

A Second Home Honoré de Balzac

Translated by Clara Bell

To Madame la Comtesse Louise de Turheim as a token of remembrance and
affectionate respect.

The Rue du Tourniquet–Saint-Jean, formerly one of the darkest and most tortuous of the streets about the Hotel de Ville, zigzagged round the little gardens of the Paris Prefecture, and ended at the Rue Martroi, exactly at the angle of an old wall now pulled down. Here stood the turnstile to which the street owed its name; it was not removed till 1823, when the Municipality built a ballroom on the garden plot adjoining the Hotel de Ville, for the fete given in honor of the Duc d'Angouleme on his return from Spain.

The widest part of the Rue du Tourniquet was the end opening into the Rue de la Tixeranderie, and even there it was less than six feet across. Hence in rainy weather the gutter water was soon deep at the foot of the old houses, sweeping down with it the dust and refuse deposited at the corner-stones by the residents. As the dust-carts could not pass through, the inhabitants trusted to storms to wash their always miry alley; for how could it be clean? When the summer sun shed its perpendicular rays on Paris like a sheet of gold, but as piercing as the point of a sword, it lighted up the blackness of this street for a few minutes without drying the permanent damp that rose from the ground-floor to the first story of these dark and silent tenements.

The residents, who lighted their lamps at five o'clock in the month of June, in winter never put them out. To this day the enterprising wayfarer who should approach the Marais along the quays, past the end of the Rue du Chaume, the Rues de l'Homme Arme, des Billettes, and des Deux–Portes, all leading to the Rue du Tourniquet, might think he had passed through cellars all the way.

Almost all the streets of old Paris, of which ancient chronicles laud the magnificence, were like this damp and gloomy labyrinth, where the antiquaries still find historical curiosities to admire. For instance, on the house then forming the corner where the Rue du Tourniquet joined the Rue de la Tixeranderie, the clamps might still be seen of two strong iron rings fixed to the wall, the relics of the chains put up every night by the watch to secure public safety.

This house, remarkable for its antiquity, had been constructed in a way that bore witness to the unhealthiness of these old dwellings; for, to preserve the ground-floor from damp, the arches of the cellars rose about two feet above the soil, and the house was entered up three outside steps. The door was crowned by a closed arch, of which the keystone bore a female head and some time-eaten arabesques. Three windows, their sills about five feet from the ground, belonged to a small set of rooms looking out on the Rue du Tourniquet, whence they derived their light. These windows were protected by strong iron bars, very wide apart, and ending below in an outward curve like the bars of a baker's window.

If any passer-by during the day were curious enough to peep into the two rooms forming this little dwelling, he could see nothing; for only under the sun of July could he discern, in the second room, two beds hung with green serge, placed side by side under the paneling of an old-fashioned alcove; but in the afternoon, by about three o'clock, when the candles were lighted, through the pane of the first room an old woman might be seen sitting on a stool by the fireplace, where she nursed the fire in a brazier, to simmer a stew, such as porters' wives are expert in. A few kitchen utensils, hung up against the wall, were visible in the twilight.

At that hour an old table on trestles, but bare of linen, was laid with pewter-spoons, and the dish concocted by the old woman. Three wretched chairs were all the furniture of this room, which was at once the kitchen and the dining-room. Over the chimney-piece were a piece of looking-glass, a tinder-box, three glasses, some matches, and a large, cracked white jug. Still, the floor, the utensils, the fireplace, all gave a pleasant sense of the perfect cleanliness and thrift that pervaded the dull and gloomy home.

The old woman's pale, withered face was quite in harmony with the darkness of the street and the mustiness of the place. As she sat there, motionless, in her chair, it might have been thought that she was as inseparable from the house as a snail from its brown shell; her face, alert with a vague expression of mischief, was framed in a flat cap made of net, which barely covered her white hair; her fine, gray eyes were as quiet as the street, and the many wrinkles in her face might be compared to the cracks in the walls. Whether she had been born to poverty, or had fallen from some past splendor, she now seemed to have been long resigned to her melancholy existence.

From sunrise till dark, excepting when she was getting a meal ready, or, with

a basket on her arm, was out purchasing provisions, the old woman sat in the adjoining room by the further window, opposite a young girl. At any hour of the day the passer-by could see the needlewoman seated in an old, red velvet chair, bending over an embroidery frame, and stitching indefatigably.

Her mother had a green pillow on her knee, and busied herself with hand-made net; but her fingers could move the bobbin but slowly; her sight was feeble, for on her nose there rested a pair of those antiquated spectacles which keep their place on the nostrils by the grip of a spring. By night these two hardworking women set a lamp between them; and the light, concentrated by two globe-shaped bottles of water, showed the elder the fine network made by the threads on her pillow, and the younger the most delicate details of the pattern she was embroidering. The outward bend of the window had allowed the girl to rest a box of earth on the window-sill, in which grew some sweet peas, nasturtiums, a sickly little honeysuckle, and some convolvulus that twined its frail stems up the iron bars. These etiolated plants produced a few pale flowers, and added a touch of indescribable sadness and sweetness to the picture offered by this window, in which the two figures were appropriately framed.

The most selfish soul who chanced to see this domestic scene would carry away with him a perfect image of the life led in Paris by the working class of women, for the embroideress evidently lived by her needle. Many, as they passed through the turnstile, found themselves wondering how a girl could preserve her color, living in such a cellar. A student of lively imagination, going that way to cross to the Quartier-Latin, would compare this obscure and vegetative life to that of the ivy that clung to these chill walls, to that of the peasants born to labor, who are born, toil, and die unknown to the world they have helped to feed. A house-owner, after studying the house with the eye of a valuer, would have said, "What will become of those two women if embroidery should go out of fashion?" Among the men who, having some appointment at the Hotel de Ville or the Palais de Justice, were obliged to go through this street at fixed hours, either on their way to business or on their return home, there may have been some charitable soul. Some widower or Adonis of forty, brought so often into the secrets of these sad lives, may perhaps have reckoned on the poverty of this mother and daughter, and have hoped to become the master at no great cost of the innocent work-woman, whose nimble and dimpled fingers, youthful figure, and white skin — a charm due, no doubt, to living in this sunless street — had excited his admiration. Perhaps,

again, some honest clerk, with twelve hundred francs a year, seeing every day the diligence the girl gave to her needle, and appreciating the purity of her life, was only waiting for improved prospects to unite one humble life with another, one form of toil to another, and to bring at any rate a man's arm and a calm affection, pale-hued like the flowers in the window, to uphold this home.

Vague hope certainly gave life to the mother's dim, gray eyes. Every morning, after the most frugal breakfast, she took up her pillow, though chiefly for the look of the thing, for she would lay her spectacles on a little mahogany worktable as old as herself, and look out of the window from about half-past eight till ten at the regular passers in the street; she caught their glances, remarked on their gait, their dress, their countenance, and almost seemed to be offering her daughter, her gossiping eyes so evidently tried to attract some magnetic sympathy by manoeuvres worthy of the stage. It was evident that this little review was as good as a play to her, and perhaps her single amusement.

