, and began swallowing enormous mouthfuls. The family rigorously excluded all indecent words from their conversation.

"Is she good looking?" asked Rose of Octave.

"That's a matter of taste," replied the latter. "Some people may think so."

"She had the andacity to come to the shop one day," said Gasparine, who, in spite of her own skinniness, detested thin people. "She was pointed out to me. A regular bean-stalk."

"All the same," concluded the architect, "Duveyrier's hooked again. His poor wife———"

He intended saying that Clotilde was probably relieved and delighted. Only, he remembered a second time that Angèle was present, and put on a doleful air to declare:

"Relations do not always agree together. Yes! every family has its worries."

Lisa, on the other side of the table, with a napkin on her arm, looked at Angèle, and the latter, seized with a mad fit of laughter, hastened to take a long drink, and hide her face in her glass.

A little before ten o'clock, Octave pretended to be very fatigued, and retired to his room. In spite of Rose's affectionate ways, he was ill at ease in that family circle, where he felt Gasparine's hostility to him to be ever on the increase. Yet, he had never done anything to her. She detested him for being a handsome man, she suspected him of having overcome all the women of the house, and that exasperated her, though she did not desire him the least in the world, but merely yielded, at the thought of his happiness, to the instinctive anger of a woman whose beauty had faded too soon.

Directly he had left, the family talked of retiring for the night. Before getting into bed, Rose spent an hour in her dressing-room every evening. She proceeded to wash and scent herself all over, then did her hair, examined her eyes, her mouth, her ears, and even placed a tiny patch under her chin. At night-time, she replaced her luxury of dressing-gowns by a luxury of night-caps and chemises.

On that occasion she selected a chemise and a cap trimmed with Valenciennes lace. Gasparine had assisted her, handing her the basins, wiping up the water she spilt, drying her with a soft towel, little things which she did

far better than Lisa.

“Ah! I do feel comfortable!” said Rose at length, stretched out in her bed, whilst the cousin tucked in the sheets and raised the bolster.

And she laughed with delight, all alone in the middle of the big bed. With her soft, delicate, and spotless body, reclining amidst the lace, she looked like some beautiful creature awaiting the idol of her heart. When she felt herself pretty, she slept better, she used to say. Besides, it was the only pleasure left her.

“Is it all right?” asked Campardon, entering the room. “Well! good-night, little duck.”

He pretended he had some work to do. He would have to sit up a little longer. But she grew angry, she wished him to take some rest; it was foolish to work himself to death like that!

“You hear me, now go to bed. Gasparine, promise me to make him go to bed.”

The cousin, who had just placed a glass of sugar and water, and one of Dickens’ novels on the night table, looked at her. Without answering, she bent over and said:

“You are so nice, this evening!”

And she kissed her on both cheeks, with her dry lips and bitter mouth, in the resigned manner of a poor and ugly relation. Campardon, his face very red, and suffering from a difficult digestion, also looked at his wife. His mustache quivered slightly as he kissed her in his turn.

“Good night, my little duck.”

“Good night, my darling. Now, mind you go to bed at once.”

“Never fear!” said Gasparine. “If he’s not in bed asleep at eleven o’clock, I’ll get up and put his lamp out.”

Toward eleven o’clock, Campardon, who was yawning over a Swiss cottage, the fancy of a tailor of the Rue Rameau, rose from his seat and undressed himself slowly, thinking of Rose, so pretty and so clean; then, after opening his bed, on account of the servants, he went and joined Gasparine in hers. It was so narrow that they slept very uncomfortably in it, and their elbows were constantly digging into each other’s ribs. He especially always had one leg quite stiff in the morning, through his efforts to balance himself on the edge of the mattress.

At the same time, as Victoire had gone to her room, having finished her washing up, Lisa came, in accordance with her usual custom, to see if

mademoiselle required anything more. Angèle was waiting for her comfortably in her bed; and thus, every evening, unknown to the parents, they had endless games at cards, on a corner of the counterpane, which they spread out for the purpose. They played at beggar-my-neighbor, while abusing cousin Gasparine, a dirty creature, whom the maid coarsely pulled to pieces before the child. They both avenged themselves for their hypocritical submission during the day, and Lisa took a low delight in this corruption of Angèle, and in satisfying the curiosity of this sickly girl, agitated by the crisis of her thirteen years. That night they were furious with Gasparine, who, for two days past, had taken to locking up the sugar, with which the maid filled her pockets, to empty them afterward on the child's bed. What a bear she was! now they were not even able to get a lump of sugar to suck when going to sleep!

"Yet, your papa gives her plenty of sugar!" said Lisa, with a sensual laugh.

"Oh! yes!" murmured Angèle, laughing also.

"What does your papa do to her? Come, show me."

Then the child caught the maid round the neck, pressed her in her bare arms, and kissed her violently on the mouth, saying as she did so:

"See! like this. See! like this."

Midnight struck. Campardon and Gasparine were moaning in their over-narrow bed, whilst Rose, stretching herself out in the middle of hers, and extending her limbs, was reading Dickens, with tears of emotion. A profound silence followed; the chaste night cast its shadow over the respectability of the family.

On going up to his room, Octave found that the Pichons had company. Jules called him in, and persisted on his taking a glass of something. Monsieur and Madame Vuillaume were there, having made it up with the young people, on the occasion of Marie's churching, she having been confined in September. They had even agreed to come to dinner one Tuesday, to celebrate the young woman's recovery, which only fully dated from the day before. Anxious to pacify her mother, whom the sight of the child, another girl, annoyed, she had sent it out to nurse, not far from Paris. Lilitte was sleeping on the table, overcome by a glass of pure wine, which her parents had forced her to drink to her little sister's health.

"Well! two may still be put up with!" said Madame Vuillaume, after clinking glasses with Octave. "Only, don't do it again, son-in-law."

The others all laughed. But the old woman remained perfectly grave.

"There is nothing laughable in that," she continued. "We accept this child, but I swear to you that if another were to come——"

“Oh! if another came,” finished Monsieur Vuillaume, “you would have neither heart nor brains. Dash it all! one must be serious in life, one should restrain oneself, when one has not got hundreds and thousands to spend in pleasures.”

And, turning toward Octave, he added:

“You see, sir, I am decorated. Well! I may tell you that, so as not to dirty too many ribbons, I don’t wear my decoration at home. Therefore, if I deprive my wife and myself of the pleasure of being decorated in our own home, our children can certainly deprive themselves of the pleasure of having daughters. No, sir, there are no little economies.”

But the Pichons assured him of their obedience. They were not likely to be caught at that game again!

“To suffer what I’ve suffered!” said Marie, still quite pale.

“I would sooner cut my leg off,” declared Jules.

The Vuillaumes nodded their heads with a satisfied air. They had their word, so they forgave them that time. And, as ten was striking by the clock, they tenderly embraced all round; and Jules put on his hat to see them to the omnibus. This resumption of the old ways affected them so much that they embraced a second time on the landing. When they had taken their departure, Marie, who stood watching them go down, leaning over the balustrade, beside Octave, took the latter back to the dining-room, saying:

“Ah! mamma is not unkind, and she is quite right: children are no joke!”

She had shut the door, and was clearing the table of the glasses which still lay about. The narrow room, with its smoky lamp, was quite warm from the little family jollification. Lilitte continued to slumber on a corner of the American cloth.

“I’m off to bed,” murmured Octave.

But he sat down, feeling very comfortable there.

“What! going to bed already!” resumed the young woman. “You don’t often keep such good hours. Have you something to see to, then, early to-morrow?”

“No,” answered he. “I feel sleepy, that is all. Oh! I can very well stay another ten minutes or so.”

He just then thought of Berthe. She would not be coming up till half-past twelve: he had plenty of time. And this thought, the hope of having her with him for a whole night, which had been consuming him for weeks past, no longer had the same effect on him. The fever of the day, the torment of his

desire counting the minutes, evoking the continual image of approaching bliss, gave way beneath the fatigue of waiting.

“Will you have another small glass of brandy?” asked Marie.

“Well! yes, I don’t mind.”

He thought that it would set him up a bit. When she had taken the glass from him, he caught hold of her hands, and held them in his, whilst she smiled, without the least alarm. He thought her charming, with her paleness of a woman who had recently gone through a deal of suffering. All the hidden tenderness with which he felt himself again invaded, ascended with sudden violence to his throat, and to his lips. He had one evening restored her to her husband, after placing a father’s kiss upon her brow, and now he felt a necessity to take her back again, an acute and immediate longing, in which all desire for Berthe vanished, like something too distant to dwell upon.

“You are not afraid, then, to-day?” asked he, squeezing her hands tighter.

“No, since it has now become impossible. Oh! we shall always be good friends!”

And she gave him to understand that she knew everything. Saturnin must have spoken. Moreover, she always noticed when Octave received a certain person in his room. As he turned pale with anxiety, she hastened to ease his mind: she would never say a word to any one, she was not angry, on the contrary she wished him much happiness.

“Come,” repeated she, “I’m married, so I can’t bear you any ill will.”

He took her on his knees, and exclaimed:

“But it’s you who I love!”

And he spoke truly. At that moment he loved her and only her, and with an absolute and infinite passion. All his new intrigue, the two months spent in pursuing another, were as naught. He again beheld himself in that narrow room, coming and kissing Marie on the neck, behind Jule’s back, ever finding her willing, with her passive gentleness. This was true happiness, how was it that he had disdained it? Regret almost broke his heart. He still wished for her, and he felt that, if he had her no more, he would be eternally miserable.

“Let me be,” murmured she, trying to release herself. “You are not reasonable, you will end by grieving me. Now that you love another, what is the use of continuing to torment me?”

She defended herself thus, in her gentle and irresolute way, merely feeling a certain repugnance for what did not amuse her much. But he was getting crazy, he squeezed her tighter, he kissed her throat through the coarse material

of her woolen dress.

“It’s you who I love, you cannot understand—Listen! on what I hold most sacred, I swear to you I do not lie. Tear my heart open and see. Oh! I implore you, be kind!”

Marie, paralyzed by the will of this man, made a movement as though to take slumbering Lilitte into the next apartment; but he prevented her, fearing that she would awaken the child. The peacefulness of the house, at that hour of the night, filled the little room with a sort of buzzing silence. Suddenly the lamp went down, and they were about to find themselves in the dark, when Marie, rising, was just in time to wind it up again.

Tears filled her eyes, and she remained sad, though still without anger. When he left her, he felt dissatisfied, he would have liked to have gone to sleep. But the other one would be there shortly, he must wait for her, and this thought weighed terribly on him; after having spent feverish nights in concocting extravagant plans for getting her to visit him in his room, he longed for something to happen which would prevent her from coming up. Perhaps she would once again fail to keep her word. It was a hope with which he scarcely dared delude himself.

Midnight struck. Octave, quite tired out, stood listening, fearing to hear the rustling of her skirts along the narrow passage. At half past twelve, he was seized with real anxiety; at one o’clock, he thought himself saved, but a secret irritation mingled with his relief, the annoyance of a man made a fool of by a woman. But, just as he made up his mind to undress himself, yawning for want of sleep, there came three gentle taps at the door. It was Berthe. He felt both annoyed and flattered, and advanced to meet her with open arms, when she motioned him aside, and stood trembling and listening against the door, which she had hastily shut after her.

“What is the matter?” asked he, in a low voice.

“I don’t know, I was frightened,” stammered she. “It is so dark on the stairs, I thought that somebody was following me. Dear me! how stupid all this is! Some harm is sure to happen to us.”

This chilled them both. They did not even kiss each other.

“I am going back,” said she, without leaving her chair.

“What, you are going?”

“Do you think I sell myself? You are always hurting my feelings; you have again spoilt all my pleasure to-night. Why did you buy it, when I forbade you to do so?”

She got up, and at length consented to look at it. But, when she opened the

box, she experienced such a disappointment, that she could not restrain this indignant exclamation:

“What! it is not Chantilly at all, it is llama!”

Octave, who was reducing his presents, had yielded to a miserly idea. He tried to explain to her that there was some superb llama, quite equal to Chantilly; and he praised up the article, just as though he had been behind his counter, making her feel the lace, and swearing that it would last her forever. But she shook her head, and silenced him by observing contemptuously.

“The long and short of it is, this costs one hundred francs, whereas the other would have cost three hundred.”

And, seeing him turn pale, she added, so as to soften her words: “You are very kind all the same, and I am much obliged to you. It is not the value which makes the present, when one’s intention is good.”

She sat down again, and a pause ensued. She was still quite upset by her silly fright on the stairs! And she returned to her misgivings with respect to Rachel, relating how she had found Auguste whispering with the maid behind the door. Yet, it would have been so easy to have bought the girl over by giving her a five franc piece from time to time. But to do this, it was necessary to have some five franc pieces; she never had one, she had nothing. Her voice became harsh, the llama shawl, which she no longer alluded to, was working her up to such a pitch of rancor and despair, that she ended by picking the quarrel with her lover which had already existed so long between her and her husband.

“Come, now, is it a life worth living? never a sou, always at any one’s mercy for the least thing! Oh! I’ve had enough of it, I’ve had enough of it!”

Octave, who was pacing the room, stopped short to ask her:

“But why do you tell me all this?”

“Eh? sir, why? But there are things which delicacy alone ought to tell you, without my being made to blush by having to discuss such matters with you. Ought you not, long ere now, and without having to be told, to have made me easy by bringing this girl to our feet?”

She paused, then she added, in a tone of disdainful irony:

“It would not have ruined you.”

There was another silence. The young man, who was again pacing the room, at length replied:

“I am not rich, and I regret it for your sake.”

Then matters went from bad to worse, the quarrel assumed quite conjugal violence.

“Say that I love you for your money!” cried she, with all the bluntness of her mother, whose very words seemed to come to her lips. “I am a money-loving woman, am I not? Well! yes, I am a money-loving woman, because I am a sensible woman. It is no use pretending the contrary; money will ever be money in spite of everything. As for me, whenever I have had twenty sous, I have always pretended that I had forty, for it is better to create envy than pity.”

He interrupted her to say, in a weary voice, like a man who only desires peace.

“Listen, if it annoys you so much that it’s a llama shawl, I will give you one in Chantilly.”

“Your shawl!” continued she, in a regular fury, “why, I’ve already forgotten all about your shawl! The other things are what exasperate me, understand! Oh! moreover, you’re just like my husband. You wouldn’t care a bit if I hadn’t a pair of boots to go out in. Yet, when one loves a woman, good nature alone should prompt one to feed and dress her. But no man will ever understand that. Why, between the two of you, you would soon let me go out with nothing on but my chemise, if I was agreeable!”

Octave, tired out by this domestic squabble, decided not to answer, having noticed that Auguste sometimes got rid of her in that way. He let pass the flow of words, and thought of the ill-luck of his amours. Yet, he had ardently desired this one, even to the point of upsetting all his calculations; and, now that she was in his room, it was to quarrel with him, to make him pass a sleepless night, as though they had already left six months of married life behind them.

And full of conciliation, without desire, but polite, he tried to kiss her. She pushed him away, and burst into tears.

“Go on, reproach me also with my outings,” stammered she in the midst of her sobs. “Accuse me of being too great an expense to you. Oh! I see clearly now; it’s all on account of that wretched present. If you could shut me up in a box, you would do so. I have lady friends; I go to call on them; that is no crime. And as for mamma——”

“For heaven’s sake leave your mamma alone,” interrupted Octave; “and allow me to tell you that she has given you a precious bad temper.”

She mechanically commenced to undress herself, and becoming more and more excited, she raised her voice.

“Mamma has always done her duty. It’s not for you to speak of her here. I

forbid you to mention her name. It only remained for you to attack my family!”

Finding a difficulty in undoing the string of her petticoat, she broke it. Then, seating herself on the edge of the bed, her bosom heaving with anger in the midst of the surrounding lace of her chemise, she continued:

“Ah! how I regret my weakness, sir! how one would reflect, if one could only foresee everything!”

Octave, who had made a show of lying with his face to the wall, suddenly bounced round, exclaiming:

“What! you regret having loved me?”

“Most certainly, a man incapable of understanding a woman’s heart!”

And they looked at each other close together, with hardened faces, quite devoid of love.

“Ah! good heavens! if it were only to come over again!” added she.

“You would take another, wouldn’t you?” said he, brutally and in a very low voice.

She was about to answer fin the same exasperated tone, when there came a sudden hammering at the door. Not understanding at first what it meant, they remained immovable, and their blood seemed to freeze in their veins. A hollow voice said:

“Open the door, I can hear you at your dirty tricks. Open, or I will burst it in!”

It was the husband’s voice. Still the lovers did not move, their heads were filled with such a buzzing that they could think of nothing; and they felt very cold, just like corpses. Berthe at length jumped from the bed, with an instinctive desire to fly from her lover, whilst, on the other side of the door, Auguste repeated:

“Open! open, I say!”

Then ensued a terrible confusion, an inexpressible anguish. Berthe turned about the room in a state of distraction, seeking for some outlet, with a fear of death which made her turn ghastly pale. Octave, whose heart jumped to his mouth at each blow, had gone and mechanically leant against the door, as though to strengthen it. The noise was becoming unbearable, the fool would wake the whole house up, he would have to open the door. But, when she understood his determination, she hung onto his arms, imploring him with terrified eyes; no, no, mercy! the other would rush upon them with a pistol or a knife. He, as pale as herself, and partly overcome by her fright, slipped on his

trousers, and beseeched her to dress herself. Still bewildered, she only managed to put on her stockings. All this time the husband continued his uproar.

“You won’t; you don’t answer. Very well, you’ll see.”

Every since he had last paid his rent, Octave had been asking his landlord for some slight repairs—two new screws in the staple of his lock, which scarcely held to the wood. Suddenly the door cracked, the staple yielded, and Auguste, unable to stop himself, rolled into the middle of the room.

“Damnation!” swore he.

He simply held a key in his hand, which was bleeding through becoming grazed in his fall. When he got up, livid, and filled with rage and shame at the thought of his ridiculous entry, he hit out into space, and wished to spring upon Octave. But the latter, in spite of the awkwardness of being barefooted and having his trousers all awry, seized him by the wrists, and, being the stronger of the two, mastered him, at the same time exclaiming:

“Sir, you are violating my domicile. It is disgraceful; you should act like a gentleman.”

And he almost beat him. During their short struggle, Berthe had made off in her chemise by the door which had remained wide open; she fancied she beheld a kitchen knife in her husband’s bleeding fist, and she seemed to feel the cold steel between her shoulders. As she rushed along the dark passage, she thought she heard the sound of blows, without being able to make out who had dealt them, or who received them. Voices, which she no longer recognized, were saying:

“I am at your service whenever you please.”

“Very well, you will hear from me.”

With a bound she gained the servants’ staircase. But when she had rushed down the two flights, as though there had been the flames of a conflagration behind her, she found the kitchen door locked, and remembered she had left the key up-stairs in the pocket of her dressing-gown. Moreover, there was no lamp; not the least glimmer of a light beneath the door; it was evidently the servant who had sold them. Without stopping to take breath, she tore up-stairs again, passing once more before the passage leading to Octave’s room, where the two men’s voices still continued in violent altercation.

They were going on abusing each other; she would have time, perhaps. And she rapidly descended the grand staircase, with the hope that her husband had left their outer door open. She would bolt herself in her room, and open to nobody. But there, for the second time, she encountered a locked door. Then,

shut out from her home, with scarcely a covering to her body, she lost her head, and scampered from floor to floor, like some hunted animal which knows not where to take earth. She would never have the courage to knock at her parents' door. At one moment she thought of taking refuge with the doorkeepers, but shame drove her up-stairs again. She listened, raised her head, bent over the hand-rail, her ears deafened by the beating of her heart in the profound silence, her eyes blinded by lights which seemed to shoot out from the dense obscurity. And it was always the knife, the knife in Auguste's bleeding fist, the icy cold point of which was about to pierce her. Suddenly there was a noise; she fancied he was coming, and she shivered to her very marrow; and, as she was opposite Campardons' door, she rang desperately, furiously, almost breaking the bell.

"Good heavens! is the house on fire?" asked an agitated voice inside.

The door opened at once. It was Lisa, who was only then leaving mademoiselle, walking softly, and with a candlestick in her hand. The mad ringing of the bell had made her start, just as she was crossing the ante-room. When she caught sight of Berthe in her chemise, she stood rooted to the spot.

"What's the matter?" asked she.

The young woman had entered, violently slamming the door behind her; and, panting and leaning against the wall, she stammered out:

"Hush! keep quiet! He wants to kill me."

Lisa was trying to get a sensible explanation from her, when Campardon appeared, looking very anxious. This incomprehensible uproar had disturbed Gasparine and him in their narrow bed. He had simply slipped on his trousers, and his fat face was swollen and covered with perspiration, whilst his yellow beard was quite flaccid and full of the white down of the pillow. He was all out of breath, and endeavoring to assume the assurance of a husband who sleeps alone.