The daughter rarely looked up. Modesty, or a painful consciousness of poverty, seemed to keep her eyes riveted to the work-frame; and only some exclamation of surprise from her mother moved her to show her small features. Then a clerk in a new coat, or who unexpectedly appeared with a woman on his arm, might catch sight of the girl's slightly upturned nose, her rosy mouth, and gray eyes, always bright and lively in spite of her fatiguing toil. Her late hours had left a trace on her face by a pale circle marked under each eye on the fresh rosiness of her cheeks. The poor child looked as if she were made for love and cheerfulness — for love, which had drawn two perfect arches above her eyelids, and had given her such a mass of chestnut hair, that she might have hidden under it as under a tent, impenetrable to the lover's eye — for cheerfulness, which gave quivering animation to her nostrils, which carved two dimples in her rosy cheeks, and made her quick to forget her troubles; cheerfulness, the blossom of hope, which gave her strength to look out without shuddering on the barren path of life.

The girl's hair was always carefully dressed. After the manner of Paris needlewomen, her toilet seemed to her quite complete when she had brushed her hair smooth and tucked up the little short curls that played on each temple in contrast with the whiteness of her skin. The growth of it on the back of her neck was so pretty, and the brown line, so clearly traced, gave such a pleasing idea of her youth and charm, that the observer, seeing her bent over her work, and

unmoved by any sound, was inclined to think of her as a coquette. Such inviting promise had excited the interest of more than one young man, who turned round in the vain hope of seeing that modest countenance.

“Caroline, there is a new face that passes regularly by, and not one of the old ones to compare with it.”

These words, spoken in a low voice by her mother one August morning in 1815, had vanquished the young needlewoman’s indifference, and she looked out on the street; but in vain, the stranger was gone.

“Where has he flown to?” said she.

“He will come back no doubt at four; I shall see him coming, and will touch your foot with mine. I am sure he will come back; he has been through the street regularly for the last three days; but his hours vary. The first day he came by at six o’clock, the day before yesterday it was four, yesterday as early as three. I remember seeing him occasionally some time ago. He is some clerk in the Prefet’s office who has moved to the Marais. — Why!” she exclaimed, after glancing down the street, “our gentleman of the brown coat has taken to wearing a wig; how much it alters him!”

The gentleman of the brown coat was, it would seem, the individual who commonly closed the daily procession, for the old woman put on her spectacles and took up her work with a sigh, glancing at her daughter with so strange a look that Lavater himself would have found it difficult to interpret. Admiration, gratitude, a sort of hope for better days, were mingled with pride at having such a pretty daughter.

At about four in the afternoon the old lady pushed her foot against Caroline’s, and the girl looked up quickly enough to see the new actor, whose regular advent would thenceforth lend variety to the scene. He was tall and thin, and wore black, a man of about forty, with a certain solemnity of demeanor; as his piercing hazel eye met the old woman’s dull gaze, he made her quake, for she felt as though he had the gift of reading hearts, or much practice in it, and his presence must surely be as icy as the air of this dank street. Was the dull, sallow complexion of that ominous face due to excess of work, or the result of delicate health?

The old woman supplied twenty different answers to this question; but Caroline, next day, discerned the lines of long mental suffering on that brow that

was so prompt to frown. The rather hollow cheeks of the Unknown bore the stamp of the seal which sorrow sets on its victims as if to grant them the consolation of common recognition and brotherly union for resistance. Though the girl's expression was at first one of lively but innocent curiosity, it assumed a look of gentle sympathy as the stranger receded from view, like a last relation following in a funeral train.

The heat of the weather was so great, and the gentleman was so absent-minded, that he had taken off his hat and forgotten to put it on again as he went down the squalid street. Caroline could see the stern look given to his countenance by the way the hair was brushed from his forehead. The strong impression, devoid of charm, made on the girl by this man's appearance was totally unlike any sensation produced by the other passengers who used the street; for the first time in her life she was moved to pity for some one else than herself and her mother; she made no reply to the absurd conjectures that supplied material for the old woman's provoking volubility, and drew her long needle in silence through the web of stretched net; she only regretted not having seen the stranger more closely, and looked forward to the morrow to form a definite opinion of him.

It was the first time, indeed, that a man passing down the street had ever given rise to much thought in her mind. She generally had nothing but a smile in response to her mother's hypotheses, for the old woman looked on every passer-by as a possible protector for her daughter. And if such suggestions, so crudely presented, gave rise to no evil thoughts in Caroline's mind, her indifference must be ascribed to the persistent and unfortunately inevitable toil in which the energies of her sweet youth were being spent, and which would infallibly mar the clearness of her eyes or steal from her fresh cheeks the bloom that still colored them.

For two months or more the "Black Gentleman"— the name they had given him — was erratic in his movements; he did not always come down the Rue du Tourniquet; the old woman sometimes saw him in the evening when he had not passed in the morning, and he did not come by at such regular hours as the clerks who served Madame Crochard instead of a clock; moreover, excepting on the first occasion, when his look had given the old mother a sense of alarm, his eyes had never once dwelt on the weird picture of these two female gnomes. With the exception of two carriage-gates and a dark ironmonger's shop, there were in the

Rue du Tourniquet only barred windows, giving light to the staircases of the neighboring houses; thus the stranger's lack of curiosity was not to be accounted for by the presence of dangerous rivals; and Madame Crochard was greatly piqued to see her "Black Gentleman" always lost in thought, his eyes fixed on the ground, or straight before him, as though he hoped to read the future in the fog of the Rue du Tourniquet. However, one morning, about the middle of September, Caroline Crochard's roguish face stood out so brightly against the dark background of the room, looking so fresh among the belated flowers and faded leaves that twined round the window-bars, the daily scene was gay with such contrasts of light and shade, of pink and white blending with the light material on which the pretty needlewoman was working, and with the red and brown hues of the chairs, that the stranger gazed very attentively at the effects of this living picture. In point of fact, the old woman, provoked by her "Black Gentleman's" indifference, had made such a clatter with her bobbins that the gloomy and pensive passer-by was perhaps prompted to look up by the unusual noise.

The stranger merely exchanged glances with Caroline, swift indeed, but enough to effect a certain contact between their souls, and both were aware that they would think of each other. When the stranger came by again, at four in the afternoon, Caroline recognized the sound of his step on the echoing pavement; they looked steadily at each other, and with evident purpose; his eyes had an expression of kindness which made him smile, and Caroline colored; the old mother noted them with satisfaction. Ever after that memorable afternoon, the Gentleman in Black went by twice a day, with rare exceptions, which both the women observed. They concluded from the irregularity of the hours of his homecoming that he was not released so early, nor so precisely punctual as a subordinate official.

All through the first three winter months, twice a day, Caroline and the stranger thus saw each other for so long as it took him to traverse the piece of road that lay along the length of the door and three windows of the house. Day after day this brief interview had the hue of friendly sympathy which at last had acquired a sort of fraternal kindness. Caroline and the stranger seemed to understand each other from the first; and then, by dint of scrutinizing each other's faces, they learned to know them well. Ere long it came to be, as it were, a visit that the Unknown owed to Caroline; if by any chance her Gentleman in Black went by without bestowing on her the half-smile of his expressive lips, or the cordial glance

of his brown eyes, something was missing to her all day. She felt as an old man does to whom the daily study of a newspaper is such an indispensable pleasure that on the day after any great holiday he wanders about quite lost, and seeking, as much out of vagueness as for want of patience, the sheet by which he cheats an hour of life.

But these brief meetings had the charm of intimate friendliness, quite as much for the stranger as for Caroline. The girl could no more hide a vexation, a grief, or some slight ailment from the keen eye of her appreciative friend than he could conceal anxiety from hers.

“He must have had some trouble yesterday,” was the thought that constantly arose in the embroideress’ mind as she saw some change in the features of the “Black Gentleman.”

“Oh, he has been working too hard!” was a reflection due to another shade of expression which Caroline could discern.

The stranger, on his part, could guess when the girl had spent Sunday in finishing a dress, and he felt an interest in the pattern. As quarter-day came near he could see that her pretty face was clouded by anxiety, and he could guess when Caroline had sat up late at work; but above all, he noted how the gloomy thoughts that dimmed the cheerful and delicate features of her young face gradually vanished by degrees as their acquaintance ripened. When winter had killed the climbers and plants of her window garden, and the window was kept closed, it was not without a smile of gentle amusement that the stranger observed the concentration of the light within, just at the level of Caroline’s head. The very small fire and the frosty red of the two women’s faces betrayed the poverty of their home; but if ever his own countenance expressed regretful compassion, the girl proudly met it with assumed cheerfulness.

Meanwhile the feelings that had arisen in their hearts remained buried there, no incident occurring to reveal to either of them how deep and strong they were in the other; they had never even heard the sound of each other’s voice. These mute friends were even on their guard against any nearer acquaintance, as though it meant disaster. Each seemed to fear lest it should bring on the other some grief more serious than those they felt tempted to share. Was it shyness or friendship that checked them? Was it a dread of meeting with selfishness, or the odious distrust which sunders all the residents within the walls of a populous city? Did

the voice of conscience warn them of approaching danger? It would be impossible to explain the instinct which made them as much enemies as friends, at once indifferent and attached, drawn to each other by impulse, and severed by circumstance. Each perhaps hoped to preserve a cherished illusion. It might almost have been thought that the stranger feared lest he should hear some vulgar word from those lips as fresh and pure as a flower, and that Caroline felt herself unworthy of the mysterious personage who was evidently possessed of power and wealth.

As to Madame Crochard, that tender mother, almost angry at her daughter's persistent lack of decisiveness, now showed a sulky face to the "Black Gentleman," on whom she had hitherto smiled with a sort of benevolent servility. Never before had she complained so bitterly of being compelled, at her age, to do the cooking; never had her catarrh and her rheumatism wrung so many groans from her; finally, she could not, this winter, promise so many ells of net as Caroline had hitherto been able to count on.

Under these circumstances, and towards the end of December, at the time when bread was dearest, and that dearth of corn was beginning to be felt which made the year 1816 so hard on the poor, the stranger observed on the features of the girl whose name was still unknown to him, the painful traces of a secret sorrow which his kindest smiles could not dispel. Before long he saw in Caroline's eyes the dimness attributed to long hours at night. One night, towards the end of the month, the Gentleman in Black passed down the Rue du Tourniquet at the quite unwonted hour of one in the morning. The perfect silence allowed of his hearing before passing the house the lachrymose voice of the old mother, and Caroline's even sadder tones, mingling with the swish of a shower of sleet. He crept along as slowly as he could; and then, at the risk of being taken up by the police, he stood still below the window to hear the mother and daughter, while watching them through the largest of the holes in the yellow muslin curtains, which were eaten away by wear as a cabbage leaf is riddled by caterpillars. The inquisitive stranger saw a sheet of paper on the table that stood between the two work-frames, and on which stood the lamp and the globes filled with water. He at once identified it as a writ. Madame Crochard was weeping, and Caroline's voice was thick, and had lost its sweet, caressing tone.

"Why be so heartbroken, mother? Monsieur Molineux will not sell us up or

turn us out before I have finished this dress; only two nights more and I shall take it home to Madame Roguin.”

“And supposing she keeps you waiting as usual? — And will the money for the gown pay the baker too?”

The spectator of this scene had long practice in reading faces; he fancied he could discern that the mother’s grief was as false as the daughter’s was genuine; he turned away, and presently came back. When he next peeped through the hole in the curtain, Madame Crochard was in bed. The young needlewoman, bending over her frame, was embroidering with indefatigable diligence; on the table, with the writ lay a triangular hunch of bread, placed there, no doubt, to sustain her in the night and to remind her of the reward of her industry. The stranger was tremulous with pity and sympathy; he threw his purse in through a cracked pane so that it should fall at the girl’s feet; and then, without waiting to enjoy her surprise, he escaped, his cheeks tingling.

Next morning the shy and melancholy stranger went past with a look of deep preoccupation, but he could not escape Caroline’s gratitude; she had opened her window and affected to be digging in the square window-box buried in snow, a pretext of which the clumsy ingenuity plainly told her benefactor that she had been resolved not to see him only through the pane. Her eyes were full of tears as she bowed her head, as much as to say to her benefactor, “I can only repay you from my heart.”

But the Gentleman in Black affected not to understand the meaning of this sincere gratitude. In the evening, as he came by, Caroline was busy mending the window with a sheet of paper, and she smiled at him, showing her row of pearly teeth like a promise. Thenceforth the Stranger went another way, and was no more seen in the Rue due Tourniquet.

It was one day early in the following May that, as Caroline was giving the roots of the honeysuckle a glass of water, one Saturday morning, she caught sight of a narrow strip of cloudless blue between the black lines of houses, and said to her mother:

“Mamma, we must go tomorrow for a trip to Montmorency!”

She had scarcely uttered the words, in a tone of glee, when the Gentleman in Black came by, sadder and more dejected than ever. Caroline’s innocent and

ingratiating glance might have been taken for an invitation. And, in fact, on the following day, when Madame Crochard, dressed in a pelisse of claret-colored merinos, a silk bonnet, and striped shawl of an imitation Indian pattern, came out to choose seats in a chaise at the corner of the Rue du Faubourg Saint-Denis and the Rue d'Enghien, there she found her Unknown standing like a man waiting for his wife. A smile of pleasure lighted up the Stranger's face when his eye fell on Caroline, her neat feet shod in plum-colored prunella gaiters, and her white dress tossed by a breeze that would have been fatal to an ill-made woman, but which displayed her graceful form. Her face, shaded by a rice-straw bonnet lined with pink silk, seemed to beam with a reflection from heaven; her broad, plum-colored belt set off a waist he could have spanned; her hair, parted in two brown bands over a forehead as white as snow, gave her an expression of innocence which no other feature contradicted. Enjoyment seemed to have made Caroline as light as the straw of her hat; but when she saw the Gentleman in Black, radiant hope suddenly eclipsed her bright dress and her beauty. The Stranger, who appeared to be in doubt, had not perhaps made up his mind to be the girl's escort for the day till this revelation of the delight she felt on seeing him. He at once hired a vehicle with a fairly good horse, to drive to Saint-Leu-Taverny, and he offered Madame Crochard and her daughter seats by his side. The mother accepted without ado; but presently, when they were already on the way to Saint-Denis, she was by way of having scruples, and made a few civil speeches as to the possible inconvenience two women might cause their companion.

"Perhaps, monsieur, you wished to drive alone to Saint-Leu-Taverny," said she, with affected simplicity.