"Is that you, Lisa?" called he from the drawing-room. "It's absurd! How is it you're not up-stairs?"

"I was afraid I had not fastened the door properly, sir; I could not sleep for thinking of it, so I came down to make sure. But it's madame——"

The architect, seeing Berthe leaning against the wall of his anteroom with nothing but her chemise on, stood lost in amazement also. Berthe forgot how scantily she was clad.

"Oh! sir, keep me here," repeated she. "He wants to kill me."

"Who does?" asked he.

“My husband.”

The cousin now put in an appearance behind the architect. She had taken time to don a dress, and, her hair untidy and also full of down, her breast flat and hanging, her bones almost protruding through her garment, she brought with her the rancor arising from her interrupted repose. The sight of the young woman, of her plump and delicate nudity, only increased her ill-humor.

“Whatever have you done, then, to your husband?” she asked.

At this simple question Berthe was overcome by a great shame. She remembered she was half-naked, and blushed from head to foot. In this long thrill of shame, she crossed her arms over her bosom, as though to escape the glances directed at her. And she stammered out:

“He found me—he caught me——”

The two others understood, and looked at each other with indignation in their eyes. Lisa, whose candle lighted up the scene, pretended to share her master’s reprehension. At this moment, however, the explanation was interrupted by Angèle also hastening to the spot; and she pretended to have just woke up, rubbing her eyes heavy with sleep. The sight of the lady with nothing on her but a chemise suddenly brought her to a standstill, with a jerk, a quivering of her precocious young girl’s slender body.

“Oh!” she simply exclaimed.

“It’s nothing; go back to bed!” cried her father.

Then, understanding that some sort of story was necessary, he related the first that came into his head, but it was really too ludicrous.

“Madame sprained her ankle coming down-stairs, so she’s come here for assistance. Go back to bed; you’ll catch cold!”

Lisa choked back a laugh on encountering Angele’s wide-open eyes, as the latter returned to her bed, all rosy, and quite delighted at having seen such a sight. For some minutes past Madame Campardon had been calling from her room. She had not put her light out, being so interested in her Dickens, and she wished to know what had happened. What did it all mean? who was there? why did not some one come to set her mind at rest?

“Come, madame,” said the architect, taking Berthe with him. “And you, Lisa, wait a minute.”

In the bed-room, Rose was still spread out in the middle of the big bed. She throned there with her queenly luxury, her quiet serenity of an idol. She was deeply affected by what she had read, and she had placed the book on her breast, with the heavings of which it gently rose and fell. When the cousin in a

few words had made her acquainted with what had taken place, she also appeared to be scandalized. How could one go with a man who was not one's husband? and she was filled with disgust for that which was denied to her. But the architect now cast confused glances at the young woman, and this ended by making Gasparine blush.

"It is shocking!" cried she. "Cover yourself up, madame, for it is really shocking! Pray cover yourself up!"

And she herself threw a shawl of Rose's over Berthe's shoulders, a large knitted woolen shawl which was lying about. It did not reach to her knees, however, and in spite of himself the architect's eyes wandered over the young woman's person.

Berthe was still trembling. Though she was in safety, she kept starting and looking toward the door. Her eyes were full of tears, and she beseeched this lady, who seemed so calm and comfortable as she lay in bed:

"Oh! madame, keep me, save me. He wants to kill me."

A pause ensued. The three were consulting one another with their eyes, without hiding their disapproval of such culpable conduct. Besides, it was not proper to come in a state of nudity and wake people up after midnight, and perhaps put them to great inconvenience. No, such a thing was not right; it showed a want of discretion, besides placing them in a very awkward position.

"We have a young girl here," said Gasparine at length. "Think of our responsibility, madame."

"You would be better with your parents," insinuated the architect, "and if you will allow me to see you to their door——"

Berthe was again seized with terror.

"No, no! He is on the stairs; he would kill me."

And she implored him to let her remain: a chair was all she needed to wait on till morning; on the morrow, she would go quietly away. The architect and his wife would have consented; he won over by such tender charms; she interested by the drama of this surprise in the middle of the night. But Gasparine remained inflexible. Yet she had her curiosity to satisfy, and she ended by asking:

"Wherever were you?"

"Up-stairs, in the room at the end of the passage, you know."

At this, Campardon held up his arms and exclaimed:

"What! with Octave! it isn't possible!"

With Octave, with that bean-stalk, such a pretty, plump little woman! He was annoyed. Rose, also, felt vexed, and was now inclined to be severe. As for Gasparine, she was quite beside herself, stung to the heart by her instinctive hatred of the young man. He again! she knew very well that he had them all; but she was certainly not going to be so stupid as to keep them warm for him in her home.

“Put yourself in our place,” resumed she, harshly. “I tell you again we have a young girl here.”

“Besides,” said Campardon, in his turn, “there is the house to be considered; there is your husband, with whom I have always been on the best of terms. He would have a right to be surprised. It will never do for us to appear to publicly approve your conduct, madame, oh! a conduct which I do not permit myself to judge, but which is rather—what shall I say?—rather indiscreet, is it not?”

“We are certainly not going to cast stones at you,” continued Rose. “Only, the world is so wicked! People will say that you had your meetings here. And, you know, my husband works for some very strait-laced people. At the least stain on his morality, he would lose everything. But, allow me to ask you, madame, how is it you were not restrained by religion? The Abbé Manduit was talking to us of you quite paternally, only the day before yesterday.”

Berthe turned her head about between the three of them, looking at the one who spoke, in a bewildered sort of way. In the midst of her fright, she was beginning to understand; she felt surprised at being there. Why had she rang; what was she doing amongst these people whom she disturbed? She saw them clearly now—the wife occupying the whole width of the bed, the husband in his drawers, and the cousin in a thin skirt, the pair of them white with the feathers of the same pillow. They were right; it was not proper to tumble amongst people in that way. And, as the architect pushed her gently toward the ante-room, she went off without even answering Rose’s religious regrets.

“Shall I accompany you as far as your parents’ door?” asked Campardon. “Your place is with them.”

She refused, with a terrified gesture.

“Then, wait a moment; I will take a look up and down the stairs, for I should deeply regret if the least harm happened to you.”

Lisa had remained in the middle of the ante-room, with her candle. He took it, went out onto the landing, and returned almost immediately.

“I assure you there is no one. Run up quick.”

Then Berthe, who had not again opened her lips, hastily took off the

woolen shawl, and threw it on the floor, saying:

“Here! this is yours. It’s no use keeping it, as he’s going to kill me!”

And she went out into the darkness, with nothing on but her chemise, the same as when she came. Campardon double locked the door in a fury, murmuring the while:

“Eh! go and get tumbled elsewhere!”

Then, as Lisa burst out laughing behind him, he added:

“It’s true, they’d be coming every night, if one received them. Every one for himself. I would have given her a hundred francs: but my reputation! no, by Jove!”

In the bed-room, Rose and Gasparine were recovering themselves. Had any one ever seen such a shameless creature? to walk about the staircase with nothing on! Really! there were women who respected nothing, at certain times! But it was close upon two o’clock; they must get to sleep. And they embraced again: good night, my darling—good night, my duck. Eh! was it not nice to love each other, and to always agree together, when one beheld such catastrophes occurring in other families? Rose again took up her Dickens; he supplied all her requirements; she would read a few more pages, then let the book slip into the bed, the same as she did every night, and fall off asleep, weary with emotion. Campardon followed Gasparine, made her get into bed first, and then laid himself down beside her. They both grumbled; the sheets had become cold again; they were not at all comfortable; it would take them another half-hour to get warm.

And Lisa, who, before going up-stairs, had returned to Angèle’s room, was saying to her:

“The lady has sprained her ankle. Come, show me how she sprained it.”

“Why! like this!” replied the child, throwing herself on the maid’s neck, and kissing her on her lips.

Berthe was on the stairs shivering. It was cold, the heating apparatus was not lighted till the beginning of November. Her fright had at length abated. She had gone down and listened at her door: nothing, not a sound. Then she had gone up, not daring to venture as far as Octave’s room, but listening from a distance: there was a death-like silence, unbroken by a murmur.

Suddenly, a noise affrighted her, causing her to jump up, and she was about to hammer with both her fists on her mother’s door, when some one calling out stopped her.

It was a voice almost as faint as a zephyr.

“Madame—madame—”

She looked down-stairs, but saw nothing.

“Madame—madame—it’s I.”

And Marie showed herself in her chemise also. She had heard all the disturbance, and had slipped out of bed, leaving Jules asleep, whilst she remained listening in her little dining-room without a light.

“Come in. You are in trouble. I am a friend.”

She gently reassured her, and told her all that had taken place. The men had not hurt each other: he had cursed and swore, and pushed the chest of drawers up against his door, to shut himself in; whilst the other had gone down-stairs with a bundle in his hand, the things she had left behind, her shoes and petticoat, which he must have rolled up mechanically in her dressing-gown, on seeing them lying about. In short, it was all over. It would be easy enough to prevent them fighting on the morrow.

But Berthe remained standing on the threshold with a remnant of fear and shame at thus entering the abode of a lady whom she did not habitually frequent. Marie was obliged to lead her in by the hand.

“You will sleep there, on that sofa. I will lend you a shawl, and I will go and see your mother. Good heavens! what a misfortune! When one is in love, one does not stop to think.”

“Ah! for the little pleasure we had!” said Berthe, with a sigh, which was full of the cruelty and stupidity of her unprofitable night. “He does right to swear. If he’s like me, he’s had more than enough of it!”

They were on the point of speaking of Octave. They said nothing further, but suddenly fell sobbing into each other’s arms in the dark. Their limbs clasped with a convulsive passion, their bosoms, hot with tears, were pressed close together beneath their crumpled chemises. It was a final weariness, an immense sadness, the end of everything. They did not say another word, whilst their tears flowed, flowed without ceasing, in the midst of the darkness and of the profound slumber of that house so full of decency.

CHAPTER XV.

That morning the house awoke with a great middle-class dignity. Nothing of the staircase preserved a trace of the scandals of the night, neither the imitation marble which had reflected that gallop of a woman in her chemise,

nor the Wilton carpet from which all the odor of her semi-nudity had evaporated. Monsieur Gourd alone, when he went up-stairs toward seven o'clock to give his look round, sniffed at the walls; but what did not concern him, did not concern him; and as, on going down-stairs again, he saw two of the servants in the courtyard, Lisa and Julie, who were no doubt discussing the catastrophe, for they seemed deeply interested, he stared at them so fixedly that they at once separated. Then he went outside to make sure of the tranquillity of the street. It was calm. Only, the servants must already have been talking, for some of the neighbors' wives stopped, tradespeople came to their shop doors, looking up in the air, examining and searching the different floors, in the gaping way in which the crowd scrutinizes houses where a crime has been committed. In the presence of the rich frontage, however, people held their tongues and politely passed on.

At half-past seven, Madame Juzeur appeared in a dressing-gown, to look after Louise, she said. Her eyes sparkled, and her hands were feverishly hot. She stopped Marie, who was going up with her milk, and endeavored to get her to talk; but she could draw nothing out of her, and did not even learn how the mother had received her guilty daughter. Then, under the pretense of waiting a minute for the postman, she entered the Gourds' room, and ended by asking why Monsieur Octave did not come down; perhaps he was ill. The doorkeeper replied that he did not know; moreover, Monsieur Octave never came down before ten minutes past eight. At this moment, the other Madame Campardon, pale and erect, passed by; every one bowed to her. And Madame Juzeur, obliged to go up-stairs again, had the luck, on reaching the landing, to meet the architect just starting off and putting on his gloves. At first they both looked at each other in a dejected sort of way; then he shrugged his shoulders.

"Poor things!" murmured she.

"No, no, it serves them right!" said he ferociously. "An example must be made of them. A fellow whom I introduce into a respectable house, beseeching him not to bring any women there, and who, to humbug me, goes and sleeps with the landlord's sister-in-law! I look like a fool in it all!"

No more was said. Madame Juzeur entered her apartments, whilst Campardon continued on his way down-stairs in such a state of fury that he tore one of his gloves.

Just as eight o'clock was striking, Auguste, looking very dejected, his features contracted by an atrocious headache, crossed the courtyard to go to his warehouse. Filled with shame, and dreading to meet any one, he had come down by way of the servants' staircase. However, he could not leave his business to take care of itself. When in the midst of his counters, and before the pay-desk where Berthe usually sat, his emotion almost choked him. The

porter was taking down the shutters, and Auguste was giving the orders for the day, when the abrupt appearance of Saturnin coming up from the basement gave him an awful fright. The madman's eyes were like flames of fire, his white teeth resembled a famished wolf's. He went straight up to the husband, clenching his fists.

"Where is she? If you touch her, I'll bleed you to death like a pig!"

Auguste drew back, exasperated.

"Here's this one, now!"

"Shut up, or I'll bleed you!" repeated Saturnin, making a rush at him.

Then the husband preferred to beat a retreat. He had a horror of madmen; one could not reason with such people. But, as he went out into the porch, calling to the porter to shut Saturnin up in the basement, he found himself face to face with Valérie and Théophile. The latter, who had caught a frightful cold, was wrapped up in a big red comforter, and coughed and moaned. They must both have known everything, for they stopped before Auguste with an air of condolence. Since the quarrel about the inheritance, the two couples had been sworn enemies, and were no longer on speaking terms.

"You still have a brother," said Théophile, shaking him by the hand, when he had finished coughing. "I wish you to remember it in your misfortune."

"Yes," added Valérie, "this ought to avenge me, for she said some filthy things to me, did she not? But we pity you all the same, for we are not quite heartless."

Auguste, deeply touched by their kind manner, led them to the end of his warehouse, keeping an eye on Saturnin, who was prowling about. And, there, their reconciliation became complete. Berthe's name was not mentioned; only, Valérie allowed it to be understood that all the unpleasantness arose from that woman, for there never had been a disagreeable word said in the family till she had entered it to dishonor them. Auguste, his eyes cast on the ground, listened and nodded his head approvingly. And a certain gayety gleamed beneath Théophile's commiseration, for he was delighted at no longer being the only one, and he examined his brother's face to see how a person looks when in that awkward position.

"Now, what have you decided to do?" inquired he.

"To challenge him, of course!" firmly replied the husband.

Théophile's joy was spoilt. His wife and he became cooler, in the presence of Auguste's courage. The latter related to them the frightful scene of the night —how, having been foolish enough to hesitate purchasing a pistol, he had been forced to content himself with merely slapping the gentleman's face; and

to tell the truth, the gentleman had done the same to him, but that did not prevent his having received a pretty good hiding! A scoundrel who had been making a fool of him for six months past by pretending to take his part against his wife, and whose impudence had gone as far as making reports respecting her on the days she went out! As for her, the creature, as she had gone to her parents, she could remain with them; he would never take her back.

“Would you believe that last month I allowed her three hundred francs for her dress!” cried he. “I who am so kind, so tolerant, who had decided to put up with everything sooner than make myself ill! But one cannot put up with that —no! no! one cannot!”

Théophile was thinking of death. He trembled feverishly, and almost choked as he said:

“It’s absurd, you will get spitted. I would not fight.”

And, as Valérie looked at him, he added, in an embarrassed manner:

“If such a thing happened to me.”

“Ah! the wretched woman!” then murmured his wife, “when one thinks that two men are going to kill each other on account of her! In her place I could never sleep again.”

Auguste remained firm. He would fight. Moreover, his plans were settled. As he particularly wished Duveyrier to be second, he was going up to inform him of what had taken place, and to send him at once to Octave. Valérie, who was most obliging to Auguste, ended by offering to attend at the pay-desk, to give him time to find a suitable person.

“Only,” added she, “I must take Camille to the Tuileries gardens toward two o’clock.”

“Oh! it does not matter for once in a way!” said her husband. “It’s raining, too.”

“No, no, the child wants air. I must go out.”

At length the two brothers went up to the Duveyriers’. But an abominable fit of coughing obliged Théophile to stop on the very first stair. He held on the hand-rail, and, when he was able to speak, though still with a slight rattle in his throat, he stammered:

“You know, I’m very happy now; I’m quite sure of her, No; I’ve not the least thing to reproach her with, and she has given me proofs.”

Auguste stared at him without comprehending, and saw how yellow and half dead he looked, with the scanty hairs of his beard drying up in his flabby flesh. The look completed Théophile’s annoyance, whilst he felt quite

embarrassed by his brother’s valor.

“I am speaking of my wife,” he resumed. “Ah! poor old fellow, I pity you with all my heart! You recollect my stupidity on your wedding day. But with you there can be no mistake, as you saw them.”

“Bah!” said Auguste, doing the brave, “I’ll spit him like a lark. On my word, I shouldn’t care a hang if I hadn’t such a headache!”

Just as they rang at the Duveyriers’ door, Théophile suddenly thought that very likely the counselor would not be in, for since the day he had found Clarisse, he had been drifting into bad habits, and had now even got to the point of sleeping out. Hippolyte, who opened the door to them, avoided answering with respect to his master; but he said that the gentlemen would find madame playing her scales. They entered. Clotilde, tightly laced up from the moment she got out of bed, was seated at her piano, practicing with a regular and continuous movement of her hands; and, as she went in for this kind of exercise for two hours every day, so as not to lose the lightness of her touch, she occupied her mind in another way, by reading the “Revue des deux Mondes,” which stood open on the piano before her, without the agility of her fingers being in any way hampered.

“Why! it’s you!” said she, when her brothers had drawn her from the volley of notes, which isolated and enveloped her like a storm of hail.

And she did not even show her surprise when she caught sight of Théophile. The latter, moreover, kept himself very stiff, like a man who had come on another’s account. Auguste, filled with shame at the thought of telling his sister of his misfortune, and afraid of terrifying her with his duel, had a story all ready. But she did not give him time to lie, she questioned him in her quiet way, after looking at him intently.

“What do you intend doing now?”

He started and blushed. So every one knew it, then? and he answered in the brave tone which had already closed Théophile’s mouth:

“Why, fight, of course!”

“Ah!” said she, greatly surprised this time.

However, she did not disapprove. It would increase the scandal, but yet honor had to be satisfied. She contented herself with recalling that she had at first opposed the marriage. One could expect nothing of a young girl who appeared to be ignorant of all a woman’s duties. Then, as Auguste asked her where her husband was:

“He is traveling,” answered she, without the least hesitation.

Then he was quite distressed, for he did not wish to do anything before consulting Duveyrier. She listened to him, without mentioning the new address, unwilling to acquaint her family with her home troubles. At length she hit on an expedient: she advised him to go to Monsieur Bachelard, in the Rue d'Enghien; perhaps he would be able to tell him something. And she returned to her piano.

"It's Auguste who asked me to come up," Théophile, who had not spoken until then, thought it necessary to declare. "Will you let me kiss you, Clotilde? We are all in trouble."

She presented her cold cheek, and said:

"My poor fellow, only those are in trouble who choose to be. As for me, I forgive every one. And take care of yourself, you seem to me to have a very had cough."

Then, calling to Auguste, she added:

"If the matter does not get settled, let me know, for I shall then be very anxious."

The storm of notes recommenced, enveloping and drowning her; and, whilst her nimble fingers practiced the scales in every key, she gravely resumed her reading of the "Revue dex deux Mondes," in the midst of it all.

Down-stairs, Auguste for a moment discussed the question whether he should go to Bachelard's or not. How could he say to him: "Your niece has deceived me?" At length, he decided to obtain Duveyrier's address from the uncle, and to tell him nothing. Everything was settled: Valérie would look after the warehouse, whilst Théophile would watch the home, until his brother's return. The latter had sent for a cab, and he was just going off, when Saturnin, who had disappeared a moment before, came up from the basement with a big kitchen knife, which he flourished about, as he cried:

"I'll bleed him! I'll bleed him!"

This created another scare. Auguste, turning very pale, jumped precipitately into the cab, and pulled the door to, saying:

"He's got another knife! Wherever does he find all those knives? I beseech you, Théophile, send him away, try and arrange that he shall no longer be here when I come back. As though what has already happened were not bad enough for me!"

The porter had hold of the madman by his shoulders. Valérie told the driver the address. But he, a fat and filthy looking man, with a face the color of bullock's blood, and still drunk from the night before, did not hurry himself, but took his time to gather up the reins and make himself comfortable on the

box.

“By distance, governor?” asked he, in a hoarse voice.

“No, by the hour, and quickly please. There will be something handsome for yourself.”

In the Rue d’Enghein, he met with another vexation. To begin with, the commission agent’s doorway was so blocked up with vans that he almost got crushed; then he found himself in the courtyard with the glass roof, amidst a crowd of packers all violently nailing up cases, and not one of whom could tell him where Bachelard was. The hammering seemed to split his skull. He was, however, making up his mind to wait for the uncle, when an apprentice, pitying his suffering look, came and whispered an address in his ear: Mademoiselle Fifi, Rue Saint-Marc, third floor. Old Bachelard was most likely there.

“Where do you say?” asked the driver, who had fallen asleep.