Before long she complained of the heat, and especially of her cough, which, she said, had hindered her from closing her eyes all night; and by the time the carriage had reached Saint-Denis, Madame Crochard seemed to be fast asleep. Her snores, indeed, seemed, to the Gentleman in Black, rather doubtfully genuine, and he frowned as he looked at the old woman with a very suspicious eye.

"Oh, she is fast asleep," said Caroline quilelessly; "she never ceased coughing all night. She must be very tired."

Her companion made no reply, but he looked at the girl with a smile that seemed to say:

"Poor child, you little know your mother!"

However, in spite of his distrust, as the chaise made its way down the long avenue of poplars leading to Eaubonne, the Stranger thought that Madame Crochard was really asleep; perhaps he did not care to inquire how far her slumbers were genuine or feigned. Whether it were that the brilliant sky, the pure country air, and the heady fragrance of the first green shoots of the poplars, the catkins of willow, and the flowers of the blackthorn had inclined his heart to open like all the nature around him; or that any long restraint was too oppressive while Caroline's sparkling eyes responded to his own, the Gentleman in Black entered on a conversation with his young companion, as aimless as the swaying of the branches in the wind, as devious as the flitting of the butterflies in the azure air, as illogical as the melodious murmur of the fields, and, like it, full of mysterious love. At that season is not the rural country as tremulous as a bride that has donned her marriage robe; does it not invite the coldest soul to be happy? What heart could remain unthawed, and what lips could keep its secret, on leaving the gloomy streets of the Marais for the first time since the previous autumn, and entering the smiling and picturesque valley of Montmorency; on seeing it in the morning light, its endless horizons receding from view; and then lifting a charmed gaze to eyes which expressed no less infinitude mingled with love?

The Stranger discovered that Caroline was sprightly rather than witty, affectionate, but ill educated; but while her laugh was giddy, her words promised genuine feeling. When, in response to her companion's shrewd questioning, the girl spoke with the heartfelt effusiveness of which the lower classes are lavish, not guarding it with reticence like people of the world, the Black Gentleman's face brightened, and seemed to renew its youth. His countenance by degrees lost the sadness that lent sternness to his features, and little by little they gained a look of handsome youthfulness which made Caroline proud and happy. The pretty needlewoman guessed that her new friend had been long weaned from tenderness and love, and no longer believed in the devotion of woman. Finally, some unexpected sally in Caroline's light prattle lifted the last veil that concealed the real youth and genuine character of the Stranger's physiognomy; he seemed to bid farewell to the ideas that haunted him, and showed the natural liveliness that lay beneath the solemnity of his expression.

Their conversation had insensibly become so intimate, that by the time when the carriage stopped at the first houses of the straggling village of Saint-Leu, Caroline was calling the gentleman Monsieur Roger. Then for the first time the old

mother awoke.

“Caroline, she has heard everything!” said Roger suspiciously in the girl’s ear.

Caroline’s reply was an exquisite smile of disbelief, which dissipated the dark cloud that his fear of some plot on the old woman’s part had brought to this suspicious mortal’s brow. Madame Crochard was amazed at nothing, approved of everything, followed her daughter and Monsieur Roger into the park, where the two young people had agreed to wander through the smiling meadows and fragrant copses made famous by the taste of Queen Hortense.

“Good heavens! how lovely!” exclaimed Caroline when standing on the green ridge where the forest of Montmorency begins, she saw lying at her feet the wide valley with its combes sheltering scattered villages, its horizon of blue hills, its church towers, its meadows and fields, whence a murmur came up, to die on her ear like the swell of the ocean. The three wanderers made their way by the bank of an artificial stream and came to the Swiss valley, where stands a chalet that had more than once given shelter to Hortense and Napoleon. When Caroline had seated herself with pious reverence on the mossy wooden bench where kings and princesses and the Emperor had rested, Madame Crochard expressed a wish to have a nearer view of a bridge that hung across between two rocks at some little distance, and bent her steps towards that rural curiosity, leaving her daughter in Monsieur Roger’s care, though telling them that she would not go out of sight.

“What, poor child!” cried Roger, “have you never longed for wealth and the pleasures of luxury? Have you never wished that you might wear the beautiful dresses you embroider?”

“It would not be the truth, Monsieur Roger, if I were to tell you that I never think how happy people must be who are rich. Oh yes! I often fancy, especially when I am going to sleep, how glad I should be to see my poor mother no longer compelled to go out, whatever the weather, to buy our little provisions, at her age. I should like her to have a servant who, every morning before she was up, would bring her up her coffee, nicely sweetened with white sugar. And she loves reading novels, poor dear soul! Well, and I would rather see her wearing out her eyes over her favorite books than over twisting her bobbins from morning till night. And again, she ought to have a little good wine. In short, I should like to see her comfortable — she is so good.”

“Then she has shown you great kindness?”

“Oh yes,” said the girl, in a tone of conviction. Then, after a short pause, during which the two young people stood watching Madame Crochard, who had got to the middle of the rustic bridge, and was shaking her finger at them, Caroline went on:

“Oh yes, she has been so good to me. What care she took of me when I was little! She sold her last silver forks to apprentice me to the old maid who taught me to embroider. — And my poor father! What did she not go through to make him end his days in happiness!” The girl shivered at the remembrance, and hid her face in her hands. — “Well! come! let us forget past sorrows!” she added, trying to rally her high spirits. She blushed as she saw that Roger too was moved, but she dared not look at him.

“What was your father?” he asked.

“He was an opera-dancer before the Revolution,” said she, with an air of perfect simplicity, “and my mother sang in the chorus. My father, who was leader of the figures on the stage, happened to be present at the siege of the Bastille. He was recognized by some of the assailants, who asked him whether he could not lead a real attack, since he was used to leading such enterprises on the boards. My father was brave; he accepted the post, led the insurgents, and was rewarded by the nomination to the rank of captain in the army of Sambre-et-Meuse, where he distinguished himself so far as to rise rapidly to be a colonel. But at Lutzen he was so badly wounded that, after a year’s sufferings, he died in Paris. — The Bourbons returned; my mother could obtain no pension, and we fell into such abject misery that we were compelled to work for our living. For some time past she has been ailing, poor dear, and I have never known her so little resigned; she complains a good deal, and, indeed, I cannot wonder, for she has known the pleasures of an easy life. For my part, I cannot pine for delights I have never known, I have but one thing to wish for.”

“And that is?” said Roger eagerly, as if roused from a dream.

“That women may continue to wear embroidered net dresses, so that I may never lack work.”

The frankness of this confession interested the young man, who looked with less hostile eyes on Madame Crochard as she slowly made her way back to them.

“Well, children, have you had a long talk?” said she, with a half-laughing, half-indulgent air. “When I think, Monsieur Roger, that the ‘little Corporal’ has sat where you are sitting,” she went on after a pause. “Poor man! how my husband worshiped him! Ah! Crochard did well to die, for he could not have borne to think of him where *they* have sent him!”

Roger put his finger to his lips, and the good woman went on very gravely, with a shake of her head:

“All right, mouth shut and tongue still! But,” added she, unhooking a bit of her bodice, and showing a ribbon and cross tied round her neck by a piece of black ribbon, “they shall never hinder me from wearing what *he* gave to my poor Crochard, and I will have it buried with me.”