“Rue Saint-Marc, and a little faster, if it’s possible.”

The cab resumed its funereal crawl. On the boulevards, the wheel caught in an omnibus. The panels cracked, the springs uttered plaintive cries, a gloomy melancholy more and more overcame the husband in his search of his second. However, they at last reached the Rue Saint-Marc.

On the third floor, the door was opened by a little old woman, plump and white. She seemed suffering from some strong emotion, and she admitted Auguste directly he asked for Monsieur Bachelard.

“Ah! sir, you are one of his friends, surely. Pray try to calm him. Something happened to vex him a little while ago, the poor dear man. You know me, no doubt, he must have spoken to you of me: I am Mademoiselle Menu.”

Auguste, feeling quite scared, found himself in a narrow room overlooking the courtyard, and as clean and peaceful as a country home. One could almost detect the odor of order and work, the purity of the happy existence of people in a quiet way. Seated before an embroidery frame, on which a priest’s stole was stretched, a fair young girl, pretty and having a candid air, was weeping bitterly; whilst uncle Bachelard, standing up, his nose inflamed, his eyes bloodshot, was driveling with rage and despair. He was so upset that Auguste’s entry did not appear to surprise him in the least. He immediately called upon him to bear witness, and the scene continued.

“Come now, Monsieur Vabre, who are an honest man, what would you say in my place? I arrived here this morning a little earlier than usual. I entered her room with the sugar from the café and three four-sou pieces, just for a surprise

for her, and I find her with that pig Gueulin! No, there, frankly what would you say?”

Auguste, greatly embarrassed, turned very red. He at first thought that the uncle knew of his misfortune and was making a fool of him. But the other added, without even waiting for a reply:

“Ah! listen, mademoiselle, you don’t know what it is you have done! I who was becoming young again, who felt so delighted at having found a nice quiet little nook, where I was once more beginning to believe in happiness! Yes, you were an angel, a flower, in short something fresh which helped me to forget a lot of dirty women.”

A genuine emotion contracted his throat, his voice choked in accents of profound suffering. Everything was crumbling away, and he wept for the loss of the ideal, with the hiccoughs of a remnant of drunkenness.

“I did not know uncle,” stammered Fifi, whose sobs redoubled in presence of this pitiful spectacle; “no, I did not know it would cause you so much grief.”

And indeed she did not look as if she did know. She retained her ingenuous eyes, her odor of chastity, the naivete of a little girl unable as yet to distinguish a gentleman from a lady. Aunt Menu, moreover, swore that at heart she was innocent.

“Do be calm, Monsieur Narcisse. She loves you well all the same. I felt that it would not be very agreeable to you. I said to her: ‘If Monsieur Narcisse learns this, he will be annoyed.’ But she has scarcely lived as yet, has she? She does not know what pleases, nor what does not please. Do not weep any more, as her heart is always for you.”

As neither the child nor the uncle listened to her, she turned toward Auguste, she told him how much more anxious such an adventure made her feel for her niece’s future.

“Perhaps you know Villeneuve, near Lille?” said she in conclusion. “I come from there. It is a pretty large town———”

But Auguste’s patience was at an end. He shook himself free of the aunt, and turned toward Bachelard, whose noisy despair was calming down.

“I came to ask you for Duveyrier’s new address. I suppose you know it.”

“Duveyrier’s address, Duveyrier’s address,” stammered the uncle. “You mean Clarisse’s address. Wait a moment.”

And he went and opened the door of Fifi’s bed-room. Auguste was greatly surprised on seeing Gueulin, whom the old man had locked in, come forth. He

had wished to give him time to dress himself, and also to detain him, so as to decide afterward what he would do with him. The sight of the young man looking all upset, his hair still unbrushed, revived his anger.

“What! wretch! it’s you, my nephew, who dishonors me! You soil your family, you drag my white hairs in the mire! Ah! you’ll end badly, we shall see you one of these days in the dock of the assize-court!”

Gueulin listened with bowed head, feeling at once both embarrassed and furious.

“I say, uncle, you’re going too far,” murmured he. “There’s a limit to everything. I don’t think it funny either. Why did you bring me to see mademoiselle? I never asked you. You dragged me here. You drag everybody here.”

But Bachelard, again overcome with tears, continued:

“You’ve taken everything from me; I had only her left. You’ll be the cause of my death, and I won’t leave you a sou, not a sou!”

Then Gueulin, quite beside himself, burst out:

“Go to the deuce! I’ve had enough of it! Ah! it’s as I’ve always told you! here they come, here they come, the annoyances of the morrow! See how it succeeds with me, when for once in a way I’ve been fool enough to take advantage of an opportunity. Of course! the night was very pleasant; but, afterward, go to blazes! one will be blubbering like a calf for the rest of one’s life.”

“I am in a great hurry,” Auguste ventured to observe. “Please give me the address, just the name of the street and the number, I require nothing further.”

“The address,” said the uncle, “wait a bit, directly.”

And, carried away by his feelings, which were overflowing, he caught hold of Gueulin’s hands.

“You ungrateful fellow, I was keeping her for you, on my word of honor! I said to myself: If he’s good, I’ll give her to him. Oh! in a proper manner, with a dowry of fifty thousand francs. And, you dirty beast! you can’t wait, you go and take her like that, all on a sudden!”

“No, let me be!” said Gueulin, affected by the old chap’s kindness of heart. “I see very well that the annoyances are going to continue.”

But Bachelard dragged him before the young girl and asked her:

“Come now, Fifi, look at him, would you have loved him?”

“If it would have pleased you, uncle,” answered she.

This kind reply quite broke his heart. He wiped his eyes, blew his nose, and almost choked. Well! he would see. He had always wished to make her happy. And he suddenly sent Gueulin off about his business.

“Be off. I will think about it.”

Just as Gueulin was leaving, Bachelard called him back.

“Kiss her on the forehead; I permit it.”

And then he went himself and put him outside the door, after which he returned to Auguste, and, placing his hand on his heart, he said:

“It’s no joke; I give you my word of honor that I intended giving her to him, later on.”

“And the address?” asked the other, losing all patience.

The uncle appeared surprised, as though he had answered him before.

“Eh? what? Clarisse’s address? Why, I don’t know it.”

Auguste made an angry gesture. Everything was going wrong: there seemed to be a regular plot to render him ridiculous! Seeing him so upset, Bachelard made a suggestion. No doubt, Trublot knew the address, and they might find him at his employer’s—the stockbroker, Desmarquay. And the uncle, with the obliging manner of one accustomed to knock about, offered to accompany his young friend. The latter accepted.

“Listen!” said the uncle to Fifi, after kissing her in his turn on the forehead: “here’s the sugar from the café, all the same, and three four-sou bits for your money-box. Behave well whilst awaiting my orders.”

The young girl, looking very modest, continued drawing her needle with exemplary application. A ray of sunshine, coming from over a neighboring roof, enlivened the little room, gilded this nook of innocence, into which the noise of the passing vehicles did not even penetrate. All the poetry of Bachelard’s nature was stirred.

“May God bless you, Monsieur Narcisse!” said aunt Menu to him as she saw him to the door. “I am more easy now. Only listen to the dictates of your heart, for it will inspire you.”

The driver had again fallen asleep, and he grumbled when the uncle gave him Monsieur Desmarquay’s address in the Rue Saint-Lazare. No doubt the horse was asleep also, for it required quite a hail of blows to get him to move. At length the cab rolled painfully along.

“It’s hard all the same,” resumed the uncle, after a pause. “You can’t imagine the effect it had on me when I saw Gueulin in his shirt. No; one must

have gone through such a thing to understand it.”

And he went on, entering into every detail, without noticing Auguste’s increasing uneasiness. At length the latter, feeling his position becoming falser and falser, told him why he was in such a hurry to find Duveyrier.

“Berthe with that counter-jumper!” cried the uncle. “You astonish me, sir!”

And it seemed that his astonishment was especially on account of his niece’s choice. However, after a little reflection, he became very indignant. His sister Eléonore had a great deal to reproach herself with. He would have nothing more to do with the family. Of course, he was not going to mix himself up with the duel; but he considered it indispensable.

“Thus, just now, when I saw Fifi with a man, my first thought was to murder every one. If the same thing should ever happen to you——-”

A painful start of Auguste’s caused him to interrupt himself.

“Ah! true, I was forgetting. My story does not interest you.”

Another pause ensued, whilst the cab swayed in a melancholy fashion.

“I told you Rue Saint-Lazare,” called out the uncle to the driver. “It isn’t at Chaillot. Turn to the left.”

At length the cab stopped. Out of prudence they sent up for Trublot, who came down bareheaded to talk to them in the doorway.

“You know Clarisse’s address?” asked Bachelard.

“Clarisse’s address?”

“Why, of course! Rue d’Assas.”

They thanked him, and were about to re-enter their cab, when Auguste asked in his turn:

“What’s the number?”

“The number! Ah! I don’t know the number.”

At this, the husband declared that he preferred to give up seeing Duveyrier altogether. Trublot did all he could to try and remember. He had dined there once, it was just behind the Luxembourg; but he could not recollect whether it was at the end of the street, or on the right or the left, But he knew the door well; oh! he could have said at once, “That’s it.” Then the uncle had another idea; he begged him to accompany them in spite of Auguste’s protestations, and his talking of returning home and not wishing to disturb any one any further. Trublot, however, refused in a constrained manner. No, he would not trust himself in that hole again.

“Well, I’m off, as Monsieur Trublot can’t come,” said Auguste, whose worries were increased by all these stories.

But Trublot then declared that he would accompany them all the same; only, he would not go up; he would merely show them the door. And, after fetching his hat, and giving a pretext for going out, he joined them in the cab. “Rue d’Assas,” said he to the driver. “Straight down the street; I’ll tell you when to stop.”

The driver swore. Rue d’Assas, by Jove! there were people who liked going about. However, they would get there when they did get there. The big white horse steamed away without making hardly any progress, his neck dislocated in a painful bow at every step.

Bachelard was already relating his misfortune to Trublot. Such things always made him talkative. Yes, with that pig Gueulin, a most delicious little thing! But at this point of his story he recollected Auguste, who, gloomy and doleful, was sitting in a heap in a corner of the cab.

“Ah! true; I beg your pardon!” murmured he; “I keep forgetting.”

And, addressing Trublot, he added:

“Our friend has met with a misfortune in his home also, and that is why we are trying to find Duveyrier. Yes, he found his wife last night—”

He finished with a gesture, then added simply:

“Octave, you know.”

Trublot, always plain-spoken, was about to say that it did not surprise him. Only, he caught back his words, and replaced them by others, full of disdainful anger, and the explanation of which the husband did not dare to ask him for:

“What an idiot that Octave is!” said he.

At this appreciation of adultery there ensued another pause. Each of the three men was buried in his own reflections. The cab scarcely moved at all. It seemed to have been rolling for hours over a bridge, when Trublot, who was the first to emerge from his thoughts, ventured on making this judicious remark:

“This cab doesn’t get along very fast.”

But nothing could increase the horse’s pace. It was eleven o’clock when they reached the Rue d’Assas. And there they wasted nearly another quarter of an hour, for, in spite of Trublot’s boasts, he could not find the door. At first he allowed the driver to go along the street to the very end without stopping him; then he made him drive up and down three times over. And, on his precise indications, Auguste kept entering every tenth house; but the doorkeepers all

answered that they knew no one of the name. At length a green-grocer pointed out the door to him. He went in with Bachelard, leaving Trublot in the cab.

It was the big rascal of a brother who admitted them. He had a cigarette stuck between his lips, and blew the smoke into their faces as he showed them into the drawing-room. When they asked for Monsieur Duveyrier, he stood looking at them in a jocular manner without answering. Then he disappeared, perhaps to fetch him. In the middle of the blue satin drawing-room, all luxuriously new, yet already stained with grease, one of the sisters, the youngest, was seated on the carpet scouring out a saucepan which she had brought from the kitchen; whilst the other, the eldest, was hammering with her clenched fists on a magnificent piano, the key of which she had just found. On seeing the gentlemen enter, they had both raised their heads; neither, however, left off her occupation, but continued on the contrary hammering and scouring more energetically than ever. Five minutes passed, yet no one came. The visitors, feeling almost deafened, stood looking at each, when some yells, issuing from a neighboring room, completely terrified them; it was the invalid aunt being washed.

At length an old woman, Madame Bocquet, Clarisse's mother, passed her head through a partly opened door, not daring to show any more of her person, because of the filthy dress she had on.

"What do you gentlemen desire?" asked she.

"Why, Monsieur Duveyrier!" exclaimed the uncle, losing patience. "We have already told the servant. Let him know that Monsieur Auguste Vabre and Monsieur Narcisse Bachelard wish to see him."

Madame Bocquet shut the door again. The eldest of the sisters was now mounted on the music stool, and was hammering with her elbows, whilst the youngest was scraping the saucepan with an iron fork, so as to get all she could out of it. Another five minutes passed by. Then, in the midst of the uproar, which did not seem to disturb her in the least, Clarisse appeared.

"Ah! it's you!" said she to Bachelard, without even looking at Auguste.

"You know, my old fellow," added she, "if you've come to tipple, you may as well get out at once. The old life's done with. I now intend to be respected."

"We haven't called on your account," replied Bachelard, recovering himself, used as he was to the lively receptions of such ladies. "We must speak to Duveyrier."

Then Clarisse looked ar the other gentleman. She took him for a bailiff, knowing that Alphonse was already in a mess.

"Oh! after all, I don't care," said she. "You can take him and keep him if

you like. It’s not so very pleasant to have to dress his pimples!”

She no longer even took the trouble to conceal her disgust, certain, moreover, that all her cruelties only attached him to her the more.

And opening a door, she added:

“Here! come along, as these gentlemen persist in seeing you.”

Duveyrier, who seemed to have been waiting behind the door, entered and shook their hands, trying to conjure up a smile. He no longer had the youthful air of bygone days, when he used to spend the evening at her rooms in the Rue de la Cerisaie; he looked overcome with weariness, he was mournful and much thinner, starting at every moment, as though he were uneasy about something behind him.

Clarisse remained to listen. Bachelard, who did not intend to speak before her, invited the counselor to lunch.

“Now, do accept, Monsieur Vabre wants you. Madame will be kind enough to excuse——”

But the latter had at length caught sight of her sister hammering on the piano, and she slapped her and turned her out of the room, taking the same opportunity to cuff and drive away the little one with her saucepan. There was a most infernal uproar. The invalid aunt in the next room again started off yelling, thinking they were coming to beat her.

“Do you hear, my darling?” murmured Duveyrier, “these gentlemen have invited me to lunch.”

But she was not listening to him, she was trying the instrument with frightened tenderness. For a month past, she had been learning to play the piano. It was the secret dream of her whole life, a far-away ambition the realization of which could alone stamp her a woman of society. Having satisfied herself that there was nothing broken, she was about to prevent her lover from going, simply to annoy him, when Madame Bocquet once more bobbed her head in at the door, again hiding her skirt.

“Your music-master,” said she.

At this Clarisse changed her mind, and called to Duveyrier:

“That’s it, be off! I’ll lunch with Théodore. We don’t want you.”

After kissing her on the hair, he discreetly withdrew, leaving her with Théodore. In the ante-room, the big rascal of a brother asked him in his jocular way for a franc for tobacco. Then, as they wont down-stairs, Bachelard expressed surprise at his conversion to the charms of the piano, and he swore he had never disliked it; he talked of the ideal, saying how much Clarisse’s

simple scales stirred his soul, yielding to his continual mania for having a bright side to his coarse masculine appetites.

Down below, Trublot had given the driver a cigar, and was listening to his history with the liveliest interest. The uncle insisted on lunching at Foyot's; it was the proper time, and they could talk better whilst eating. Then, when the cab had managed to start off again, he told everything to Duveyrier, who became very grave.

Auguste's uneasiness seemed to have increased at Clarisse's, where he had not opened his mouth; and now, worn out by this interminable drive, his head entirely a prey to a violent aching, he abandoned himself.

When the counselor questioned him as to what he intended doing, he opened his eyes, and remained a moment filled with anguish; then he repeated his former phrase:

"Why, fight, of course!"

Only, his voice was weaker, and he added, as he closed his eyes, as though to ask to be left alone:

"Unless you have anything else to suggest."

Then the gentlemen held a grand council in the midst of the laborious jolts of the vehicle. Duveyrier, the same as Bachelard, considered the duel indispensable; and he was deeply affected by it, on account of the blood likely to be spilt, a long black stream of which he pictured soiling the stairs of his property; but honor demanded it, and one cannot compound with honor. Trublot had broader views: it was too stupid to place one's honor in what out of decency he termed a woman's frailty. And Auguste approved what he said by a weary blink of his eyelids, thoroughly incensed at last by the bellicose rage of the two others, whose duty it was on the contrary to have been conciliatory. In spite of his fatigue, he was obliged to relate once more the scene of the night before, the blow he had given and the blow he had received; and soon the fact of the adultery was lost sight of, the discussion bore solely upon these two blows: they were commented upon, and analyzed, as a satisfactory solution was sought for.

"What refinement!" Trublot ended by contemptuously saying. "If they hit each other, well! they're quits."

Duveyrier and Bachelard looked at one another, evidently shaken in their opinions. But just then they arrived at the restaurant, and the uncle declared that they would first of all have a good lunch. It would help to clear their ideas. He stood treat, ordering a copious meal, with costly dishes and wines, which kept them three hours in a private room. The duel was not even once

mentioned. From the very beginning, the conversation had necessarily turned on the question of women; Fifi and Clarisse were during the whole time explained, turned inside out, and pulled to pieces. Bachelard now admitted himself to have been in the wrong, so as not to appear to the counselor as having been vilely chucked over; whilst the latter, taking his revenge for the evening when the uncle had seen him weep in the middle of the empty rooms in the Rue de la Cerisaie, lied about his happiness, to the point of believing in it and being affected by it himself. Seated before them, Auguste, prevented by his neuralgia both from eating and drinking, appeared to be listening, an elbow on the table, and a confused look in his eyes. At dessert, Trublot recollected the driver, who had been forgotten outside: and, full of sympathy, he sent him the remnants of the dishes and what was left in the bottles; for, said he, from certain things he had let drop, he had a suspicion the man was an ex-priest. Three o'clock struck. Duveyrier complained of being assessor at the next sitting of the assizes; Bachelard, who was now very drunk, spat sideways onto Trublot's trousers, without the latter noticing it; and the day would have been finished there, amidst the liquors, if Auguste had not suddenly roused himself with a start.

"Well, what's going to be done?" asked he.

"Well! young'un," replied the uncle, speaking most familiarly, "if you like, we'll settle matters nicely for you. It's stupid to fight."

No one appeared surprised at this conclusion. Duveyrier signified his approval with a nod of the head. The uncle continued:

"I'll go with Monsieur Duveyrier and see the fellow, and he shall apologize, or my name isn't Bachelard. The mere sight of me will make him cave in, just because I shall have no business there. I don't care a hang for anyone!"

Auguste shook him by the hand; but he did not seem to feel relieved, the pain in his head had become so unbearable. At length they left the private room. Down in the street, the driver was still at lunch, inside the cab; and, completely intoxicated, he had to shake the crumbs out, digging Trublot fraternally in the stomach. Only the horse, which had had nothing at all, refused to walk, with a despairing wag of the head. They pushed him, and he ended by going down the Rue de Tournon, as though he were rolling along. Four o'clock had struck, when the animal at length stopped in the Rue de Choiseul. Auguste had had the cab seven hours. Trublot, who remained inside, engaged it for himself, and declared that he would wait there for Bachelard, whom he wished to invite to dinner.

"Well! you have been a time," said Théophile to his brother, as he hastened to meet him. "I thought you were dead."

And directly the gentlemen had entered the warehouse, he related how the day had passed. He had been watching the house ever since nine o'clock. But nothing particular had occurred. At two o'clock, Valérie had gone to the Tuileries gardens with their son Camille. Then, toward half past three, he had seen Octave go out. And that was all. Nothing moved, not even at the Josserands'. Saturnin, who had been seeking his sister under the furniture, having gone up to ask for her, Madame Josserand had shut the door in his face, doubtless to get rid of him, saying that Berthe was not there. Since then, the madman had been prowling about with clenched teeth.

"Very well," said Bachelard, "we'll wait for the gentleman. We shall see him come in from here."

Auguste, whose head was in a whirl, was making great efforts to keep on his legs. Then Duveyrier advised him to go to bed. There was no other cure for headache.

"Go up now, we no longer require you. We will inform you of the result. My dear fellow, you know you should avoid all emotions."

And the husband went up to lie down.

At five o'clock, the two others were still waiting for Octave. The latter, without any definite object, simply desirous of having some fresh air and of forgetting the events of the night, had at first passed before "The Ladies' Paradise," where he had stopped to wish Madame Hédouin good-day, as she stood in the doorway, dressed in deep mourning; and as he informed her of his having left the Vabres', she had quietly asked him why he did not return to her.

Opposite to him, Valérie was taking leave of a bearded gentleman, at the door of a low lodging-house in the darkest corner. She blushed and hastened away, pushing open the padded door of the church; then, seeing that the young man was following her and smiling, she preferred to await him under the porch, where they conversed together very cordially.

"You run away from me," said he. "Are you, then, angry with me?"

"Angry?" repeated she, "why should I be angry? Ah! they may quarrel and eat each other up if they like, it doesn't matter to me!"

She was speaking of her relations. And she at once gave vent to her old rancor against Berthe, making at first simply allusions so as to sound the young man; then, when she felt he was secretly weary of his mistress, being still exasperated with the night's proceedings, she no longer restrained herself, but poured out her heart. To think that that woman had accused her of selling herself—she, who never accepted a sou, not even a present! Yes, though, a few flowers at times, some bunches of violets. And now everybody knew which of

the two was the one to sell herself. She had prophesied that one day it would be known how much she could be bought for.

“It cost you more than a bunch of violets, did it not?” asked she.

“Yes, yes,” murmured he basely.

In his turn he let out some disagreeable things about Berthe, saying that she was spiteful, and even making her out to be too fat, as though seeking to avenge himself for the worry she was causing him. He had been waiting all day for her husband’s seconds, and he was then returning home to see if any one had called. It was a most stupid adventure; she might very well have prevented this duel taking place. He ended by relating all that had occurred at their ridiculous meeting—their quarrel, then Auguste’s arrival on the scene, before they had even exchanged a caress.

“On all I hold most sacred,” said he, “I had not even touched her.”

Valérie laughed, and was getting quite excited. She gradually yielded to the tender intimacy of this exchange of confidences, drawing nearer to Octave as though to some female friend who knew all. At times, a devotee coming from the church disturbed them; then the door generally closed to again, and they once more found themselves alone in the drum, hung with green baize, as though in the innermost recesses of some discreet and religious asylum.

“I scarcely know why I live with such people,” resumed she, returning to the subject of her relations. “Oh! no doubt, I am not free from reproach on my side. But, frankly, I cannot feel any remorse, they affect me so little. And yet if I were to tell you how much love bores me!”

“Come now, not so much as all that!” said Octave gayly. “People are not always as silly as we were yesterday. There are blissful moments.”

Then she confessed herself. It was not entirely the hatred she felt for her husband, the continual fever which shook his frame, his impotence, nor yet his perpetual blubbering like a little boy, which had caused her to misbehave herself six months after her marriage; no, she often did it involuntarily, solely because her head got filled with things of which she was unable to explain the why and the wherefore. Everything gave way; she became quite ill, and could almost kill herself. Then, as there was nothing to restrain her, she might as well take that leap as another.

“But really now, do you never have a nice time of it?” again asked Octave.

“Well, never like people describe,” replied she.

He looked at her full of a pitying sympathy. All for nothing, and without the least pleasure. It was certainly not worth the trouble she gave herself, in her continual fear of being caught. And he especially felt a certain relief to his

pride, for he had always suffered a little at heart from her old disdain. He recalled the circumstance to her.

“You remember, after one of your attacks?”

“Oh! yes, I remember. Still, I did not dislike you; but listen! it is far better as it is, we should be detesting each other now.”

She gave him her little gloved hand. He squeezed it, as he repeated:

“You are right; it is better as it is. Really, one only cares for the women one has had nothing to do with.”

It was quite a blissful moment. They stood for a while hand in hand, deeply affected. Then, without another word, they pushed open the padded door of the church, inside which she had left her son Camille in care of the woman who let out the chairs. The child had fallen asleep. She made him kneel down, and did the same herself for a minute, burying her face in her hands, as though in the midst of a fervent prayer. And she was rising to her feet when Abbé Manduit, who was coming from a confessional, greeted her with a paternal smile.

Octave had simply passed through the church. When he returned home every one was on the alert. In the doorway, as Octave passed, Lisa, who was gossiping with Adèle, had to content herself with merely staring at him; and both resumed their complaints of the dear price of poultry beneath the stern look of Monsieur Gourd, who bowed to the young man. As the latter was going up to his room, Madame Juzeur, who had been on the watch ever since the morning, slightly opened her door, and, seizing hold of his hands, drew him into her ante-room, where she kissed him on the forehead and murmured:

“Poor child! There, I won’t keep you. Come back and talk with me when it’s all over.”

And he had scarcely reached his own apartment when Duveyrier and Bachelard called. At first, amazed at seeing the uncle, he wished to give them the names of two of his friends. But these gentlemen, without answering, spoke of their age, and preached him a sermon on his misconduct. Then, as in the course of conversation he announced his intention of leaving the house at the earliest possible moment, they both solemnly declared that that proof of his discretion was quite sufficient. There had been more than enough scandal; the time had come when respectable people had the right to expect them to make the sacrifice of their passions. Duveyrier accepted Octave’s notice to quit on the spot, and withdrew, whilst, behind his back, Bachelard invited the young man to dine with him that evening.

“Mind, I count upon you. We’re on the spree; Trublot is waiting below. I

don’t care a button for Eléonore. But I don’t wish to see her, and I’ll go down first, so that no one shall meet us together.”

He took his departure, and, five minutes later, Octave, delighted with the issue of affairs, joined him below. He slipped into the cab, and the melancholy horse, which had been dragging the husband about for seven hours, limped along with them to a restaurant near the Halles, where some marvelous tripe was to be obtained.

Duveyrier had gone back to Théophile in the warehouse. Valérie also had just come in, and all three were talking together when Clotilde herself returned from a concert. She had gone there, moreover, with a mind perfectly at ease, certain, said she, that some arrangement satisfactory to every one would be arrived at. Then ensued a pause, a momentary embarrassment between the two families. Théophile, seized with an abominable fit of coughing, was almost spitting his teeth out. As it was to their mutual interest to be reconciled, they ended by taking advantage of the emotion into which the new family troubles had plunged them. The two women embraced; Duveyrier swore to Théophile that the Vabre inheritance was ruining him, yet he promised to indemnify him by remitting his rent for three years.

“I must go and tranquilize poor Auguste,” at length observed the counselor.

He was ascending the stairs, when some terrible cries, resembling those of an animal being butchered, issued from the bed-room. It was Saturnin, who, armed with his kitchen knife, had noiselessly crept as far as the alcove; and there, his eyes as red as flaming coals, his mouth covered with foam, he had rushed upon Auguste.

“Tell me! where have you put her?” cried he. “Give her back to me, or I’ll bleed you like a pig!”

The husband, suddenly roused from his painful slumber, tried to fly. But the madman, with the strength of his fixed idea, had caught him by the tail of his shirt, and, pushing him back on the mattress, placing his neck on the edge of the bed, over a basin which happened to be there, he held him in the position of an animal at the slaughter-house.

“Ah! it’s all right this time. I’m going to bleed you—I’m going to bleed you like a pig!”

Fortunately, the others arrived and were able to release the victim. But Saturnin, who was raving mad, had to be shut up: and, two hours later, the commissary of police having been sent for, he was taken for the second time to the Asile des Moulineaux, with the consent of the family. Poor Auguste lay trembling. He said to Duveyrier, who informed him of the arrangement that had been come to with Octave:

“No, I should have preferred to have fought the duel. One cannot defend oneself against a madman. Why has he such a mania for wishing to bleed me, the brigand? because his sister has made a cuckold of me? Ah! I’ve had enough of it, my friend, I’ve had enough of it, on my word of honor!”

CHAPTER XVI.

On the Wednesday morning, when Marie brought Berthe to Madame Josserand, the latter, bursting with anger at the thought of an adventure which she felt was a sad blow to her pride, became quite pale and unable to utter a word.

She caught hold of her daughter’s hand with the roughness of a teacher dragging a refractory scholar to the black-hole, and, leading her to Hortense’s room, she pushed her inside, saying at length:

“Hide yourself, never show yourself again. You will kill your father if you do.”

“What’s up? Whatever have you done?” asked her sister, whose astonishment increased on seeing her wrapped in an old shawl which Marie had lent her. “Has poor Auguste fallen ill at Lyons?”

But Berthe would not answer. No, later on; there were things she could not speak about; and she beseeched Hortense to go away, to let her have the room to herself, so that she could at least weep there in peace. The day passed thus. Monsieur Josserand had gone off to his office, without having the faintest idea of what had occurred; then, when he returned home in the evening, Berthe still remained in hiding. As she had refused all food, she ended by ravenously devouring the little dinner which Adèle brought to her in secret. The maid remained watching her, and, in presence of her appetite, said:

“Don’t worry yourself so much, pick up your strength. The house is quite quiet. And as for any one being killed or wounded, there’s nobody hurt at all.”

“Ah!” said the young woman.

She questioned Adèle, who gave her a long account of how the day had passed; the duel which had not come off; what Monsieur Auguste had said, and what the Duveyriers and the Vabres had done. She listened to her, and seemed to live again, gobbling everything up, and asking for more bread. In all truth it was foolish of her to take the matter so much to heart when the others seemed to be already consoled!

“So you won’t tell me?” asked Hortense again.

“But, my darling,” answered Berthe, “you’re not married. I really can’t. It’s a quarrel I’ve had with Auguste. He came back, you know——”

And as she interrupted herself, her sister resumed, impatiently:

“Get along with you! What a fuss! Good heavens! at my age, I’m quite old enough to know!”

Then Berthe confessed herself, at first choosing her words, then letting out everything, talking of Octave and talking of Auguste. Hortense listened as she lay on her back in the dark, and merely uttered a few words to question her sister or to give an opinion: “What did he say to you then? And you, how did you feel? Well, that’s funny; I shouldn’t like that! Ah! really! so that’s the way!” Midnight, one o’clock, then two struck; still they went on with the story, their limbs little by little irritated by the sheets, and themselves gradually becoming drowsy.

“Oh! as for me, with Verdier, it will be very simple,” declared Hortense, abruptly. “I shall do just as he wishes.”

At the mention of Verdier’s name Berthe gave a movement of surprise. She thought the marriage was broken off, for the woman with whom he had been living for fifteen years past had just had a child, at the very moment that he intended leaving her.

“Do you, then, expect to marry him all the same?” asked she. “Well land why not? I was stupid enough to wait too long. But the child will die. It’s a girl, and all scrofulous.”

“Poor woman!” Berthe was unable to help exclaiming.

“How, poor woman!” cried Hortense, sourly. “It’s easy to see that you also have things to reproach yourself with!”

She at once regretted her cruelty, and, taking her sister in her arms, kissed her, and swore that she did not mean it. Then they were silent. But still they could not sleep, so continued the story, their eyes wide open in the darkness.

The next morning, Monsieur Josserand did not feel very well. Up till two o’clock, he had persisted in addressing wrappers, in spite of a lowness of spirits, and of a gradual loss of strength, of which he had been complaining for some time. He got up, however, and dressed himself; but, when he was on the point of starting for his office, he felt so feeble that he sent a messenger with a letter to inform the brothers Bernheim of his indisposition.

The family were about to have their breakfast. On seeing her husband remain, Madame Josserand decided not to hide Berthe any longer; she was already sick of all the mystery, and was, moreover, expecting every minute to see Auguste come up and create a disturbance.

“What! you’re going to breakfast with us! whatever is the matter?” asked the father in great surprise, on beholding his daughter, her eyes heavy with sleep, her bosom half-bursting through Hortense’s too tight dressing-gown.

“My husband has written to say that he is obliged to stay at Lyons,” answered she, “so I thought of spending the day with you.”

“Is it really true? You are not hiding anything from me?” murmured he.

“What an idea! why should I hide anything from you?”

Madame Josserand merely allowed herself to shrug her shoulders. What was the use of all those precautions? to gain an hour, perhaps; it was not worth while; the father would always have to receive the blow in the end. The breakfast, however, passed off most pleasantly.

But a regrettable scene spoilt the end of the breakfast. All on a sudden, Madame Josserand addressed the servant:

“Whatever are you eating?”

For some little while past she had been watching her. Adèle, dragging her shoes after her, turned clumsily round the table.

“Nothing, madame,” replied she.

“How! nothing! You’re chewing; I’m not blind. See! you’ve got your mouth full of it. Oh! it’s no use drawing in your cheeks; it’s easy to see in spite of that. And you’ve got some in your pocket, haven’t you?”

Adèle became confused, and tried to draw back. But Madame Josserand caught hold of her by the skirt.

“For a quarter of an hour past, I’ve been watching you take something out of there and thrust it under your nose, after hiding it in your hand. It must be something very good. Let me see what it is.”

She dived into the pocket in her turn, and withdrew a handful of cooked prunes. The juice was still trickling from them.

“What is this?” cried she furiously.

“Prunes, madame,” said the servant, who, seeing herself caught, became insolent.

“Ah! you eat my prunes! So that’s why they go so quickly and never again appear on the table! I could never have believed it possible; prunes! in a pocket!”

And she also accused her of drinking her vinegar. Everything disappeared; one could not even have a potato about without being certain of never seeing it

again.

“You’re a regular gulf, my girl.”

“Give me sufficient to eat,” retorted Adèle boldly, “and then I won’t touch your potatoes.”

This was too much. Madame Josserand rose from her seat, majestic and terrible.

“Hold your tongue, and don’t answer me! Oh! I know, it’s the other servants who’ve spoilt you. Directly a simpleton arrives in a house from the country, all the hussies in the place at once put her up to all sorts of horrors. You no longer go to mass, and now you steal!”

Adèle, who had indeed been worked up by Lisa and Julie, did not yield.

“When I was a simpleton, as you say, you should not have taken advantage of me. It’s ended now.”

“Leave the room, I discharge you!” cried Madame Josserand, pointing to the door with a tragical gesture.

She sat down quite shaken, whilst the maid, without hurrying herself, dragged her shoes after her, and swallowed another prune before returning to the kitchen.

The breakfast, however, finished in the most affectionate intimacy. Monsieur Josserand, deeply moved, spoke of poor Saturnin, who had had to be taken away the day before during his absence from home; and, as he believed, in a sudden fit of raving madness, with which his son had been seized in the middle of the shop, for such was the story that had been told him.

“How is the marriage getting on?” asked Monsieur Josserand, discreetly.

At first the mother replied in well-chosen phrases, on account of Hortense. Now, she was at the feet of her son, a young fellow who was sure to succeed; and she would even throw his name in the father’s face at times, saying that, thank goodness! he took after her, and would never leave his wife without a pair of shoes. She little by little warmed with her subject.

“In short, he’s had enough of it! It was all very well for a while, and did him no harm. But, if the aunt doesn’t give him the niece, good night! he’ll cut off all supplies. I think he is quite right.”

Hortense, out of decency, sipped her coffee, making a show of obliterating herself behind the cup; whilst Berthe, who for the future might hear anything, gave a slight pout of repugnance at her brother’s successes. The family were about to rise from table, and Monsieur Josserand, who was more cheerful and feeling much better, was talking of going to his office all the same, when

Adèle brought in a card. The person was waiting in the drawingroom.

“What, it’s her! and at this hour of the morning!” exclaimed Madame Josserand. “And I who haven’t got my stays on! So much the worse! it’s time I gave her a piece of my mind!”

The visitor was Madame Dambreville. The father and his two daughters remained talking in the dining-room, whilst the mother directed her steps to the drawing-room. But she stopped at the door before opening it, and anxiously examined her old green silk dress, trying to button it up, picking off the threads gathered from the floors, and driving in her immense bosom with a tap.

“Excuse me, dear madame,” said the visitor, with a smile. “I was passing, so could not resist calling to see how you were.”

She was all laced up, and had her hair done in the most correct style, while she conversed in the easy way of an amiable woman who had just come up to wish a friend good-day. Only, her smile, trembled, and behind her society graces one could detect a frightful anguish, with which her whole frame quivered. She at first talked of all sorts of things, avoiding any mention of Léon’s name, but at length she took from her pocket a letter which she had just received from him.

“Oh! such a letter, such a letter,” murmured she, in an altered voice, half-broken with sobs. “Whatever is it he has to complain of, dear madame? He says he will never come to our house again!”

And her feverish hand held out the letter, which quite shook as she offered it to Madame Josserand. The latter read it coldly. It was a breaking off of the acquaintance in three lines of most cruel conciseness.

“Really!” said she, as she returned the letter, “Léon is not perhaps altogether wrong——”

But Madame Dambreville at once began to praise up the widow—a woman scarcely thirty-five years old, most accomplished and sufficiently rich, who would make a Minister of her husband, she was so active. In short, she had kept her promises, she had found a fine match for Léon; whatever had he to be angry about? And, without waiting for a reply, making up her mind with a nervous start, she named Raymonde, her niece. Really, now, was it possible? a chit of sixteen, a young savage who knew nothing of life!

“Why not?” Madame Josserand kept repeating at each interrogation, “why not, if he loves her?”

No! no! he did not love her—he could not love her! Madame Dambreville struggled, and gradually abandoned herself.

“Come,” cried she, “I only ask him for a little gratitude. It’s I who have made him, it’s thanks to me that he is an auditor, and he will receive a higher appointment on his wedding day. Madame, I implore you, tell him to return to me, tell him to do me that pleasure. I appeal to his heart, to your motherly heart, yes, to all that is noble in your nature——”

She clasped her hands, her words became inarticulate. A pause ensued, during which they were standing face to face. Then suddenly she burst out into the most bitter sobs, vanquished, and no longer mistress of herself.

“Not with Raymonde,” stuttered she, “oh! no, not with Raymonde!”

“Keep quiet, my dear, you make me quite ashamed,” replied Madame Josserand, angrily. “I have daughters who might hear you. I know nothing, and I don’t wish to know anything. If you have affairs with my son, you must settle them together. I will never place myself in a questionable position.”

Yet she loaded her with advice. At her age, one should resign oneself to the inevitable.

“Just think, dear friend, he is not yet thirty. I should be grieved to appear unkind, but you might be his mother. Oh, he knows what he owes you, and I myself am filled with gratitude. You will remain his guardian angel. Only, when a thing is ended, it is ended. You could not possibly have hoped to have kept him always!”

And as the wretched woman refused to listen to reason, wishing simply to have him back, and at once, the mother grew quite angry.

“Do have done, madâme! It is kind on my part to be so obliging. The boy will have no more of it! it is easily to be understood. Look at yourself, pray! It is I now who would call him back to his duty, if he submitted again to your exactions; for, I ask you, what good can there be in it for both of you in future? It so happens that he is coming here, and if you have counted on me——”

Of all these words, Madame Dambreville only heard the last phrase. For a week past she had been running about after Léon, without succeeding in seeing him. Her face brightened up; she uttered this cry from her heart:

“As he is coming, I shall stay!”

From that moment she made herself at home, seating herself like a heavy mass in an arm-chair, her eyes fixed on vacancy, declining any further questioning with the obstinacy of an animal which will not yield, even when beaten. Madame Josserand, bitterly regretting having said too much, exasperated with this sort of mile-stone which had become a fixture in her drawing-room, yet not daring to turn her out, ended by leaving her to herself. Moreover, some sounds coming from the dining-room made her feel uneasy.

She fancied she recognized Auguste’s voice.

“On my word of honor! madame, one never heard of such a thing before!” said she, violently slamming the door. “It is most indiscreet!”

It was indeed Auguste, who had come up to have the explanation with his wife’s parents which he had been meditating since the day before. Monsieur Josserand, feeling jollier still, and more inclined for a little enjoyment than for office duties, was proposing a walk to his daughters, when Adèle came and announced Madame Berthe’s husband. It created quite a scare. The young woman turned pale.

“What! your husband?” said the father. “But he was at Lyons! Ah! you were not speaking the truth. There is some misfortune; for two days past I have seemed to feel it.”

And, as she rose from her seat, he detained her.

“Tell me, have you been quarreling again? about money, is it not? Eh? perhaps because of the dowry, of the ten thousand francs we have not paid him?”

“Yes, yes, that’s it,” stammered Berthe, who released herself and fled.

Hortense also had risen. She ran after her sister, and both took refuge in her room.

“Come in, come in, my dear Auguste,” said he, in a choking tone of voice. “Berthe has just told me of your quarrel. I’m not very well, and they’ve been spoiling me. I regret immensely not being able to give you that money. I did wrong in promising, I know—”

“Yes, sir, I know all. You completely took me in with your lies. I don’t mind so much not having the money; but it’s the hypocrisy of the thing which exasperates me! Why all that nonsense about an assurance which did not exist? Why give yourself such airs of tenderness and affection, by offering to advance sums which, according to you, you would not be entitled to receive till three years later? And you were not even blessed with a sou! Such behavior has only one name in every country.”

Monsieur Josserand opened his mouth to exclaim: “It is not I; it is them!” But he was ashamed to accuse the family; he bowed his head, thus accepting the responsibility of the disgraceful action. Auguste continued:

“Moreover, every one was against me, even that Duveyrier behaved like a rascal, with his scoundrel of a notary; for I asked to have the assurance mentioned in the contract, as a guarantee, and I was made to shut up. Had I insisted, though, you would have been guilty of swindling. Yes, sir, swindling!”