On hearing this speech, which at that time was regarded as seditious, Roger interrupted the old lady by rising suddenly, and they returned to the village through the park walks. The young man left them for a few minutes while he went to order a meal at the best eating-house in Taverny; then, returning to fetch them, he led the way through the alleys cut in the forest.

The dinner was cheerful. Roger was no longer the melancholy shade that was wont to pass along the Rue du Tourniquet; he was not the “Black Gentleman,” but rather a confiding young man ready to take life as it came, like the two hard-working women who, on the morrow, might lack bread; he seemed alive to all the joys of youth, his smile was quite affectionate and childlike.

When, at five o’clock, this happy meal was ended with a few glasses of champagne, Roger was the first to propose that they should join the village ball under the chestnuts, where he and Caroline danced together. Their hands met with sympathetic pressure, their hearts beat with the same hopes; and under the blue sky and the slanting, rosy beams of sunset, their eyes sparkled with fires which, to them, made the glory of the heavens pale. How strange is the power of an idea, of a desire! To these two nothing seemed impossible. In such magic moments, when enjoyment sheds its reflections on the future, the soul foresees nothing but happiness. This sweet day had created memories for these two to which nothing could be compared in all their past existence. Would the source prove to be more beautiful than the river, the desire more enchanting than its gratification, the thing hoped for more delightful than the thing possessed?

“So the day is already at an end!” On hearing this exclamation from her unknown friend when the dance was over, Caroline looked at him compassionately, as his face assumed once more a faint shade of sadness.

“Why should you not be as happy in Paris as you are here?” she asked. “Is happiness to be found only at Saint-Leu? It seems to me that I can henceforth never be unhappy anywhere.”

Roger was struck by these words, spoken with the glad unrestraint that always carries a woman further than she intended, just as prudery often lends her greater cruelty than she feels. For the first time since that glance, which had, in a way, been the beginning of their friendship, Caroline and Roger had the same idea; though they did not express it, they felt it at the same instant, as a result of a common impression like that of a comforting fire cheering both under the frost of winter; then, as if frightened by each other’s silence, they made their way to the spot where the carriage was waiting. But before getting into it, they playfully took hands and ran together down the dark avenue in front of Madame Crochard. When they could no longer see the white net cap, which showed as a speck through the leaves where the old woman was —“Caroline!” said Roger in a tremulous voice, and with a beating heart.

The girl was startled, and drew back a few steps, understanding the invitation this question conveyed; however, she held out her hand, which was passionately kissed, but which she hastily withdrew, for by standing on tiptoe she could see her mother.

Madame Crochard affected blindness, as if, with a reminiscence of her old parts, she was only required to figure as a supernumerary.

The adventures of these two young people were not continued in the Rue du Tourniquet. To see Roger and Caroline once more, we must leap into the heart of modern Paris, where, in some of the newly-built houses, there are apartments that seem made on purpose for newly-married couples to spend their honeymoon in. There the paper and paint are as fresh as the bride and bridegroom, and the decorations are in blossom like their love; everything is in harmony with youthful notions and ardent wishes.

Half-way down the Rue Taitbout, in a house whose stone walls were still white, where the columns of the hall and the doorway were as yet spotless, and the

inner walls shone with the neat painting which our recent intimacy with English ways had brought into fashion, there was, on the second floor, a small set of rooms fitted by the architect as though he had known what their use would be. A simple airy ante-room, with a stucco dado, formed an entrance into a drawing-room and dining-room. Out of the drawing-room opened a pretty bedroom, with a bathroom beyond. Every chimney-shelf had over it a fine mirror elegantly framed. The doors were crowded with arabesques in good taste, and the cornices were in the best style. Any amateur would have discerned there the sense of distinction and decorative fitness which mark the work of modern French architects.

For above a month Caroline had been at home in this apartment, furnished by an upholsterer who submitted to an artist's guidance. A short description of the principal room will suffice to give us an idea of the wonders it offered to Caroline's delighted eyes when Roger installed her there. Hangings of gray stuff trimmed with green silk adorned the walls of her bedroom; the seats, covered with light-colored woolen sateen, were of easy and comfortable shapes, and in the latest fashion; a chest of drawers of some simple wood, inlaid with lines of a darker hue, contained the treasures of the toilet; a writing-table to match served for inditing love-letters on scented paper; the bed, with antique draperies, could not fail to suggest thoughts of love by its soft hangings of elegant muslin; the window-curtains, of drab silk with green fringe, were always half drawn to subdue the light; a bronze clock represented Love crowning Psyche; and a carpet of Gothic design on a red ground set off the other accessories of this delightful retreat. There was a small dressing-table in front of a long glass, and here the needlewoman sat, out of patience with Plaisir, the famous hairdresser.

“Do you think you will have done today?” said she.

“Your hair is so long and so thick, madame,” replied Plaisir.

Caroline could not help smiling. The man's flattery had no doubt revived in her mind the memory of the passionate praises lavished by her lover on the beauty of her hair, which he delighted in.

The hairdresser having done, a waiting-maid came and held counsel with her as to the dress in which Roger would like best to see her. It was the beginning of September 1816, and the weather was cold; she chose a green *grenadine* trimmed with chinchilla. As soon as she was dressed, Caroline flew into the drawing-room and opened a window, out of which she stepped on to the elegant balcony, that

adorned the front of the house; there she stood, with her arms crossed, in a charming attitude, not to show herself to the admiration of the passers-by and see them turn to gaze at her, but to be able to look out on the Boulevard at the bottom of the Rue Taitbout. This side view, really very comparable to the peephole made by actors in the drop-scene of a theatre, enabled her to catch a glimpse of numbers of elegant carriages, and a crowd of persons, swept past with the rapidity of *Ombres Chinoises*. Not knowing whether Roger would arrive in a carriage or on foot, the needlewoman from the Rue du Tourniquet looked by turns at the foot-passengers, and at the tilburies — light cabs introduced into Paris by the English.

Expressions of refractoriness and of love passed by turns over her youthful face when, after waiting for a quarter of an hour, neither her keen eye nor her heart had announced the arrival of him whom she knew to be due. What disdain, what indifference were shown in her beautiful features for all the other creatures who were bustling like ants below her feet. Her gray eyes, sparkling with fun, now positively flamed. Given over to her passion, she avoided admiration with as much care as the proudest devotee to encouraging it when they drive about Paris, certainly feeling no care as to whether her fair countenance leaning over the balcony, or her little foot between the bars, and the picture of her bright eyes and delicious turned-up nose would be effaced or no from the minds of the passers-by who admired them; she saw but one face, and had but one idea. When the spotted head of a certain bay horse happened to cross the narrow strip between the two rows of houses, Caroline gave a little shiver and stood on tiptoe in hope of recognizing the white traces and the color of the tilbury. It was he!

Roger turned the corner of the street, saw the balcony, whipped the horse, which came up at a gallop, and stopped at the bronze-green door that he knew as well as his master did. The door of the apartment was opened at once by the maid, who had heard her mistress' exclamation of delight. Roger rushed up to the drawing-room, clasped Caroline in his arms, and embraced her with the effusive feeling natural when two beings who love each other rarely meet. He led her, or rather they went by a common impulse, their arms about each other, into the quiet and fragrant bedroom; a settee stood ready for them to sit by the fire, and for a moment they looked at each other in silence, expressing their happiness only by their clasped hands, and communicating their thoughts in a fond gaze.