At this accusation, the father, who was very pale, rose to his feet, and he was about to answer, to offer his labor, to purchase his daughter's happiness with all of his existence that remained to him, when Madame Josserand, quite beside herself through Madame Dambreville's obstinacy, no longer thinking of her old green silk dress, now splitting, through the heaving of her angry bosom, entered like a blast of wind.

"Eh? what?" cried she; "who talks of swindling? Is it you, sir? You would do better, sir, to go first to Père-Lachaise cemetery to see if it's your father's pay-day!"

Auguste had expected this, but he was all the same horribly annoyed. She went on, with head erect, and quite crushing in her audacity:

"We've got them, your ten thousand francs. Yes, they're there in a drawer. But we will only give them to you when Monsieur Vabre returns to give you the others. What a family! a gambler of a father who lets us all in, and a thief of a brother-in-law who pops the inheritance into his own pocket!"

"Thief! thief!" stammered Auguste, unable to contain himself any longer; "the thieves are here, madame!"

They both stood with heated countenances in front of each other. Monsieur Josserand, quite upset by all this wrangling, separated them. He beseeched them to be calm; and, trembling all over, he was obliged to sit down again.

"Anyhow," resumed the son-in-law, after a pause, "I won't have any strumpet in my house. Keep your money and keep your daughter That is what I came up to tell you."

"You are changing the subject," quietly observed the mother. "Very well, we will discuss the fresh one."

"I told you she would deceive me!" cried Auguste, with an air of indignant triumph.

"And I answered that you were doing everything to lead to such a result!" declared Madame Josserand, victoriously. "Oh! I do not pretend that Berthe is right; what she has done is simply idiotic; and she won't lose anything by waiting. I shall let her know what I think of it. But, however, as she is not present, I can state the fact—you alone are guilty."

"What! I guilty?"

"Undoubtedly, my dear fellow. You don't know how to deal with women. Here's an instance! Do you even deign to come to my Tuesday receptions? No; you perhaps put in an appearance three times during the season, and then only stay half-an-hour Though one may have headaches, one should be polite. Oh! of course, it's no great crime; anyhow, it judges you; you don't know how

to live.”

Her voice hissed with a slowly gathered rancor; for, on marrying her daughter, she had above all counted on her son-in-law to fill her drawing-room. And he brought no one; he did not even come himself; it was the end of one of her dreams; she would never be able to struggle against the Duveyriers’ choruses.

“However,” added she, ironically. “I force no one to come and amuse himself in my home.”

“The truth is, it is not very amusing there,” replied he, out of all patience.

This threw her into a towering rage.

“That’s it, insult away! Learn, sir, that I might have all the high life of Paris if I wished, and that I was not looking to you to help me to keep my rank in society!”

There was no longer any question of Berthe; the adultery had disappeared before this personal quarrel. Monsieur Josserand continued to listen to them, as though he were tossing about in the midst of some nightmare. It was not possible; his daughter could not have caused him this grief; and he ended by painfully rising again from his seat and going, without saying a word, in search of Berthe. Directly she was there, she would throw herself into Auguste’s arms, and then everything would be explained and forgotten. He found her in the midst of a quarrel with Hortense, who was urging her to implore her husband’s forgiveness, having already had enough of her, and being unwilling to share her room any longer. The young woman resisted, yet she ended by following her father. As they returned to the dining-room, where the breakfast cups were still scattered over the table, Madame Josserand was exclaiming:

“No, on my word of honor! I don’t pity you.”

On catching sight of Berthe she stopped speaking, and again retired into her stern majesty. When his wife appeared before him, Auguste made a gesture of protest, as though to remove her from his path.

“Come,” said Monsieur Josserand, in his gentle and trembling voice, “what is the matter with you all? I can’t make it out; you will drive me mad with all your quarreling. Your husband is mistaken, is he not, my child? You will explain things to him. You must have a little consideration for your old parents. Embrace each other; now, come, do it for my sake.”

Berthe, who would all the same have kissed Auguste, stood there awkwardly, and half-choked by her dressing-gown, on seeing him draw back with an air of tragical repugnance.

“What! you refuse to, my darling?” continued the father. “You should take the first step, and you, my dear boy, encourage her; be indulgent.”

The husband at length gave free vent to his anger.

“Encourage her, not if I know it! I found her in her chemise, sir! and with that man! Do you take me for a fool, that you wish me to kiss her! In her chemise, sir!”

Monsieur Josserand stood lost in amazement. Then he caught hold of Berthe’s arm.

“You say nothing; can it be true? On your knees, then!”

But Auguste had reached the door. He was hastening away. “Your comedies are useless! they don’t take me in! Don’t try to shove her on my shoulders again; I’ve had her once too often. You hear me; never again! I would sooner go to law about it. Pass her on to some one else, if she’s in your way. And, besides, you’re no better than she is!”

He waited till he was in the ante-room, and then further relieved himself by shouting out these last words:

“Yes, when one makes a strumpet of one’s daughter, one should not push her into a respectable man’s arms!”

The outer door banged, and a profound silence ensued. Berthe had mechanically gone back to her seat at the table, lowering her eyes, and looking at the coffee dregs in the bottom of her cup; whilst her mother sharply walked about, carried away by the tempest of her violent emotions. The father, utterly worn out, and with a face as white as that of a corpse, had sat down all by himself at the other end of the room, against the wall. An odor of rancid butter —butter of inferior quality purposely bought at the Halles—quite infected the apartment.

“Now that that vulgar person has gone,” said Madame Josserand, “one may be able to hear oneself speak. Ah! sir, these are the results of your incapacity. Do you at length acknowledge your errors? think you that such quarrels would be picked with either of the brothers Bernheim, with one of the owners of the Saint-Joseph glass works?”

Monsieur Josserand, with a lifeless look in his eyes, had not even stirred. She had stopped before him, with an enraged desire for a row; then, seeing he did not move, she continued to pace the room.

“Yes, yes, be disdainful. You know it will not affect me much. And we will see if you will again dare to speak ill of my relations after all that yours have done. Uncle Bachelard is quite a star! my sister is most polite! Listen; do you wish to know my opinion? Well! it is that if my father had not died, you would

have killed him. As for your father——”

Monsieur Josserand’s face became whiter than ever as he remarked:

“I beseech you, Eléonore. I abandon my father to you, and also all my relations. Only, I beseech you, let me be. I do not feel well.”

Berthe, taking pity on him, raised her head.

“Do leave him alone, mamma,” said she.

So, turning toward her daughter, Madame Josserand resumed more violently than ever:

“I’ve been keeping you for the last; you won’t lose by waiting! Yes, ever since yesterday I’ve been bottling it up. But, I warn you, I can no longer keep it in—I can no longer keep it in. With that counter-jumper; I can scarcely believe it! Have you, then, lost all pride? I thought that you were making use of him, that you were just sufficiently amiable to cause him to interest himself in the business down-stairs; and I assisted you, I encouraged him. In short, tell me what advantage you saw in it all?”

“None whatever,” stammered the young woman.

“Then, why did you take up with him? It was even more stupid than wicked.”

“How absurd you are, mamma: one can never explain such things.”

Madame Josserand was again walking about.

“Ah! you can’t explain! Well! but you ought to be able to! There is not the slightest shadow of sense in misbehaving oneself like that, and it is this which exasperates me! Did I ever tell you to deceive your husband? did I ever deceive your father? He is here; ask him. Let him say if he ever caught me with any other man.”

Her pace slackened and became quite majestic, and she slapped herself on her green bodice, driving her breasts back under her arms.

“Nothing; not a fault, not the least forgetfulness, even in thought. My life has been a chaste one. Yet God knows what I have had to put up with from your father! I have had every excuse; many women would have avenged themselves. But I had some sense, and that saved me. Before heaven!” said she, “I swear I would have restrained myself, even if the Emperor had pestered me! One loses too much.”

She took a few steps in silence, apparently reflecting, and then added:

“Moreover, it is the greatest possible shame.”

Monsieur Josserand looked at her, looked at his daughter, and his lips moved, though no sound came from them; and his whole suffering being conjured them to put an end to this cruel explanation. But Berthe, who bent before violence, was wounded by her mother's lesson. She at length rebelled, for she was quite unconscious of her fault, thanks to the old education which she had received when a girl in search of a husband.

"Well!" said she, boldly planting her elbows on the table, "you should not have made me marry a man I did not love. Now I hate him, and I have taken another."

"In short, he bores me, and I bore him," declared she. "It's not my fault, we don't understand one another. As early as the morrow of our wedding-day, he looked as though he thought we had taken him in; yes, he was cold and put out, just like when he has a bad day's sale. For my part, I did not amuse myself particularly with him. Really! I don't think much of marriage if it offers no more pleasure than that! And that's how it all began. So much the worse! it was bound to come; I'm not the most guilty."

She left off speaking, but shortly added, with an air of profound conviction:

"Ah! mamma, how well I understand you now! You remember, when you told us you had had more than enough of it."

Madame Josserand, standing up before her, had been listening for a minute with indignant amazement.

"Eh? I said that!" cried she.

But Berthe, warming with her subject, would not stop.

"You have said so twenty times. And, besides, I should have liked to have seen you in my place. Auguste is not kind like papa. You would have been fighting together about money matters before a week had passed. He would precious soon have made you say that men are only good to be taken in!"

"Eh? I said that!" repeated the mother, quite beside herself.

She advanced so menacingly toward her daughter, that the father held out his hands in a suppliant gesture imploring mercy. The sounds of the two women's voices struck him to the heart unceasingly; and, at each shock, he felt the wound extend. Tears gushed from his eyes as he stammered:

"Do leave off, spare me."

"No, it is dreadful!" resumed Madame Josserand, in louder tones than ever. "This wretched creature now pretends I am the cause of her shamelessness! You will see she will soon make out that it is I who have deceived her

husband. So, it’s my fault! for that is what you seem to mean. It’s my fault!”

Berthe remained with her elbows on the table, very pale, but resolute.

“It’s very certain that, if you had brought me up differently——”

She did not finish. Her mother gave her a clout with all her might, and such a hard one that it hanged Berthe’s head down onto the table-cover. Her hand had been itching to give it, ever since the day before; it had been making her fingers tingle, the same as in those far-off days when the child used to oversleep herself.

“There!” cried she, “that’s for your education! Your husband ought to have beaten you to a jelly.”

The young woman did not rise, but sat there sobbing, her cheek pressed against her arm. She forgot her twenty-four years, this clout brought her back to the slaps of other times, to a whole past of timorous hypocrisy. All her resolution of an emancipated grownup person melted away in the great sorrow of a little girl.

But, on hearing her weep so bitterly, the father was seized with a terrible emotion. He at length got up, quite distracted, and he pushed the mother away, saying:

“You wish, then, to kill me between you? Tell me, must I go on my knees to you?”

Madame Josserand, having relieved her feelings, and having nothing to add, was withdrawing in a royal silence, when she found Hortense listening behind the door as she suddenly opened it. This caused a fresh outburst.

“Ah! so you were listening to all this filth? The one does the most horrible things, and the other takes a delight in hearing about them; the two make the pair. But, good heavens! whoever was it that brought you up?”

Hortense, without being in the least moved, entered the room.

“It was not necessary to listen, one can even hear you in the kitchen. The servant is wriggling with laughter. Besides, I’m old enough to be married; there is no harm in my knowing.”

“Verdier, eh?” resumed the mother bitterly. “That’s all the satisfaction you give me. Now, you are waiting for the death of a brat. You may wait, she’s big and plump, so I’ve been told. It serves you right.”

A rush of bile gave a yellow hue to the young girl’s skinny countenance. And, with clenched teeth, she replied:

“Though she’s big and plump, Verdier can leave her. And I will make him

leave her sooner than you think, just to spite you all. Yes, yes, I will get married without any one else's assistance. They're far too solid, the marriages you put together!"

Then, as her mother was advancing toward her, she added:

"Ah! you know, I don't intend to be slapped! Take care." They looked each other straight in the eyes, and Madame Josserand was the first to yield, hiding her retreat beneath an air of scornful domination. But the father thought the battle was going to begin again. In the midst of his sobs, he kept repeating:

"I can bear it no longer—I can bear it no longer—"

The dining-room became once more wrapped in silence. Berthe, her cheek on her arm, and still heaving long, nervous sighs, was growing calmer. Hortense had quietly seated herself at the other end of the table, and was buttering the remainder of a roll, so as to pull herself together again. Well! butter at twenty-two sous could only be poison. And, as it left a stinking deposit at the bottom of the saucepans, Adèle was explaining that it was not even economical, when a dull thud, a distant shake of the floor, suddenly caused them to listen intently.

Berthe, all anxiety, at length raised her head.

"What's that!" asked she.

"It's perhaps madame and the other lady, in the drawing-room," said Adèle.

Madame Josserand had started with surprise, as she crossed the drawing-room. A woman was there all alone.

"What? you again?" cried she, when she had recognized Madame Dambreville, whom she had forgotten.

The latter did not stir. The family quarrels, the noisy voices, the slamming of doors, seemed to have passed over her without her having felt the least breath of them. She remained immovable, looking into vacancy, buried in a heap in her love-sick mania. But there was something at work within her, the advice of Léon's mother had upset her, and was deciding her to dearly purchase a few remnants of happiness.

"Come," resumed Madame Josserand, roughly, "you can't, you know, sleep here. I have had a note from my son, he is not coming."

Then Madame Dambreville spoke, her mouth all clammy from her long silence, as though she were just waking up.

"I am going, pray excuse me. And tell him from me that I have reflected. I consent. Yes, I will reflect still further, and perhaps I may help him to marry

that girl, as he insists upon it. But it is I who give her to him, and I wish him to ask me for her, me alone, you understand! Oh! he must come back, he must come back!”

Her ardent voice became quite beseeching. She added, in a lower tone, in the obstinate way of a woman who, after sacrificing everything, clings to a last satisfaction.

“He shall marry her, but he must live with us. Otherwise nothing will be done. I would sooner lose him.”

And she went off. Madame Josserand was most charming again. In the ante-room, she said all sorts of consoling things, she promised to send her son submissive and tender, that very evening, affirming that he would be delighted to live at his aunt-in-law’s. Then, when she had shut the door behind Madame Dambreville’s back, filled with a pitying tenderness, she thought:

“Poor boy! what a price she will make him pay for it!”

But, at this moment, she also heard the dull thud, which caused the boards to tremble. Well? what was it? was the servant smashing all the crockery, now? She hastened to the dining-room, and questioned her daughters.

“What is it? Is the sugar-basin broken?”

“No, mamma. We don’t know.”

She turned round, looking for Adèle, when she beheld her listening at the door of the bed-room.

“Whatever are you doing?” cried she. “Everything is being smashed in your kitchen, and your’re there spying on your master. Yes, yes, one begins with prunes, and one ends with something else. For some time past, you have had a way about you which greatly displeases me; you smell of men, my girl ——-”

The servant stood looking at her with wide-open eyes. At length she interrupted her.

“That’s not what’s the matter. I think master has fallen down in there.”

“Good heavens! she’s right,” said Berthe, turning pale, “it was just like some one falling.”

They entered the room. Monsieur Josserand, seized with a fainting fit, was lying on the floor before the bed; his head had come in contact with a chair, and a little stream of blood was issuing from the right ear. The mother, the two daughters and the servant surrounded and examined him. Berthe, alone, wept, again seized with the bitter sobs which the blow had called forth. And, when the four of them raised him to place him on the bed, they heard him murmur:

“It’s all over. They’ve killed me.”

CHAPTER XVII.

Months passed by, and spring had come again. At the house in the Rue de Choiseul, every one was talking of the approaching marriage of Octave and Madame Hédouin.

Matters, however, were not so far advanced. Octave was again in his old place at “The Ladies’ Paradise,” the business of which developed daily. Since her husband’s death, Madame Hédouin was unable to attend properly to the incessantly growing concern by herself. Her uncle, old Deleuze, nailed to his easy-chair by rheumatism, troubled himself about nothing; and, naturally, the young man, who was very active and a constant prey to the mania for doing business on a large scale, had in a little while reached a position of decisive importance in the house.

From this moment their relations became most intimate. They would shut themselves for hours together in the small room right at the back. In former days, when he had sworn to himself to seduce her, he had pursued certain tactics there, trying to take advantage of her commercial emotions, whispering figures close to her neck, watching for the days of heavy takings to profit by her enthusiasm. Now, he was simply good-natured, having no other aim but to push the business. He no longer even desired her, though he retained the recollection of her gentle quiver when waltzing with him on Berthe’s wedding night. Perhaps she had loved. In any case it was best to remain as they were; for, as she justly said, the business demanded a great amount of order, and it would be impolitic to wish for things which would disturb them from morning till night.

Seated together at the narrow desk, they would often forget themselves, after going through the books and settling the orders. He would then return to his dreams of enlargement. He had sounded the owner of the next house, and had found him willing to sell. They would give notice to the second-hand dealer and to the umbrella man, and then establish a special department for silk. She, very grave, would listen, not daring to venture yet.

At length, as they sat side by side one evening examining some invoices beneath the scorching flame of a gas-jet, she said slowly:

“I have spoken to my uncle, Monsieur Octave. He consents, so we will buy the house. Only——”

He interrupted her joyfully to exclaim:

“Then, the Vabres are done for!”

She smiled, and murmured reproachfully:

“Do you detest them, then? It is not proper on your part; you are the last who should wish them ill.”

She had never spoken to him of his relations with Berthe. This sudden allusion embarrassed him immensely, without his exactly knowing why. He blushed and tried to stammer out some explanation.

“No, no, it does not concern me,” resumed she, still smiling and very calm. “Excuse me, it quite escaped me; I never intended to speak to you on the subject. You are young. So much the worse for those who are willing, is it not so? It is the place of the husbands to guard their wives when the latter are unable to guard themselves.”

He experienced a sensation of relief, on understanding she was not angry. He had often dreaded a coldness on her part if she came to know of his former connection.

“You interrupted me, Monsieur Octave,” resumed she, gravely. “I was about to add that if I purchase the next house, and thus double the importance of my business, it will be impossible for me to remain single. I shall be obliged to marry again.”

Octave sat lost in astonishment. What! she already had a husband in view, and he was in ignorance of it! He at once felt that his position there was compromised.

“My uncle,” continued she, “told me so himself. Oh, there is no hurry just yet. I have only been eight months in mourning; I shall wait till the autumn. Only, in trade one must put one’s heart on one side, and consider the necessities of the situation. A man is absolutely necessary here.”

She discussed all this calmly, like a matter of business, and he gazed on her regular and healthy beauty, on her pure complexion beneath her neatly arranged black hair. Then he regretted not having, since her widowhood, renewed the effort to become her lover.

“It is always a very serious matter,” stammered he; “it requires reflection.”

No doubt, she was quite of that opinion. And she spoke of her age.

“I am already old; I am five years older than you, Monsieur Octave—”

Deeply agitated, yet thinking he understood, he interrupted her, and seizing hold of her hands, he repeated:

“Oh, madame! oh, madame!”

But she rose from her seat and released herself. Then she turned down the gas.

“No, that’s enough for to-day. You have some very good ideas, and it is natural I should think of you to put them into execution. Only there will be a deal of worry; we must thoroughly study the project. I know that at heart you are very serious. Think the matter over on your side, and I will think it over on mine. That is why I have named it to you. We can talk about it again later on.”

And things remained thus for weeks. The establishment continued just the same as usual. As Madame Hédouin always maintained her smiling serenity when in Octave’s company, without an allusion to the slightest tender feeling, he affected on his side a similar peace of mind, and he ended by becoming like her, healthfully happy, placing his confidence in the logic of things. She often repeated that sensible things always happened of themselves. Therefore she was never in a hurry. The gossip which commenced to circulate respecting her intimacy with the young man did not in the least affect her. They waited.

In the Rue de Choiseul, therefore, the entire house vowed that the marriage was as good as accomplished. Octave had given up his room to lodge in the Rue Neuve-Saint-Augustin, near “The Ladies’ Paradise.” He no longer visited any one—neither the Campar-dons nor the Duveyriers, who were quite shocked at the scandal of his amours. Monsieur Gourd himself, whenever he saw him, pretended not to recognize him, so as to avoid having to bow. Only Marie and Madame Juzuer, on the mornings when they met him in the neighborhood, went and stood a moment in some doorway to have a chat with him. Madame Juzeur, who passionately questioned him respecting Madame Hédouin, tried to persuade him to call upon her, so as to be able to talk the matter over nicely; and Marie, who was greatly distressed, complaining of again being in the family way, and who told him of Jules’ amazement and of her parents’ terrible anger. Then, when the rumor of his marriage became more persistent, Octave was surprised to receive a low bow from Monsieur Gourd. Campardon, without exactly making friends again, gave him a cordial nod across the street, whilst Duveyrier, calling one evening to buy some gloves, showed himself most amiable. The entire house was beginning to pardon him.

However, the uneasiness caused by the adulterous act was still there, imperceptible to uneducated people, but most disagreeable to those of refined morals. Auguste obstinately persisted in not taking his wife back, and, so long as Berthe lived with her parents, the scandal would not be effaced—there would ever linger a material vestige of it.

It was Duveyrier especially who, as landlord, carried the burden of this persistent and unmerited misfortune. For some time past Clarisse had been torturing him to such a pitch that he would at times come home to his wife to

weep. But the scandal of the adultery had struck him to the heart; he saw, said he, the passer-by look at his house from top to bottom—that house which his father-in-law and he had striven to decorate with every domestic virtue; and, as this sort of thing could not be allowed to last, he talked of purifying the building for his personal honor. Therefore he urged Auguste, in the name of public decency, to become reconciled with his wife. Unfortunately, Auguste resisted, backed up in his rage by Théophile and Valérie, who had definitely installed themselves at the pay-desk, and who were delighted with the existing discord. Then, as matters were going badly at Lyons, and the silk warehouse was in jeopardy for want of capital, Duveyrier conceived a practical idea. The Josserands were probably longing to get rid of their daughter; the thing to do was to offer to take her back, but only on condition that they paid the dowry of fifty thousand francs. Perhaps uncle Bachelard would yield to their entreaties and give the money. At first, Auguste violently refused to be a party to any such arrangement; even were the sum a hundred thousand francs, he would not think it sufficient. Then, becoming very anxious as his April payments drew near, he had given in to the counselor's arguments, as the latter pleaded the cause of morality and spoke merely of a good action to be done.

When they were agreed, Clotilde selected the Abbé Manduit for negotiator. It was a delicate matter; only a priest could interfere in it without compromising himself. It so happened that the reverend man was deeply grieved by the deplorable catastrophes which had befallen one of the most interesting households of his parish; and he had already offered his advice, his experience and his authority to put an end to a scandal at which the enemies of religion might take delight. However, when Clotilde spoke to him of the dowry, asking him to be the bearer of Auguste's conditions to the Josserands, he bowed his head, and maintained a painful silence.

"It is money due that my brother asks for," repeated she. "It is no bargain, understand. Moreover, my brother insists upon it."

"It is necessary, and I will go," said the priest, at length.

The Josserands had been expecting the proposal for days. Valérie must have spoken of it, all the tenants were discussing the affair: were they so hard up as to be forced to keep their daughter? would they be able to obtain the fifty thousand francs to get rid of her? Since the question had reached this point, Madame Josserand had been in a constant rage. What! after having had such trouble to marry Berthe at first, she now had to marry her a second time! Everything was upset, the dowry was again demanded, all the money worries were going to commence afresh! Never before had a mother had such a task to go through twice over. And all owing to the fault of that silly fool, whose stupidity went so far as to make her forget her duty.

The house was becoming a hell upon earth; Berthe suffered a continual torture, for even her sister Hortense, furious at no longer sleeping alone, never uttered a sentence without introducing some insulting allusion into it. She was even reproached with the food she ate. When one had a husband somewhere, it was all the same very funny that one should go and share one's parents' meals, which were already too sparing. Then the young woman, in despair, would sob in corners, accusing herself of being a coward, but unable to pick up sufficient courage to go down-stairs and throw herself at Auguste's feet, and say:

"Here! beat me, I cannot be more unhappy than I am."

Monsieur Josserand alone showed some affection for his child. But that child's faults and tears were killing him; he was dying through the cruelties of the family, with an unlimited holiday from business, spent mostly in bed. Doctor Juillerat, who attended him, talked of a decomposition of the blood: it was a dissolution of the entire system, during which each organ was attacked, one after the other.

"When you have made your father die of grief, perhaps you will be satisfied!" cried the mother.

And Berthe scarcely dared enter the invalid's room. Directly the father and daughter met, they wept together, and did each other a great deal of harm.

At length, Madame Josserand came to a grand decision: she invited uncle Bachelard, resolved to humiliate herself once more. She would have given the fifty thousand francs out of her own pocket, if she had possessed them, so as not to have to keep that big married girl, whose presence dishonored her Tuesday receptions. But she had learnt some shocking things about the uncle, and, if he did not do as she wished, she intended, once for all, to give him a bit of her mind.

During dinner, Bachelard behaved in a most abominable manner. He had arrived in an advanced state of intoxication; for, since he had left Fifi, he had fallen into the lowest depths of vice.

"Narcisse," said Madame Josserand, "the situation is a grave one——"

And, slowly and solemnly, she explained this situation, her daughter's regrettable misfortune, the husband's revolting venality, the painful resolution she had been obliged to come to of giving the fifty thousand francs, so as to put a stop to the scandal which covered the family with shame. Then she severely continued:

"Remember what you promised, Narcisse. On the evening of the signing of the marriage contract, you again slapped your chest and swore that Berthe might rely on her uncle's affections. Well! where is this affection? the moment

has arrived to display it. Monsieur Josserand, join me in showing him his duty, if your weak state of health will allow you to do so."

In spite of his great repugnance, the father murmured, out of love for his daughter:

"It is true; you promised, Bachelard. Come, before I leave you forever, do me the pleasure of behaving as you should."

But Berthe and Hortense, in the hope of working upon the uncle's feelings, had filled his glass once too often. He was in such a fuddled condition, that one could not even take advantage of him.

"Eh? what?" stuttered he, without having the least necessity for exaggerating his intoxication. "Never promise—Don't understand—Tell me again, Eléonore."

The latter recommenced her story, made weeping Berthe embrace him, besought him for the sake of her husband's health, and proved to him that in giving the fifty thousand francs, he would be fulfilling a sacred duty. Then, as he began to doze off again, without appearing to be in the least affected by the sight of the invalid or of the chamber of sickness, she abruptly broke out into the most violent language.

"Listen! Narcisse, this sort of thing has been lasting too long—you're a scoundrel! I know of all your beastly goings-on. You've just married your mistress to Gueulin, and you've given them fifty thousand francs, the very amount you promised us. Ah! it's decent; little Gueulin plays a pretty part in it all! And you, you're worse still, you take the bread from our mouth, you prostitute your fortune, yes! you prostitute it, by robbing us of money which was ours for the sake of that harlot!"

Never before had she relieved her feelings to such an extent. Hortense busied herself with her father's medicine, so as not to show her embarrassment. Monsieur Josserand, who was made far worse by this scene, tossed about on his pillow, and murmured in a trembling voice:

"I beseech you, Eléonore, do be quiet; he will give nothing. If you wish to say such things to him, take him away that I may not hear you."

Berthe, on her side, sobbed louder than ever, and joined her father in his entreaties.

"Enough, mamma, do as papa asks. Good heavens! how miserable I am to be the cause of all these quarrels! I would sooner leave you all, and go and die somewhere."

Then Madame Josserand deliberately put the question to the uncle.

“Will you, yes or no, give the fifty thousand francs, so that your niece may hold her head up?”

Regularly scared, he tried to go into explanations.

“Listen a moment. I found Gueulin and Fifi together. What could I do? I was obliged to marry them. It wasn’t my fault.”

“Will you, yes or no, give the dowry you promised?” repeated she furiously.

He wavered, his intoxication increased to such a pitch that he could scarcely find words to utter:

“Can’t, word of honor!—Completely ruined. Otherwise, at once—Candidly you know——”

She interrupted him with a terrible gesture, and declared:

“Good, then I shall call a family council and have you declared incapable of managing your affairs. When uncles become driveling, it’s time to send them to an asylum.”

At this, the uncle was seized with intense emotion. He glanced about him, and found the room had a sinister aspect with its feeble light; he looked at the dying man, who, held up by his daughters, was swallowing a spoonful of some black liquid; and his heart overflowed, he sobbed as he accused his sister of never having under stood him. Yet, he had already been made unhappy enough by Gueulin’s treachery. They knew he was very sensitive, and they did wrong to invite him to dinner, to make him sad afterward. In short, in place of the fifty thousand francs, he offered all the blood in his veins.

Madame Josserand, who was quite worn out, had decided to leave him to himself, when the servant announced Doctor Juillerat and the Abbé Manduit. They had met on the landing, and entered together. The doctor found Monsieur Josserand much worse, he was still suffering from the shock occasioned by the scene in which he had been forced to play a part. When, on his side, the priest wished to take Madame Josserand into the drawing-room, having, he said, a communication to make to her, the latter guessed on what subject he had called, and answered majestically that she was with her family and prepared to hear everything there; the doctor himself would not be in the way, for a physician was also a confessor.

“Madame,” then said the priest, with slightly embarrassed gentleness, “you behold in the step I am taking an ardent desire to reconcile two families——”

“My dear Abbé Manduit, allow me to interrupt you,” said Madame Josserand. “We are deeply moved by your efforts. But never, you understand me! never will we traffic in our daughter’s honor. People who have already

become reconciled over this child's back! Oh! I know all; they were at daggers drawn, and now they are inseparable, reviling us from morning till night. No; such a bargain would be a disgrace—-"

"It seems to me, though, madame—" ventured the priest.

But she drowned his voice, as she superbly continued:

"See! my brother is here. You can question him. He was again saying to me only a little while ago: 'Here are the fifty thousand francs, Eléonore; settle this miserable matter!' Well! ask him what reply I made. Get up, Narcisse. Tell the truth." The uncle had already again fallen asleep in an arm-chair, at the end of the room. He moved, and uttered a few disconnected words. Then, as his sister insisted, he placed his hand on his heart, and stammered:

"When duty speaks, one must obey. The family comes before everything."

"You hear him?" cried Madame Josserand, with a triumphant air. "No money; it's disgraceful! Tell those people from us that we don't die to avoid having to pay. The dowry is here; we would have given it; but, now that it's exacted as the price of our daughter, the matter becomes too disgusting. Let Auguste take Berthe back first, and then we will see later on."

She had raised her voice, and the doctor, who was examining his patient, was obliged to make her leave off.

"Speak lower, madame!" said he; "your husband suffers."

Then the Abbé Manduit, whose embarrassment had increased, went up to the bedside, and found some kind words to say. And he afterward withdrew, without again referring to the matter, hiding the confusion of having failed beneath his amiable smile, with a curl of grief and disgust on his lips. As the doctor went off in his turn, he roughly informed Madame Josserand that there was no hope for the invalid: the greatest precautions must be taken, for the least emotion might carry him off. She was thunderstruck, and returned to the dining-room, where her two daughters and their uncle had already withdrawn, to let Monsieur Josserand rest, as he seemed disposed to go to sleep.

"Berthe," murmured she, "you have killed your father. The doctor has just said so."

And they all three, seated round the table, gave way to their grief, whilst Uncle Bachelard, also in tears, mixed himself a glass of grog.

When Auguste learned the Josserands' answer, his rage against his wife knew no bounds, and he swore he would kick her away the day she came to ask for forgiveness. Yet, in reality, he wanted her; there was a voidness in his life; he seemed to be out of his element, amidst the new worries of his abandonment, quite as grave as those of his married life.

Besides all this, another more serious anxiety bothered him: “The Ladies’ Paradise” was prospering, and already menaced his business, which decreased daily. He certainly did not regret that miserable Octave, yet he was just, and recognized that the fellow possessed very great abilities. How swimmingly everything would have gone had they only got on better together! He was seized with the most tender regrets; there were hours when, sick of his loneliness, feeling life giving way beneath him, he felt inclined to go up to the Josserands and ask them to give Berthe back to him for nothing.

Duveyrier, too, moreover, did not yield, and, more and more cut up by the moral disfavor into which such an affair threw his building, he was forever urging his brother-in-law to a reconciliation.

Each day life became more and more cruel for Duveyrier at this mistress’, where he encountered all the worries of his own home again, but this time in the midst of a regular hell. The whole tribe of hawkers—the mother, the big blackguard of a brother, the two little sisters, even the invalid aunt—impudently robbed him, lived on him openly, to the point of emptying his pockets during the nights he slept there. His position was also becoming a serious one in another respect; he had got to the end of his money; he trembled at the thought of being compromised on his judicial bench; he could certainly not be removed, only, the young barristers were beginning to look at him in a saucy kind of way, which made it awkward for him to administer justice. And, when driven away by the filth and the uproar, seized with disgust of himself, he flew from the Rue d’Assas and sought refuge in the Rue de Choiseul, his wife’s malignant coldness completed the crushing of him. Then he would lose his head; he would look at the Seine on his way to the court, with thoughts of jumping in some evening when a final suffering should impart to him the requisite courage.

Clotilde had noticed her husband’s emotion, and felt anxious and irritated with that mistress of his who did not even make a man happy in his misconduct. But, for her part, she was greatly annoyed by a most deplorable adventure, the consequences of which quite revolutionized the house. On going up-stairs one morning for a handkerchief, Clémence had caught Hippolyte with Louise, and, since then, she had taken to slapping him in the kitchen for the least thing, which of course greatly interfered with the attendance. The worst was that madame could no longer close her eyes to the illicit connection existing between her maid and her footman; the other servants laughed, the scandal was reported amongst the tradespeople; it was absolutely necessary to oblige them to get married if she wished to retain them, and, as she continued to be very well satisfied with Clémence, she thought of nothing but this marriage.

To negotiate between lovers who were forever fighting with each other

seemed such a delicate affair that she decided on employing the Abbé Manduit, whose moralizing character seemed specially suited to the occasion. Her servants, moreover, had been causing her a great deal of trouble for some time past. When down in the country, she had noticed the intimacy of her big, hobbledehoy Gustave with Julie; she had at one moment thought of sending the latter about her business, though regretfully, for she liked her cooking; then, after sound reflection, she had decided to keep her, preferring that the youngster should have a mistress at home, a clean girl who would never be any trouble. There is no knowing what a youth may get hold of outside, when he begins too young. She was watching them, therefore, without saying a word, and now the other two must needs worry her with their affair.

It so happened that, one morning, as Madame Duveyrier was preparing to call on the priest, Clémence came, and announced that the Abbé Manduit was taking the extreme unction up to Monsieur Josserand. After meeting him on the staircase, the maid had returned to the kitchen, exclaiming:

“I said that he would come again this year!”

And, alluding to the catastrophes which had befallen the house, she added:

“It has brought ill-luck to every one.”

This time the priest did not arrive too late, and that was an excellent sign for the future. Madame Duveyrier hastened to Saint-Roch, where she awaited the Abbé Manduit’s return. He listened to her, and for a while maintained a sad silence; then he was unable to refuse to enlighten the maid and the footman on the immorality of their position. Moreover, the other matter would have obliged him to return shortly to the Rue de Choiseul, for poor Monsieur Josserand would certainly not last through the night; and he mentioned that he saw in this circumstance a cruel but happy opportunity for reconciling Auguste and Berthe. He would try and arrange the two affairs simultaneously. It was high time that Heaven consented to bless their efforts.

“I have prayed, madame,” said the priest. “The Almighty will triumph.”

And, indeed, that evening, at seven o’clock, Monsieur Josserand’s death agony began. The entire family was there, excepting uncle Bachelard, who had been sought for in vain in all the cafés, and Saturnin, who was still confined at the Asile des Moulineaux. Léon, whose marriage was most unfortunately postponed through his father’s illness, displayed a dignified grief. Madame Josserand and Hortense showed some courage. Berthe alone sobbed so loudly that, so as not to affect the invalid, she had gone and stowed herself away in the kitchen, where Adèle, taking advantage of the general confusion, was drinking some mulled wine. Monsieur Josserand expired in the quietest fashion; it was his honesty which finished him. He had passed a useless life,

and he went off like a worthy man tired of the wicked things of the world, heart-broken by the quiet indifference of the only beings he had ever loved. At eight o'clock he stammered out Saturnin's name, turned his face to the wall, and expired. No one thought him dead, for all had dreaded a terrible agony. They sat patiently for some time, letting him, as they thought, sleep. When they found he was already becoming cold, Madame Josserand, in the midst of the general wailing, flew into a passion with Hortense, whom she had instructed to fetch Auguste, counting on restoring Berthe to the latter's arms amidst the great grief of her husband's last moments.

"You think of nothing!" said she, wiping her eyes.

"But, mamma," replied the girl, in tears, "no one thought papa would go off so suddenly! You told me not to go for Auguste till nine o'clock, so as to be sure of keeping him till the end."

The sorely afflicted family found some distraction in this quarrel.

It was another matter gone wrong; they never succeeded in anything. Fortunately, there was still the funeral to take advantage of to bring the husband and wife together.

The funeral was a pretty decent one, though it was not so grand as Monsieur Vabre's. Moreover, it did not give rise to nearly the same excitement in the house and the neighborhood, for the deceased was not a landlord; he was merely a quiet-going body, whose demise did not even disturb Madame Juzeur's slumbers.

Madame Josserand and her daughters had to be supported to their coach. Léon, assisted by uncle Bachelard, was most attentive, whilst Auguste followed behind in an embarrassed way. He got into another coach with Duveyrier and Théophile. Clotilde detained the Abbé Manduit, who had not officiated, but who had gone to the cemetery, wishing to give the family a proof of his sympathy. The horses started on the homeward journey more gayly, and she at once asked the priest to return to the house with them, for she felt that the time was favorable. He consented.

The three mourning coaches silently drew up in the Rue de Choiseul with the relations. Théophile at once rejoined Valérie, who had remained behind to superintend a general cleaning, the warehouse being closed.

"You may pack up!" cried he, furiously. "They're all at him. I bet he'll end by begging her pardon."

They all, indeed, felt a pressing necessity for putting an end to the unpleasantness. Misfortune should at least be good for something. Auguste, in the midst of them, understood very well what they wanted; and he was alone,

without strength to resist, and filled with shame. The relations slowly walked in under the porch hung with black. No one spoke. On the stairs, the silence continued—a silence full of deep thought—whilst the crape skirts, soft and sad, ascended higher and higher. Auguste, seized with a final feeling of revolt, had taken the lead, with the intention of quickly shutting himself up in his own apartments; but, as he opened, the door, Clotilde and the priest, who had followed close behind, stopped him. Directly after them, Berthe, dressed in deep mourning, appeared on the landing, accompanied by her mother and her sister. They all three had red eyes; Madame Josserand, especially, was quite painful to behold.

“Come, my friend,” simply said the priest, overcome by tears.

And that was sufficient. Auguste gave in at once, seeing that it was better to make his peace at that honorable opportunity. His wife wept, and he wept also, as he stammered:

“Come in. We will try not to do it again.”

Then the relations kissed all around. Clotilde congratulated her brother; she had had full confidence in his heart. Madame Josserand showed a broken-hearted satisfaction, like a widow who is no longer the least affected by the most unhoped-for happiness. She associated her poor husband with the general joy.

“You are doing your duty, my dear son-in-law. He who is now in Heaven thanks you.”

“Come in,” repeated Auguste, quite upset.

But Rachel, attracted by the noise, now appeared in the anteroom; and Berthe hesitated a moment in presence of the speechless exasperation which caused the maid to turn ghastly pale. Then she sternly entered, and disappeared with her black mourning in the shadow of the apartment. Auguste followed her, and the door closed behind them.

A deep sigh of relief ascended the staircase, and filled the house with joy. The ladies pressed the hands of the priest, whose prayers had been granted. Just as Clotilde was taking him off to settle the other matter, Duveyrier, who had lagged behind with Léon and Bachelard, arrived, walking painfully. The happy result had all to be explained to him; but he, who had been desiring it for months past, scarcely seemed to understand, a strange expression overspreading his face, and his mind a prey to a fixed idea, the torture of which quite absorbed him. Whilst the Josserands regained their apartments, he returned to his own, behind his wife and the priest. And they had just reached the ante-room, when some stifled cries caused them to start.

“Do not be uneasy, madame. It is the little lady up-stairs in labor,” Hippolyte complacently explained. “I saw Dr. Juillerat run up just now.”

Then, when he was alone, he added philosophically:

“One goes, another comes.”

Clotilde made the Abbé Manduit comfortable in the drawingroom, saying that she would first of all send him Clémence; and, to help him to while away the time, she gave him the “Revue des Deux Mondes,” which contained some really charming verses. She wished to prepare her maid for the interview. But, on entering her dressing-room, she found her husband seated on a chair.