“Yes, it is he!” she said at last. “Yes, it is you. Do you know, I have not seen

you for three long days, an age! — But what is the matter? You are unhappy.”

“My poor Caroline —”

“There, you see! ‘poor Caroline’—”

“No, no, do not laugh, my darling; we cannot go to the Feydeau Theatre together this evening.”

Caroline put on a little pout, but it vanished immediately.

“How absurd I am! How can I think of going to the play when I see you? Is not the sight of you the only spectacle I care for?” she cried, pushing her fingers through Roger’s hair.

“I am obliged to go to the Attorney-General’s. We have a knotty case in hand. He met me in the great hall at the Palais; and as I am to plead, he asked me to dine with him. But, my dearest, you can go to the theatre with your mother, and I will join you if the meeting breaks up early.”

“To the theatre without you!” cried she in a tone of amazement; “enjoy any pleasure you do not share! O my Roger! you do not deserve a kiss,” she added, throwing her arms round his neck with an artless and impassioned impulse.

“Caroline, I must go home and dress. The Marais is some way off, and I still have some business to finish.”

“Take care what you are saying, monsieur,” said she, interrupting him. “My mother says that when a man begins to talk about his business, he is ceasing to love.”

“Caroline! Am I not here? Have I not stolen this hour from my pitiless —”

“Hush!” said she, laying a finger on his mouth. “Don’t you see that I am in jest.”

They had now come back to the drawing-room, and Roger’s eye fell on an object brought home that morning by the cabinetmaker. Caroline’s old rosewood embroidery-frame, by which she and her mother had earned their bread when they lived in the Rue du Tourniquet–Saint-Jean, had been refitted and polished, and a net dress, of elaborate design, was already stretched upon it.

“Well, then, my dear, I shall do some work this evening. As I stitch, I shall fancy myself gone back to those early days when you used to pass by me without a

word, but not without a glance; the days when the remembrance of your look kept me awake all night. Oh my dear old frame — the best piece of furniture in my room, though you did not give it me! — You cannot think,” said she, seating herself on Roger’s knees; for he, overcome by irresistible feelings, had dropped into a chair. “Listen. — All I can earn by my work I mean to give to the poor. You have made me rich. How I love that pretty home at Bellefeuille, less because of what it is than because you gave it me! But tell me, Roger, I should like to call myself Caroline de Bellefeuille — can I? You must know: is it legal or permissible?”

As she saw a little affirmative grimace — for Roger hated the name of Crochard — Caroline jumped for glee, and clapped her hands.

“I feel,” said she, “as if I should more especially belong to you. Usually a woman gives up her own name and takes her husband’s —” An idea forced itself upon her and made her blush. She took Roger’s hand and led him to the open piano. —“Listen,” said she, “I can play my sonata now like an angel!” and her fingers were already running over the ivory keys, when she felt herself seized round the waist.

“Caroline, I ought to be far from hence!”

“You insist on going? Well, go,” said she, with a pretty pout, but she smiled as she looked at the clock and exclaimed joyfully, “At any rate, I have detained you a quarter of an hour!”

“Good-bye, Mademoiselle de Bellefeuille,” said he, with the gentle irony of love.

She kissed him and saw her lover to the door; when the sound of his steps had died away on the stairs she ran out on to the balcony to see him get into the tilbury, to see him gather up the reins, to catch a parting look, hear the crack of his whip and the sound of his wheels on the stones, watch the handsome horse, the master’s hat, the tiger’s gold lace, and at last to stand gazing long after the dark corner of the street had eclipsed this vision.

Five years after Mademoiselle Caroline de Bellefeuille had taken up her abode in the pretty house in the Rue Taitbout, we again look in on one of those home-scenes which tighten the bonds of affection between two persons who truly love. In the middle of the blue drawing-room, in front of the window opening to the balcony, a little boy of four was making a tremendous noise as he whipped the

rocking-horse, whose two curved supports for the legs did not move fast enough to please him; his pretty face, framed in fair curls that fell over his white collar, smiled up like a cherub's at his mother when she said to him from the depths of an easy-chair, "Not so much noise, Charles; you will wake your little sister."

The inquisitive boy suddenly got off his horse, and treading on tiptoe as if he were afraid of the sound of his feet on the carpet, came up with one finger between his little teeth, and standing in one of those childish attitudes that are so graceful because they are so perfectly natural, raised the muslin veil that hid the rosy face of a little girl sleeping on her mother's knee.

"Is Eugenie asleep, then?" said he, quite astonished. "Why is she asleep when we are awake?" he added, looking up with large, liquid black eyes.

"That only God can know," replied Caroline, with a smile.

The mother and boy gazed at the infant, only that morning baptized.

Caroline, now about four-and-twenty, showed the ripe beauty which had expanded under the influence of cloudless happiness and constant enjoyment. In her the Woman was complete.

Delighted to obey her dear Roger's every wish, she had acquired the accomplishments she had lacked; she played the piano fairly well, and sang sweetly. Ignorant of the customs of a world that would have treated her as an outcast, and which she would not have cared for even if it had welcomed her — for a happy woman does not care for the world — she had not caught the elegance of manner or learned the art of conversation, abounding in words and devoid of ideas, which is current in fashionable drawing-rooms; on the other hand, she worked hard to gain the knowledge indispensable to a mother whose chief ambition is to bring up her children well. Never to lose sight of her boy, to give him from the cradle that training of every minute which impresses on the young a love of all that is good and beautiful, to shelter him from every evil influence and fulfil both the painful duties of a nurse and the tender offices of a mother — these were her chief pleasures.

The coy and gentle being had from the first day so fully resigned herself never to step beyond the enchanted sphere where she found all her happiness, that, after six years of the tenderest intimacy, she still knew her lover only by the name of Roger. A print of the picture of the Psyche lighting her lamp to gaze on Love in

spite of his prohibition, hung in her room, and constantly reminded her of the conditions of her happiness. Through all these six years her humble pleasures had never importuned Roger by a single indiscreet ambition, and his heart was a treasure-house of kindness. Never had she longed for diamonds or fine clothes, and had again and again refused the luxury of a carriage which he had offered her. To look out from her balcony for Roger's cab, to go with him to the play or make excursions with him, on fine days in the environs of Paris, to long for him, to see him, and then to long again — these made up the history of her life, poor in incidents but rich in happiness.

As she rocked the infant, now a few months old, on her knee, singing the while, she allowed herself to recall the memories of the past. She lingered more especially on the months of September, when Roger was accustomed to take her to Bellefeuille and spend the delightful days which seem to combine the charms of every season. Nature is equally prodigal of flowers and fruit, the evenings are mild, the mornings bright, and a blaze of summer often returns after a spell of autumn gloom. During the early days of their love, Caroline had ascribed the even mind and gentle temper, of which Roger gave her so many proofs, to the rarity of their always longed-for meetings, and to their mode of life, which did not compel them to be constantly together, as a husband and wife must be. But now she could remember with rapture that, tortured by foolish fears, she had watched him with trembling during their first stay on this little estate in the Gatinais. Vain suspiciousness of love! Each of these months of happiness had passed like a dream in the midst of joys which never rang false. She had always seen that kind creature with a tender smile on his lips, a smile that seemed to mirror her own.

As she called up these vivid pictures, her eyes filled with tears; she thought she could not love him enough, and was tempted to regard her ambiguous position as a sort of tax levied by Fate on her love. Finally, invincible curiosity led her to wonder for the thousandth time what events they could be that led so tender a heart as Roger's to find his pleasure in clandestine and illicit happiness. She invented a thousand romances on purpose really to avoid recognizing the true reason, which she had long suspected but tried not to believe in. She rose, and carrying the baby in her arms, went into the dining-room to superintend the preparations for dinner.

It was the 6th of May 1822, the anniversary of the excursion to the Park of

Saint–Leu, which had been the turning-point of her life; each year it had been marked by heartfelt rejoicing. Caroline chose the linen to be used, and arranged the dessert. Having attended with joy to these details, which touched Roger, she placed the infant in her pretty cot and went out on to the balcony, whence she presently saw the carriage which her friend, as he grew to riper years, now used instead of the smart tilbury of his youth. After submitting to the first fire of Caroline’s embraces and the kisses of the little rogue who addressed him as papa, Roger went to the cradle, looked at his little sleeping daughter, kissed her forehead, and then took out of his pocket a document covered with black writing.

“Caroline,” said he, “here is the marriage portion of Mademoiselle Eugenie de Bellefeuille.”

The mother gratefully took the paper, a deed of gift of securities in the State funds.

“Buy why,” said she, “have you given Eugenie three thousand francs a year, and Charles no more than fifteen hundred?”

“Charles, my love, will be a man,” replied he. “Fifteen hundred francs are enough for him. With so much for certain, a man of courage is above poverty. And if by chance your son should turn out a nonentity, I do not wish him to be able to play the fool. If he is ambitious, this small income will give him a taste for work. — Eugenie is a girl; she must have a little fortune.”

The father then turned to play with his boy, whose effusive affection showed the independence and freedom in which he was brought up. No sort of shyness between the father and child interfered with the charm which rewards a parent for his devotion; and the cheerfulness of the little family was as sweet as it was genuine. In the evening a magic-lantern displayed its illusions and mysterious pictures on a white sheet to Charles’ great surprise, and more than once the innocent child’s heavenly rapture made Caroline and Roger laugh heartily.

Later, when the little boy was in bed, the baby woke and craved its limpid nourishment. By the light of a lamp in the chimney corner, Roger enjoyed the scene of peace and comfort, and gave himself up to the happiness of contemplating the sweet picture of the child clinging to Caroline’s white bosom as she sat, as fresh as a newly opened lily, while her hair fell in long brown curls that almost hid her neck. The lamplight enhanced the grace of the young mother,

shedding over her, her dress, and the infant, the picturesque effects of strong light and shadow.

The calm and silent woman's face struck Roger as a thousand times sweeter than ever, and he gazed tenderly at the rosy, pouting lips from which no harsh word had ever been heard. The very same thought was legible in Caroline's eyes as she gave a sidelong look at Roger, either to enjoy the effect she was producing on him, or to see what the end of the evening was to be. He, understanding the meaning of this cunning glance, said with assumed regret, "I must be going. I have a serious case to be finished, and I am expected at home. Duty before all things — don't you think so, my darling?"

Caroline looked him in the face with an expression at once sad and sweet, with the resignation which does not, however, disguise the pangs of a sacrifice.

"Good-bye, then," said she. "Go, for if you stay an hour longer I cannot so lightly bear to set you free."

"My dearest," said he with a smile, "I have three days' holiday, and am supposed to be twenty leagues away from Paris."

A few days after this anniversary of the 6th of May, Mademoiselle de Bellefeuille hurried off one morning to the Rue Saint-Louis, in the Marais, only hoping she might not arrive too late at a house where she commonly went once a week. An express messenger had just come to inform her that her mother, Madame Crochard, was sinking under a complication of disorders produced by constant catarrh and rheumatism.

While the hackney coach-driver was flogging up his horses at Caroline's urgent request, supported by the promise of a handsome present, the timid old women, who had been Madame Crochard's friends during her later years, had brought a priest into the neat and comfortable second-floor rooms occupied by the old widow. Madame Crochard's maid did not know that the pretty lady at whose house her mistress so often dined was her daughter, and she was one of the first to suggest the services of a confessor, in the hope that this priest might be at least as useful to herself as to the sick woman. Between two games of boston, or out walking in the Jardin Turc, the old beldames with whom the widow gossiped all day had succeeded in rousing in their friend's stony heart some scruples as to her former life, some visions of the future, some fears of hell, and some hopes of

forgiveness if she should return in sincerity to a religious life. So on this solemn morning three ancient females had settled themselves in the drawing-room where Madame Crochard was "at home" every Tuesday. Each in turn left her armchair to go to the poor old woman's bedside and sit with her, giving her the false hopes with which people delude the dying.

At the same time, when the end was drawing near, when the physician called in the day before would no longer answer for her life, the three dames took counsel together as to whether it would not be well to send word to Mademoiselle de Bellefeuille. Françoise having been duly informed, it was decided that a commissionaire should go to the Rue Taitbout to inform the young relation whose influence was so disquieting to the four women; still, they hoped that the Auvergnat would be too late in bringing back the person who so certainly held the first place in the widow Crochard's affections. The widow, evidently in the enjoyment of a thousand crowns a year, would not have been so fondly cherished by this feminine trio, but that neither of them, nor Françoise herself knew of her having any heir. The wealth enjoyed by Mademoiselle de Bellefeuille, whom Madame Crochard, in obedience to the traditions of the older opera, never allowed herself to speak of by the affectionate name of daughter, almost justified the four women in their scheme of dividing among themselves the old woman's "pickings."

Presently the one of these three sibyls who kept guard over the sick woman came shaking her head at the other anxious two, and said:

"It is time we should be sending for the Abbe Fontanon. In another two hours she will neither have the wit nor the strength to write a line."

Thereupon the toothless old cook went off, and returned with a man wearing a black gown. A low forehead showed a small mind in this priest, whose features were mean; his flabby, fat cheeks and double chin betrayed the easy-going egotist; his powdered hair gave him a pleasant look, till he raised his small, brown eyes, prominent under a flat forehead, and not unworthy to glitter under the brows of a Tartar.

"Monsieur l'Abbe," said Françoise, "I thank you for all your advice; but believe me, I have taken the greatest care of the dear soul."

But the servant, with her dragging step and woe-begone look, was silent when she saw that the door of the apartment was open, and that the most insinuating of

the three dowagers was standing on the landing to be the first to speak with the confessor. When the priest had politely faced the honeyed and bigoted broadside of words fired off from the widow's three friends, he went into the sickroom to sit by Madame Crochard. Decency, and some sense of reserve, compelled the three women and old Françoise to remain in the sitting-room, and to make such grimaces of grief as are possible in perfection only to such wrinkled faces.

“Oh, is it not ill-luck!” cried Françoise, heaving a sigh. “This is the fourth mistress I have buried. The first left me a hundred francs a year, the second a sum of fifty crowns, and the third a thousand crowns down. After thirty years' service, that is all I have to call my own.”

The woman took advantage of her freedom to come and go, to slip into a cupboard, whence she could hear the priest.

“I see with pleasure, daughter,” said Fontanon, “that you have pious sentiments; you have a sacred relic round your neck.”