Ever since the morning, Duveyrier had been in a state of agony. For the third time he had caught Clarisse with Théodore; and, as he complained, the whole family of hawkers, the mother, the brother, the sisters, had fallen upon him, and driven him down-stairs with kicks and blows; whilst Clarisse had called him a poverty-stricken wretch, and furiously threatened him with the police if he ever dared to show himself there again. It was all over; down below the doorkeeper had told him that for a week past a very rich old fellow had been anxious to provide for madame. Then, driven away, and no longer having a warm nook to nestle in, Duveyrier, after wandering about the streets, had entered an out-of-the-way shop and purchased a pocket revolver. Life was becoming too sad; he could at least put an end to it, as soon as he had found a suitable place for doing so. This selection of a quiet corner was occupying his mind, as he mechanically returned to the Rue de Choiseul to assist at Monsieur Josserand’s funeral. Then, when following the corpse, he had had a sudden idea of killing himself at the cemetery; he would go to the furthest end and hide behind a tombstone. This flattered his taste for the romantic, the necessity for a tender ideal, which was wrecking his life, beneath his rigid middle-class attitude. But, as the coffin was being lowered into the grave, he began to tremble, seized with an earthly chill. The spot would decidedly not do; he would have to seek elsewhere. And, having returned in a worse state than ever, entirely a prey to this one idea, he sat thinking on a chair in the dressing-room, trying to decide which was the most suitable place in the house—perhaps the bed-room, beside the bed, or simply just where he was, without moving.

“Will you have the kindness to leave me to myself?” said Clotilde to him.

He already had his hand on the revolver in his pocket.

“Why?” asked he, with an effort.

“Because I wish to be alone.”

He thought that she wanted to change her dress, and that she would not even let him see her bare arms, so repugnant he felt was he to her. For an

instant he looked at her with his dim eyes, and beheld her so tall, so beautiful, with a complexion clear as marble, her hair gathered up in deep, golden tresses. Ah! if she had only consented, how everything might have been arranged! He rose stumblingly from his chair, and, opening his arms, tried to take hold of her.

“What, now?” murmured she, greatly surprised. “What’s the matter with you? Not here, surely. Have you the other one no longer, then? It is going to begin again, that abomination?”

And she exhibited such utter disgust, that he drew back. Without a word, he left her, stopping in the ante-room as he hesitated for a moment; then, as there was a door facing him, the door of the closet, he pushed it open; and, without the slightest hurry, he sat down. It was a quiet spot, no one would come and disturb him there. He placed the barrel of the little revolver in his mouth, and pulled the trigger.

Meanwhile, Clotilde, who had been struck since the morning by his strange manner, had listened to ascertain if he were obliging her by returning to Clarisse. On learning where he had gone, by a creak peculiar to that door, she no longer bothered herself about him, and was at length in the act of ringing for Clémence, when the dull report of a fire-arm filled her with surprise. Whatever was it? it was just, like the noise a saloon rifle would make. She hastened to the ante-room, not daring at first to question him; then, as a strange sound issued from where he was, she called him, and, on receiving no answer, opened the door. The bolt had not even been fastened. Duveyrier, stunned by fright more than by the injury he had received, remained squatting, in a most lugubrious posture, his eyes wide open, and his face streaming with blood. He had missed his object. After grazing his jaw, the bullet had passed out again through the left cheek. And he no longer had the courage to fire a second time.

“What! that is what you come to do here?” cried Clotilde quite beside herself. “Just go and kill yourself outside!”

She was most indignant. Instead of softening her, this spectacle threw her into a supreme exasperation. She bullied him, and raised him up without the least precaution, wishing to carry him away so that no one should see him in such a place. In that closet! and to miss killing himself too! It was too much.

Then, whilst she supported him to lead him to the bed-room, Duveyrier, who had his throat filled with blood, and whose teeth were dropping out, stuttered between two rattles:

“You never loved me!”

And he burst into sobs, he bewailed the death of poetry, that little blue

flower which it had been denied him to pluck. When Clotilde had put him to bed, she at length became softened, seized with a nervous emotion in the midst of her anger. The worst of it was that Clémence and Hippolyte were coming in answer to the bell. She at first talked to them of an accident; their master had fallen on his chin: then she was obliged to abandon this fable, for, on going to wipe up the blood, the footman had found the revolver. The wounded man was still losing a great deal of blood, when the maid remembered that Dr. Juillerat was up-stairs attending to Madame Pichon, and she hastened to him, meeting him on the staircase, on his way home, after a most successful delivery. The doctor immediately reassured Clotilde; perhaps the jaw would be slightly out of its place, but her husband's life was not in the least danger. He was proceeding to dress the wound, in the midst of basins of water and red stained rags, when the Abbé Manduit, uneasy at all this commotion, ventured to enter the room.

"Whatever has happened?" asked he.

This question completed upsetting Madame Duveyrier. She burst into tears at the first words of explanation. The priest, fully aware of the hidden miseries of his flock, had moreover quite understood matters. Already, whilst waiting in the drawing-room, he had been taken with a feeling of uneasiness, and almost regretted the success which had attended his efforts, that wretched young woman whom he had once more united to her husband without her showing the slightest remorse. He was filled with a terrible doubt, perhaps God was not with him. And his anguish still further increased as he beheld the counselor's fractured jaw. He went up to him, bent upon energetically condemning suicide. But the doctor, who was very busy, thrust him aside.

"After me, my dear Abbé Manduit. By-and-by. You can see very well that he has fainted."

And indeed, directly the doctor touched him, Duveyrier had lost consciousness. Then Clotilde, to get rid of the servants who were no longer needed, and whose staring eyes embarrassed her very much, murmured, as she wiped her eyes:

"Go into the drawing-room. Abbé Manduit has something to say to you."

The priest was obliged to take them there. It was another unpleasant piece of business. Hippolyte and Clémence followed him in profound surprise. When they were alone together, he began preaching them a rather confused sermon: Heaven rewarded good behavior, whereas a single sin led one to hell; moreover, it was time to put a stop to scandal and to think of one's salvation. Whilst he spoke thus, their surprise turned to bewilderment; with their hands hanging down beside them, she with her slender limbs and tiny mouth, he with his flat face and his big bones like a gendarme, they exchanged anxious

glances! Had madame found some of her napkins up-stairs in a trunk? or was it because of the bottle of wine they took up with them every evening?

“My children,” the priest ended by saying, “you set a bad example. The greatest of crimes is to pervert one’s neighbor, and to bring the house where one lives into disrepute. Yes, you live in a disorderly way, whieh, unfortunately, is no longer a secret to any one, for you have been fighting together for a week past.”

He blushed; a modest hesitation caused him to choose his words.

Meanwhile the two servants had sighed with relief. They smiled now and strutted about in quite a happy manner. It was only that! really, there was no occasion to be so frightened!

“But it’s all over, sir,” declared Clémence, glancing at Hippolyte in the fondest manner. “We have made it up. Yes, he explained everything to me.”

The priest in his turn exhibited an astonishment full of sadness.

“You do not understand me, my children. You cannot continue to live together; you sin against God and man. You must get married.”

At this, their amazement returned. Get married! whatever for?

“I don’t want to,” said Clémence. “I’ve quite another idea.”

Then the Abbé Manduit tried to convince Hippolyte.

“Come, my fine fellow, you who are a man, use your influence with her, talk to her of her honor. It will change nothing in your mode of living. Be married.”

The footman grinned in a jocular and embarrassed manner. At length he declared, as he looked down at the toes of his boots:

“I daresay, I don’t say the contrary; but I’m already married.”

This answer put a stop to all the priest’s moral preaching. Without adding a word, he folded up his arguments, and put religion, now become useless, back into his pocket, deeply regretting ever having risked it in such a disgraceful matter. Clotilde, who rejoined him at this moment, had heard everything; and she gave vent to her indignation in a furious gesture. At her order, the footman and the maid left the room, one behind the other, looking very serious, but in reality feeling highly amused. After a short pause, Abbé Manduit complained bitterly: why expose him in that manner? why stir up things it was far better to let rest? The condition of affairs had now become most disgraceful. But Clotilde repeated her gesture: so much the worse! she had far greater worries. Moreover, she would certainly not send the servants away, for fear the whole neighborhood learnt the story of the attempted suicide that very evening. She

would decide what to do later on.

“You will not forget, will you? the most complete repose,” urged the doctor, coming from the bed-room. “He will get over it perfectly, but all fatigue must be avoided. Take courage, madame.”

And, turning toward the priest, he added:

“You can preach him a sermon later on, my dear friend. I do not give him up to you yet. If you are returning to Saint-Roch, I will accompany you; we can walk together.”

Then they left the house, and slowly followed the Rue Neuve-Saint-Augustin. As they raised their heads, on arriving at the end of the street, they beheld Madame Hédouin smiling at them, at the door of “The Ladies’ Paradise.” Standing behind her was Octave, also laughing. That very morning they had settled on their marriage, after a serious conversation. They would wait till the autumn. And they were both full of joy at having at length arranged the matter.

“Good day, my dear Abbé Manduit!” said Madame Hédouin, gayly. “And you, doctor, always paying visits?”

And, as the latter congratulated her on her good looks, she added:

“Oh! if there were only me, you might give up business at once.” They stood conversing a moment. The doctor having mentioned Marie’s confinement, Octave seemed delighted to hear of his former neighbor’s happy delivery. But, when he learnt that it was a third daughter, he exclaimed:

“Can’t her husband manage a boy, then? She thought she might still get Monsieur and Madame Vuillaume to put up with a boy; but they’ll never stomach another girl.”

“I should think not,” said the doctor. “They have both taken to their bed, the news of their daughter’s pregnancy upset them so much. And they sent for a notary, so that their son-in-law should not even inherit their furniture.”

There was a little chaff. The priest alone remained silent, with his eyes cast on the ground. Madame Hédouin asked him if he was unwell. Yes, he felt very tired, he was going to take a little rest. And, after a cordial exchange of good wishes, he went down the Rue Saint-Roch, still accompanied by the doctor. On arriving before the church, the latter abruptly said:

“A bad customer, eh?”

“Who is?” asked the priest in surprise.

“That lady who sells linen. She does not care a pin for either of us. No need for religion, nor for medicine. All the same, when one is always so well,

it is no longer interesting."

And he went on his way, whilst the priest entered the church. Abbé Manduit intended to go up to his room. But a great agitation, a violent necessity, had forced him to enter the church and kept him there. It seemed to him that God was calling him, with a confused and far-off voice, the orders proceeding from which he was unable to catch. He slowly crossed the church, and was trying to read within himself, to quiet his alarms, when, suddenly, as he passed behind the choir, a superhuman spectacle shook his entire frame.

It was beyond the marble chapel of the Virgin, as white as a lily, beyond the gold and silver plate of the chapel of the Adoration, with its seven golden lamps, its golden candelabra, and its golden altar shining in the tawny shadow of the aureate stained windows; it was in the depths of this mysterious night, past this tabernacle background, a tragical apparition, a simple yet harrowing drama: Christ nailed to the cross, between the Virgin Mary and Mary Magdalen, weeping at his feet; and the white statues, which an invisible light coming from above caused to stand out from against the bare wall, seemed to advance and increase in size, making the bleeding humanity of this death, and these tears, the divine symbol of eternal woe.

The priest, thoroughly distracted, fell on his knees. He had whitened that plaster, arranged that mode of lighting, prepared that phenomenon; and, now that the boarding was removed, the architect and the workmen gone, he was the first to be thunderstruck at the sight. From the terrible severity of the Calvary came a breath which overpowered him. He fancied the Almighty passing over him; he bent beneath this breath, filled with misgivings, tortured by the thought that he was perhaps a bad priest.

CHAPTER XVIII.

In December, the eighth month of her morning, Madame Josserand for the first time accepted an invitation to dine out. It was merely at the Duveyriers', almost a family gathering, with which Clotilde opened her Saturday receptions of the new winter. The day before, Adèle had been told that she would have to help Julie with the washing-up. The ladies were in the habit of thus lending their servants to each other on the days when they gave parties.

"And above all, try and put a little more go into yourself," said Madame Josserand to her maid-of-all-work. "I don't know what you've got in your body now, you're as limp as rags. Yet you're fat and plump."

Adèle was simply nine months gone in the family way. For a long time she

had thought she was merely growing stouter, which greatly surprised her however; and she would get into a perfect rage, with her ever hungry empty stomach, on the days when madame triumphantly showed her to her guests; ah, well! those who accused her of weighing her servant's bread might come and look at that great glutton, it was not likely she got so fat by merely licking the walls! When, in her stupidity, Adèle at length became aware of her misfortune, she restrained herself twenty times from telling the truth to her mistress, who was really taking advantage of her condition to make the neighborhood think that she was at length feeding her.

But, from this moment, terror stultified her entirely. Her village ideas once more took possession of her obtuse skull. She thought herself damned, she fancied that the gendarmes would come and take her, if she admitted her pregnancy. Then all her low cunning was made use of to hide it. She concealed the feelings of sickness, twice she thought she would drop down dead before her kitchen fire, whilst stirring some sauces. The pain that she had endured for the two last months with the obstinacy of an heroic silence was indeed frightful.

Adèle went up to bed that night about eleven o'clock. The thought of to-morrow evening terrified her; more drudgery, more bullying by Julie! and she could scarcely move about.

During the night she was seized with labor pains, and a desire came over her to move about, so as to walk them off. She therefore lighted the candle and began to wander round the room, her tongue dried up, tormented with a burning thirst, and her cheeks on fire. Hours passed in this cruel wandering, without her daring to put on her shoes, for fear of making a noise, whilst she was only protected against the cold by an old shawl thrown across her shoulders. Two o'clock struck, then three o'clock.

Not a soul stirred in the adjoining rooms, every one was snoring; she could hear Julie's sonorous hum, whilst Lisa made a kind of hissing noise like the shrill notes of a fife. Four o'clock had just struck, when, seized with a violent pain, she felt that the end was approaching, and could not restrain uttering a loud cry.

At this the occupants of the other rooms began to rouse up. Voices thick with sleep were heard saying: "Well! what? who's being murdered?—Some one's being taken by force!—Don't dream out loud like that!" Dreadfully frightened, she drew the bedclothes over the new-born child, which was uttering plaintive cries like a little kitten. But she soon heard Julie snoring again, after turning over; whilst Lisa, once more asleep, no longer uttered a sound. Then she experienced an immense relief, an infinite comfort of calm and repose, and lay as one dead.

She must have dozed thus for the best part of an hour. When six o’clock struck, the consciousness of her position awoke her again. Time was flying, she rose up painfully, and did whatever things came into her head, without deciding on them beforehand. A frosty moon shone full into the room. After dressing herself, she wrapped the infant up in some old rags, and then folded a couple of newspapers around it. It uttered no cry now, yet its little heart was beating.

Not one of the servants was about as yet, and, after getting slumbering Monsieur Gourd to unfasten the door from his room, she was able to go out and lay her bundle in the Passage Choiseul, the gates of which had just been opened, and then quietly returned up-stairs. She met no one. For once in her lifetime, luck was on her side!

She immediately set about tidying her room, after which, utterly worn out, and as white as wax, she again lay down. It was thus that Madame Josserand found her, when she had made up her mind to go up-stairs toward nine o’clock, greatly surprised at not seeing Adèle come down. The servant having complained of a violent attack of diarrhoea which had kept her awake all night, madame exclaimed:

“Of course! you must have eaten too much again! You think of nothing else but stuffing yourself.”

The girl’s paleness, however, made her uneasy, and she talked of sending for the doctor; but she was glad to save the three francs, when Adèle vowed that she merely needed rest. Since her husband’s death, Madame Josserand had been living with her daughter Hor-tense, on an allowance made her by the brothers Bernheim, but which did not prevent her from bitterly alluding to them as persons who lived on the brains of others; and she spent less than ever on food, so as not to descend to a lower level of society by quitting her apartments and giving up her Tuesday receptions.

“That’s right; sleep,” said she. “There is some cold beef left which will do for this morning, and to-night we dine out. If you cannot come down to help Julie, she will have to do without you.”

The dinner that evening at the Duveyriers’ was a very cordial one. All the family was there: the two Vabres and their wives, Madame Josserand, Hortense, Léon, and even uncle Bachelard, who behaved well. Moreover, they had invited Trublot to fill a vacant place, and Madame Dambreville, so as not to separate her from Léon. The latter, after his marriage with the niece, had once again fallen into the arms of the aunt, who was still necessary to him. They were seen to arrive together in all the drawing-rooms, and they would apologize for the young wife, whom a cold or a feeling of idleness, said they, kept at home. That evening the whole table complained of scarce knowing her:

they loved her so much, she was so beautiful! Then they talked of the chorus which Clotilde was to give at the end of the evening; it was the “Blessing of the Daggers” again, but this time with five tenors, something complete and magisterial. For two months past, Duveyrier himself, who had become quite charming, had been looking up the friends of the house, and saying to every one he met: “You are quite a stranger, come and see us; my wife is going to give her choruses again.” Therefore, half through the dinner, they talked of nothing but music. The happiest good-nature and the most free-hearted gayety prevailed throughout.

Then, after the coffee, and whilst the ladies sat round the drawing-room fire, the gentlemen formed a group in the parlor and began to exchange some grave ideas. The other guests were now arriving. And among the earliest were Campardon, Abbé Manduit, and Doctor Juillerat, without including the diners, with the exception of Trublot, who had disappeared on leaving the table. They almost immediately commenced talking politics. The debates in the Chamber deeply interested the gentlemen, and they had not yet given over discussing the success of the opposition candidates for Paris, all of whom had been returned at the May elections. This triumph of the dissatisfied portion of the middle classes made them feel anxious at heart, in spite of their apparent delight.

“Dear me!” declared Léon, “Monsieur Thiers is certainly a most talented man. But he puts so much acrimony into his speeches on the Mexican expedition that he quite spoils their effect.”

He had just been named to a higher appointment, through Madame Dambreville’s influence, and had at once joined the government party. The only thing that remained in him of the famished demagogue, was an unbearable intolerance of all doctrines.

“Not long ago you were accusing the government of every sin,” said the doctor, smiling. “I hope you at least voted for Monsieur Thiers.”

The young man avoided answering. Théophile, whose stomach was no longer able to digest his food, and who was worried with fresh doubts as to his wife’s constancy, exclaimed:

“I voted for him. When men refuse to live as brothers, so much the worse for them!”

“And so much the worse for you, as well, eh?” remarked Duvey-rier, who, speaking but little, uttered some very profound observations.

Théophile, greatly scared, looked at him. Auguste no longer dared admit that he had also voted for Monsieur Thiers. Then every one was very much surprised to hear uncle Bachelard utter a legitimist profession of faith: he

thought it the most genteel. Cam-pardon seconded him warmly; he had abstained from voting himself, because the official candidate, Monsieur Dewinck, did not offer sufficient guarantees as regards religion; and he furiously declaimed against Renan's "Life of Jesus," which had recently made its appearance.

"It is not the book that should be burnt; it is the author," repeated he.

"You are, perhaps, too radical, my friend," interrupted the priest, in a conciliatory tone. "But, indeed, the symptoms are becoming terrible. There is some talk of driving away the pope, the revolution has invaded parliament. We are walking on the edge of a precipice."

"So much the better!" said Doctor Juillerat, simply.

Then the others all protested. He renewed his attacks against the middle classes, prophesying that there would be a clean sweep the day when the masses wished to enjoy power in their turn; and the others loudly interrupted him, exclaiming that the middle classes represented the virtue, the industry, and the thrift of the nation. Duveyrier was at length able to make himself heard. He owned it before all: he had voted for Monsieur Dewinck, not that Monsieur Dewinck exactly represented his opinions, but because he was the symbol of order. Yes, the saturnalia of the Reign of Terror might one day return. Monsieur Rouher, that remarkable statesman who had just succeeded Monsieur Billault, had formally prophesied it in the Chamber. He concluded with these striking words:

"The triumph of the opposition is the preliminary subsidence of the structure. Take care that it does not crush you in falling!"

The other gentlemen held their peace, with the unavowed fear of having allowed themselves to be carried away even to compromising their personal safety. They beheld workmen begrimed with powder and blood, entering their homes, violating their maidservants and drinking their wine. No doubt, the Emperor deserved a lesson; only, they were beginning to regret having given him so severe a one.

"Be easy!" concluded the doctor, scoffingly. "We will manage to save you from the bullets."

But he was going too far, they set him down as an original. It was, moreover, thanks to this reputation for originality, that he did not lose his connection. He continued, by resuming with Abbé Manduit their eternal quarrel respecting the approaching downfall of the Church. Léon now sided with the priest: he talked of Providence, and, on Sundays, accompanied Madame Dambreville to nine o'clock mass.

Meanwhile, the guests continued to arrive, the drawing-room was becoming quite filled with ladies. Valérie and Berthe were exchanging little secrets, like two good friends. The other Madame Cam-pardon, whom the architect had brought no doubt in place of poor Rose, who was already in bed up-stairs and reading Dickens, was giving Madame Josserand an economical recipe for washing clothes without soap; whilst Hortense, seated all by herself and expecting Verdier, did not take her eyes off the door. But suddenly Clotilde, while conversing with Madame Dambreville, rose up and held out her hands. Her friend, Madame Octave Mouret, had just entered the room. The marriage had taken place early in November, at the end of her mourning.

“And your husband?” asked the hostess. “He is not going to disappoint me, I hope?”

“No, no,” answered Caroline, with a smile. “He will be here directly; something detained him at the last moment.”

There was some whispering, glances full of curiosity were directed toward her, so calm and so lovely, ever the same, with the pleasant assurance of a woman who succeeds in everything she undertakes. Madame Josserand pressed her hand, as though she were delighted to see her again. Berthe and Valérie left off talking and examined her at their ease, studying her costume, a straw-color dress covered with lace. But, in the midst of this quiet forgetfulness of the past, Auguste, whom the political discussion had left quite cool, was giving signs of indignant amazement as he stood near the parlor door. What! his sister was going to receive the family of his wife’s former lover! And, in his marital rancor, there was a touch of the jealous anger of the tradesman ruined by a triumphant competition; for “The Ladies’ Paradise,” by extending its business and creating a special department for silk, had so drained his resources that he had been obliged to take a partner. He drew near, and, whilst every one was making much of Madame Mouret, he whispered to Clotilde:

“You know, I will never put up with it.”

“Put up with what?” asked she, greatly surprised.

“I do not mind the wife so much, she has not done me any harm. But if the husband comes, I shall take hold of Berthe by the arm, and leave the room in the presence of everybody.”

She looked at him, and then shrugged her shoulders. Caroline was her oldest friend, she was certainly not going to give up seeing her, just to satisfy his caprices. As though any one even recollected the matter. He would do far better not to rake up things forgotten by everybody but himself. And as, deeply affected, he looked to Berthe for support, expecting that she would get

up and follow him at once, she calmed him with a frown; was he mad? did he wish to make himself more ridiculous than he had ever been before?

“But it is in order that I may not appear ridiculous!” replied he, in despair.

Then Madame Josserand inclined toward him, and, said in a severe tone of voice:

“It is becoming quite indecent; every one is looking at you. Do behave yourself for once in a way.”

He held his tongue, but without submitting. From this moment a certain uneasiness existed among the ladies. The only one who preserved her smiling tranquillity was Madame Mouret, now sitting beside Clotilde and opposite Berthe. They watched Auguste, who had retired to the window recess where his marriage had been decided, not so very long before. His anger was bringing on a headache, and he now and again pressed his forehead against the icy-cold panes.

Octave did not arrive till very late. As he reached the landing, he met Madame Juzeur, who had just come down, wrapped in a shawl. She complained of her chest, and had got up on purpose not to disappoint the Duveyriers. Her languid state did not prevent her falling into the young man’s arms, as she congratulated him on his marriage.

“How delighted I am with such a splendid result, my friend! Really! I was quite in despair about you, I never thought you would have succeeded. Tell me, you rascal, how did you manage to get over her?”

Octave smiled and kissed her fingers. But some one who was bounding up-stairs with the agility of a goat, disturbed them; and, greatly surprised, they fancied they recognized Saturnin. It was indeed Saturnin, who a week before had left the Asile des Moulineaux, where for a second time Doctor Chassagne declined to detain him any longer, still considering him not sufficiently mad. No doubt he was going to spend the evening with Marie Pichon, just as in former days, when his parents had company. And those bygone times were suddenly evoked. Octave could hear an expiring voice coming from above, singing the ballad with which Marie whiled away her vacant hours; he beheld her once more eternally alone, beside the crib in which Lilitte slumbered, and awaiting Jules’ return with all the complacency of a gentle and useless woman.

“I wish you every happiness with your wife,” repeated Madame Juzeur, tenderly squeezing Octave’s hands.

In order not to enter the drawing-room with her, he was purposely occupying some time in removing his overcoat, when Trublot, in his dress clothes, bareheaded, and looking quite upset, came from the passage leading to

the kitchen.

“You know she’s not at all well!” murmured he, whilst Hippo-lyte announced Madame Juzeur.

“Who isn’t?” asked Octave.

“Why Adèle, the servant up-stairs.”

Hearing there was something the matter with her, he had gone up quite paternally, on leaving the dinner-table. It must have been a very severe attack of cholerine; a good glass of mulled wine was what she ought to have, and she had not even a lump of sugar. Then, as he noticed that his friend smiled in an indifferent sort of way, he added:

“Hallo! I forgot you’re married, you joker! This sort of thing no longer interests you. I never thought of that when I found you with madame. Anything you like except that!”

They entered together. The ladies were just then speaking of their servants, and were taking such interest in the conversation, that they did not notice them at first. All were complacently approving Madame Duveyrier, who was trying to explain, in an embarrassed way, why she continued to keep Clémence and Hippo-lyte: he was rough, but she dressed her so well that one could not help shutting one’s eyes to other matters. Neither Valérie nor Berthe could succeed in securing a decent girl; they had given it up in despair, after trying every registry office, the good-for-nothing servants from which had done no more than pass through their kitchens. Madame Josserand violently abused Adèle, of whom she related some fresh abominable and stupid doings of extraordinary character; and yet she did not send her about her business. As for the other Madame Campardon, she was quite enthusiastic in her praises of Lisa: a pearl, not a thing to reproach her with; in short, one of those deserving domestics to whom one gives prizes.

“She is quite one of the family now,” said she. “Our little Angèle is attending some lectures at the Hôtel de Ville, and Lisa accompanies her. Oh! they might remain out together for days; we should not be in the least anxious.”

It was at this moment that the ladies caught sight of Octave. He was advancing to wish Clotilde good-evening. Berthe looked at him; then, without the least affectation, she resumed her conversation with Valérie, who had exchanged with him the affectionate glance of disinterested friendship. The others—Madame Josserand, Madame Dambreville—without throwing themselves at him, surveyed him with sympathetic interest.

“So here you are at last!” said Clotilde, who was most amiable. “I was

beginning to tremble for the chorus."

And, as Madame Mouret gently scolded her husband for being so late, he made some excuses.

"But, my dear, I was unable to come sooner. I am most sorry, madame. However, I am now entirely at your disposal." Meanwhile, the ladies were anxiously watching the window recess into which Auguste had retired. They received a momentary fright when they beheld him turn round at the sound of Octave's voice. His headache was no doubt worse; he had a restless look about the eyes, which seemed full of the darkness of the street. He at length appeared to make up his mind, and, returning to his former position beside his sister's chair, he said.

"Send them away, or else we will leave."

Clotilde again shrugged her shoulders. Then Auguste seemed disposed to give her time to consider: he would wait a few minutes longer, more especially as Trublot had taken Octave into the parlor. The other ladies were still uneasy, for they had heard the husband whisper in his wife's ear:

"If he comes back here, you must get up and follow me. Otherwise, you may return to your mother's."

In the parlor, the gentlemen greeted Octave quite as cordially. If Léon made a point of showing a little coolness, Uncle Bachelard, and even Théophile, seemed to declare, as they held out their hands to Octave, that the family forgot everything. He congratulated Campardon, who, decorated two days previously, now wore a broad red ribbon; and the beaming architect scolded him for never calling now and then to pass an hour with his wife: though one got married, it was scarcely nice to forget friends of fifteen years' standing. But the young man felt quite surprised and anxious as he stood before Duveyrier. He had not seen him since his recovery. He looked uneasily at his jaw, all out of place, dropping too much on the left side, and which now gave a horrid squinting expression to his countenance. Then, when the counselor spoke, he had another surprise: his voice had lowered two tones; it had become quite sepulchral.

"Don't you think him much better thus?" said Trublot to Octave, as they returned to the drawing-room door. "It positively gives him a certain majestic air. I saw him presiding at the assizes, the day before yesterday—Listen! they are talking of it."

And indeed the gentlemen had abandoned politics to take up morality. They were listening to Duveyrier as he gave some details of an affair in which his attitude had been particularly noticed. He was even about to be named a president and an officer of the Legion of Honor. It was respecting an

infanticide already a year old. The unnatural mother, a regular savage, as he said, happened to be the boot-stitcher, his former tenant, that tall, pale and friendless girl, whose pregnant condition had roused Monsieur Gourd's indignation so much. And besides that, she was altogether stupid! for, without reflecting that her appearance would betray her, she had gone and cut her child in two and kept it at the bottom of a bonnet-box. She had naturally told the jury quite a ridiculous romance: a seducer who had deserted her; misery, hunger, and then a fit of mad despair on seeing herself unable to supply the little one's wants: in a word, the same story they all told. But it was necessary to make an example. Duveyrier congratulated himself on having summed up with that lucidity which often decided a jury's verdict.

"And what was your sentence?" asked the doctor.

"Five years," replied the counselor in his new voice, which seemed both hoarse and sepulchral. "It is time to oppose a dyke to the debauchery which threatens to submerge Paris."

Trublot nudged Octave's elbow; they were both acquainted with the facts of the attempt at suicide.

"Eh? you hear him?" murmured he. "Without joking, it improves his voice: it stirs one more, does it not? it goes straight to the heart now. Ah! if you had only seen him, standing up, draped in his long red robes, with his mug all askew! On my word! he quite frightened me; he was extraordinary; oh! you know! a style in his majesty enough to make your flesh creep!"

But he left off speaking, and listened to the ladies in the drawingroom, who were again on the subject of servants. That very morning, Madame Duveyrier had given Julio a week's notice; she had nothing certainly to say against the girl's cooking; only, good behavior came before everything in her eyes. The truth was that, warned by Doctor Juillerat, and anxious for the health of her son, whose little goings-on she tolerated at home, so as to keep them under control, she had had an explanation with Julie, who had been unwell for some time past; and the latter, like a genteel cook, whose style was not to quarrel with her employers, had accepted her week's notice. Madame Josserand at once shared Clotilde's indignation; yes, one should be very strict on the question of morality; for instance, if she kept that slut Adèle in spite of her dirty ways, and her stupidity, it was because the girl was virtuous. Oh! on that point, she had nothing whatever to reproach her with!

"Poor Adèle! when one only thinks!" murmured Trublot, again affected at the thought of the wretched creature, half frozen upstairs beneath her thin blanket.

Then, bending toward Octave's ear, he added with a chuckle:

“I say, Duveyrier might at least take her up a bottle of claret!”

“Yes, gentlemen,” the counselor was continuing, “statistics will bear me out, the crime of infanticide is increasing in the most frightful proportions. Sentiment prevails to too great an extent in the present day, and far too much consideration is shown to science, to your pretended physiology, all of which will end by there soon being neither good nor evil. One cannot cure debauchery; the thing is to destroy it at its root.”

This refutation was addressed above all to Doctor Juillerat, who had wished to give a medical explanation of the boot-stitcher’s case.

The other gentlemen also exhibited great severity and disgust. Campardou could not understand vice, uncle Bachelard defended infancy, Théophile demanded an inquiry, Léon discussed the question of prostitution in its relations with the state; whilst Trublot, in answer to an inquiry of Octave’s, talked of Duveyrier’s new mistress, who was a decent sort of a woman this time, rather mature, but romantic, with a soul expanded by that ideal which the counselor required to purify love; in short, a worthy person who gave him a peaceful home, imposing upon him as much as she liked and sleeping with his friends, without making any unnecessary fuss. And the Abbé Manduit alone remained silent, his eyes fixed on the ground, his mind sorely troubled, and full of an infinite sadness.

They were now about to sing the “Blessing of the Daggers.” The drawing-room had filled up, a flood of rich dresses was crushing in the brilliant light from the chandelier and the lamps, whilst gay bursts of laughter ran along the rows of chairs; and, in the midst of the buzz, Clotilde in a low voice roughly chided Auguste, who, on seeing Octave enter with the other gentlemen of the chorus, had caught hold of Berthe’s arm to make her leave her seat. But he was already beginning to yield, feeling more and more embarrassed in the presence of the ladies’ dumb disapproval, whilst his head had become entirely the prey of triumphant neuralgia. Madame Dambreville’s stern looks quite drove him to despair, and even the other Madame Campardon was against him. It was reserved to Madame Josserand to finish him off. She abruptly interfered, threatening to take back her daughter and never to pay him the fifty thousand francs dowry; for she was always promising this dowry with the greatest coolness imaginable. Then, turning toward uncle Bachelard, seated behind her, and next to Madame Juzeur, she made him renew his promises. The uncle placed his hand on his heart; he knew his duty, the family before everything! Auguste, repulsed on all sides, beat a retreat, and again sought refuge in the window recess, where he once more pressed his burning forehead against the icy-cold panes.

Then Octave experienced a singular sensation as though his Paris life was

beginning over again. It was as though the two years he had lived in the Rue de Choiseul had been a blank. His wife was there, smiling at him, and yet nothing seemed to have passed in his existence; to-day was the same as yesterday, there was neither pause nor ending. Trublot showed him the new partner standing beside Berthe, a little fair fellow very neat in his ways, who gave her, it was said, no end of presents. Uncle Bachelard, who was now going in for poetry, was revealing himself in a sentimental light to Madame Juzeur, whom he quite affected with some intimate details respecting Fifi and Gueulin. Théophile, devoured by doubts, doubled up by violent fits of coughing, was imploring Doctor Juillerat in an out-of-the-way corner to give his wife something to quiet her. Campardon, his eyes fixed on cousin Gasparine, was talking of the diocese of Evreux, and jumping from that to the great works of the new Rue du Dix Décembre, defending God and art, sending the world about its business, for at heart he did not care a hang for it, he was an artist! And behind a flower-stand there could even be seen the back of a gentleman, whom all the marriageable girls contemplated with an air of profound curiosity; it was Verdier, who was talking with Hortense, the pair of them having an acrimonious explanation, again putting off their marriage till the spring, so as not to turn the woman and her child into the street in the depth of winter.

Then the chorus was sung afresh. The architect, with his mouth wide open, gave out the first line. Clotilde struck a chord, and uttered her cry. And the other voices burst forth, the uproar increased little by little, and spread with a violence that scared the candles and caused the ladies to turn pale. Trublot, having been found wanting among the basses, was being tried a second time as a baritone. The five tenors were much noticed, Octave especially, to whom Clotilde regretted being unable to give a solo. When the voices fell, and she had applied the soft pedal, imitating the cadenced and distant footsteps of a departing patrol, the applause was deafening, and she, together with the gentlemen, had every praise showered upon them. And at the farthest eud of the adjoining room, right behind a triple row of men in evening dress, one beheld Duveyrier clenching his teeth so as not to cry aloud with anguish, with his mouth all on one side, and his festering eruptions almost bleeding.

The tea coming next, unrolled the same procession, distributed the same cups and the same sandwiches. For a moment, the Abbé Manduit fouud himself once more in the middle of the deserted drawing-room. He looked through the wide-open door, on the crush of guests; and, vanquished, he smiled, he again cast the mantle of religion over this corrupt middle-class society, like a master in the ceremonies draping the canker, to stave off the final decomposition. He must save the Church, as Heaven had not answered his cry of misery and despair.

At length, the same as on every Saturday, when midnight struck, the guests began to withdraw. Campardon was among the first to leave, with the other Madame Campardon. Léon and Madame Dambreville were not long in maritally following them. Verdier's back had long ago disappeared, when Madame Josserand went off with Hortense, bullying her for what she called her romantic obstinacy. Uncle Bachelard, very drunk from the punch he had taken, detained Madame Juzeur a moment at the door, finding her advice full of experience quite refreshing. Trublot, who had stolen some sugar for Adèle, was making for the passage leading to the kitchen, when the presence of Berthe and Auguste in the anteroom embarrassed him, and he pretended to be looking for his hat.

But, just at this minute, Octave and his wife, escorted by Clotilde, also came out and asked for their wraps. There ensued a few seconds of embarrassment, The ante-room was not large, Berthe and Madame Mouret were pressed against each other, whilst Hippolyte was searching for their things. They both smiled. Then, when the door was opened, the two men, Octave and Auguste, brought face to face, did the polite, each stepping aside. At length, Berthe consented to pass out first, after an exchange of bows. And Valérie, who was leaving in her turn with Théophile, again looked at Octave in the affectionate way of a disinterested friend. He and she alone might have told each other everything.

"Good-bye," repeated Clotilde graciously to the two families, before returning to the drawing-room.

Octave stopped short. He had just caught sight on the next floor of the partner, the neat little fair fellow, taking his departure like the rest, and whose hands Saturnin, who had just left Marie, was pressing in an outburst of savage tenderness, stuttering the while: "Friend—friend—friend—" A singular feeling of jealousy at first darted through him. Then he smiled. It was the past; and he again recalled his amours, all his campaign of Paris, the complacencies of that good little Pichon, the repulse he received from Valérie, of whom he preserved a pleasant recollection, his stupid connection with Berthe, which he regretted as pure waste of time. Now he had transacted his business, Paris was conquered; and he gallantly followed her whom in his heart he still styled Madame Hédouin, every now and then stooping to see that the train of her dress did not catch in the stair-rods.

The house had once more resumed its grand air of middle-class dignity. He fancied he could hear Marie's distant and expiring ballad. Beneath the porch he met Jules coming in: Madame Vuillaume was at death's door, and refused to see her daughter. Then, that was all, the doctor and the priest retired last and still arguing; Trublot had shyly gone up to Adèle to attend to her; and the deserted staircase slumbered in a heavy warmth with its chaste doors inclosing

respectable alcoves. One o’clock was striking, when Monsieur Gourd, whom Madame Gourd was snugly awaiting In bed, turned out the gas. Then the whole house lapsed into silent darkness, as though annihilated by the decency of its sleep. Nothing remained, life resumed its level of indifference and stupidity.

On the following morning, Adèle dragged herself down to her kitchen, so as to allay suspicion. A thaw had set in during the night, and she opened the window, feeling stifled, when Hippolyte’s voice rose furiously from the depths of the narrow courtyard.

“You dirty hussies! Who has been emptying her slops out of the window again? Madame’s dress is quite spoilt!”

He had hung out one of Madame Duveyrier’s dresses given him to brush, and he fouud it all spattered with sour broth. Then, from the top to the bottom, the servants appeared at their windows and violently exculpated themselves. The sluice was open and a rush of the most abominable words flowed from the foul spot. In times of thaw, the walls were steeped with humidity, and quite a pestilence ascended from the obscure little courtyard, all the hidden corruptions of the different floors seeming to melt and ooze out by this common sewer of the house.

“It wasn’t me,” said Adèle, leaning out. “I’ve only just come.” Lisa abruptly raised her head.

“Hallo! so you’re on your legs again. Well, what was the matter? Is it true that you almost croaked?”

“Oh! yes, I had such colics, and not at all funny, I can tell you!” This put a stop to the quarrel. Valérie and Berthe’s new servants, a big camel and a little jade, as they were termed, looked curiously at Adèle’s pale face. Victoire and Julie also wished to see her, and stretched their necks, and leant their heads back. They all had an idea that there was something wrong, for it was unnatural to have such gripes and yell out as she did.

“Perhaps you’ve had something which didn’t agree with you,” said Lisa.

The others burst out laughing, another rush of foul language overflowed, whilst the wretched creature, awfully frightened, stammered:

“Hold your tongues, with your nasty words! I’m quite ill enough as it is. You don’t want to finish me off, do you?”

No, of course not. She was as stupid as stupid could be, and dirty enough to disgust a whole neighborhood; but they all held too closely together to bring her into any trouble. And they naturally turned to abusing their masters and mistresses; they criticised the party of the previous evening with looks of

profound repugnance.

“So they’ve all made it up again now?” asked Victoire as she sipped her glass of syrup and brandy.

Hippolyte, who was wiping madame’s dress, replied:

“They’ve no more heart than my shoes. When they’ve spat in one another’s faces, they wash themselves with it, to make one believe they’re clean.”

“They must manage to agree somehow or other,” said Lisa.

“Otherwise it wouldn’t take long before our turn came.”

But there was a moment of panic. A door opened, and the servants were already diving back into their kitchens, when Lisa announced that it ‘was only little Angèle: there was nothing to fear with her, she understood. And, from the foul spout, there again arose all the rancor of the domestics, in the midst of the poisonous stench caused by the thaw. There was a grand spreading out of all the dirty linen of the last two years. It was quite consoling not to be ladies and gentlemen, when one beheld the masters and mistresses living in the midst of it all, and apparently enjoying it, as they were preparing to go through it all again.

“Eh! I say, you, up there!” suddenly shouted Victoire, “was it with Mug-askew that you had what didn’t agree with you?”

At this, a ferocious yell of delight quite shook the stinking cesspool. Hippolyte actually tore madame’s dress; but he did not care, it was far too good for her as it was! The big camel and the little jade were bent over the hand-rails of their windows, wriggling in a mad burst of laughter. Adèle, however, who was quite scared, and who was half asleep through weakness, started, and she retorted in the midst of the jeers:

“You’re all of you heartless things. When you’re dying, I’ll come and dance at your bedsides.”

“Ah! mademoiselle,” resumed Lisa, leaning out to speak to Julie, “how happy you must feel at leaving such a wretched house in a week! On my word, one becomes wicked here in spite of oneself. I wish you a better home in your next place.”

Julie, her arms bare, and dripping with the blood from a turbot she had been just cleaning for that evening’s dinner, returned to the window beside the footman. She shrugged her shoulders, and concluded with this philosophical reply:

“Dear me! mademoiselle, here or there, they’re all alike. In the present day,

whoever has been in the one has been in the other. It’s all Filth and Company.”

THE END.