Madame Crochard, with a feeble vagueness which seemed to show that she had not all her wits about her, pulled out the Imperial Cross of the Legion of Honor. The priest started back at seeing the Emperor's head; he went up to the penitent again, and she spoke to him, but in such a low tone that for some minutes Françoise could hear nothing.

“Woe upon me!” cried the old woman suddenly. “Do not desert me. What, Monsieur l'Abbe, do you think I shall be called to account for my daughter's soul?”

The Abbe spoke too low, and the partition was too thick for Françoise to hear the reply.

“Alas!” sobbed the woman, “the wretch has left me nothing that I can bequeath. When he robbed me of my dear Caroline, he parted us, and only allowed me three thousand francs a year, of which the capital belongs to my daughter.”

“Madame has a daughter, and nothing to live on but an annuity,” shrieked Françoise, bursting into the drawing-room.

The three old crones looked at each other in dismay. One of them, whose nose and chin nearly met with an expression that betrayed a superior type of hypocrisy and cunning, winked her eyes; and as soon as Françoise's back was turned, she gave her friends a nod, as much as to say, “That slut is too knowing by half; her

name has figured in three wills already.”

So the three old dames sat on.

However, the Abbe presently came out, and at a word from him the witches scuttered down the stairs at his heels, leaving Francoise alone with her mistress. Madame Crochard, whose sufferings increased in severity, rang, but in vain, for this woman, who only called out, “Coming, coming — in a minute!” The doors of cupboards and wardrobes were slamming as though Francoise were hunting high and low for a lost lottery ticket.

Just as this crisis was at a climax, Mademoiselle de Bellefeuille came to stand by her mother’s bed, lavishing tender words on her.

“Oh my dear mother, how criminal I have been! You are ill, and I did not know it; my heart did not warn me. However, here I am —”

“Caroline —”

“What is it?”

“They fetched a priest —”

“But send for a doctor, bless me!” cried Mademoiselle de Bellefeuille. “Francoise, a doctor! How is it that these ladies never sent for a doctor?”

“They sent for a priest —” repeated the old woman with a gasp.

“She is so ill — and no soothing draught, nothing on her table!”

The mother made a vague sign, which Caroline’s watchful eye understood, for she was silent to let her mother speak.

“They brought a priest — to hear my confession, as they said. — Beware, Caroline!” cried the old woman with an effort, “the priest made me tell him your benefactor’s name.”

“But who can have told you, poor mother?”

The old woman died, trying to look knowingly cunning. If Mademoiselle de Bellefeuille had noted her mother’s face she might have seen what no one ever will see — Death laughing.

To enter into the interests that lay beneath this introduction to my tale, we must for a moment forget the actors in it, and look back at certain previous

incidents, of which the last was closely concerned with the death of Madame Crochard. The two parts will then form a whole — a story which, by a law peculiar to life in Paris, was made up of two distinct sets of actions.

Towards the close of the month of November 1805, a young barrister, aged about six-and-twenty, was going down the stairs of the hotel where the High Chancellor of the Empire resided, at about three o'clock one morning. Having reached the courtyard in full evening dress, under a keen frost, he could not help giving vent to an exclamation of dismay — qualified, however, by the spirit which rarely deserts a Frenchman — at seeing no hackney coach waiting outside the gates, and hearing no noises such as arise from the wooden shoes or harsh voices of the hackney-coachmen of Paris. The occasional pawing of the horses of the Chief Justice's carriage — the young man having left him still playing *bouillote* with Cambaceres — alone rang out in the paved court, which was scarcely lighted by the carriage lamps. Suddenly the young lawyer felt a friendly hand on his shoulder, and turning round, found himself face to face with the Judge, to whom he bowed. As the footman let down the steps of his carriage, the old gentleman, who had served the Convention, suspected the junior's dilemma.

“All cats are gray in the dark,” said he good-humoredly. “The Chief Justice cannot compromise himself by putting a pleader in the right way! Especially,” he went on, “when the pleader is the nephew of an old colleague, one of the lights of the grand Council of State which gave France the Napoleonic Code.”

At a gesture from the chief magistrate of France under the Empire, the foot-passenger got into the carriage.

“Where do you live?” asked the great man, before the footman who awaited his orders had closed the door.

“Quai des Augustins, monseigneur.”

The horses started, and the young man found himself alone with the Minister, to whom he had vainly tried to speak before and after the sumptuous dinner given by Cambaceres; in fact, the great man had evidently avoided him throughout the evening.

“Well, Monsieur *de* Granville, you are on the high road!”

“So long as I sit by your Excellency's side —”

“Nay, I am not jesting,” said the Minister. “You were called two years since, and your defence in the case of Simeuse and Hauteserre had raised you high in your profession.”

“I had supposed that my interest in those unfortunate emigres had done me no good.”

“You are still very young,” said the great man gravely. “But the High Chancellor,” he went on, after a pause, “was greatly pleased with you this evening. Get a judgeship in the lower courts; we want men. The nephew of a man in whom Cambaceres and I take great interest must not remain in the background for lack of encouragement. Your uncle helped us to tide over a very stormy season, and services of that kind are not forgotten.” The Minister sat silent for a few minutes. “Before long,” he went on, “I shall have three vacancies open in the Lower Courts and in the Imperial Court in Paris. Come to see me, and take the place you prefer. Till then work hard, but do not be seen at my receptions. In the first place, I am overwhelmed with work; and besides that, your rivals may suspect your purpose and do you harm with the patron. Cambaceres and I, by not speaking a word to you this evening, have averted the accusation of favoritism.”

As the great man ceased speaking, the carriage drew up on the Quai des Augustins; the young lawyer thanked his generous patron for the two lifts he had conferred on him, and then knocked at his door pretty loudly, for the bitter wind blew cold about his calves. At last the old lodgekeeper pulled up the latch; and as the young man passed his window, called out in a hoarse voice, “Monsieur Granville, here is a letter for you.”

The young man took the letter, and in spite of the cold, tried to identify the writing by the gleam of a dull lamp fast dying out. “From my father!” he exclaimed, as he took his bedroom candle, which the porter at last had lighted. And he ran up to his room to read the following epistle:—

“Set off by the next mail; and if you can get here soon enough, your fortune is made. Mademoiselle Angelique Bontems has lost her sister; she is now an only child; and, as we know, she does not hate you. Madame Bontems can now leave her about forty thousand francs a year, besides whatever she may give her when she marries. I have prepared the way.

“Our friends will wonder to see a family of old nobility allying itself to the Bontems; old Bontems was a red republican of the deepest dye, owning large quantities of the nationalized land,

that he bought for a mere song. But he held nothing but convent lands, and the monks will not come back; and then, as you have already so far derogated as to become a lawyer, I cannot see why we should shrink from a further concession to the prevalent ideas. The girl will have three hundred thousand francs; I can give you a hundred thousand; your mother's property must be worth fifty thousand crowns, more or less; so if you choose to take a judgeship, my dear son, you are quite in a position to become a senator as much as any other man. My brother-in-law the Councillor of State will not indeed lend you a helping-hand; still, as he is not married, his property will some day be yours, and if you are not senator by your own efforts, you will get it through him. Then you will be perched high enough to look on at events. Farewell. Yours affectionately."

So young Granville went to bed full of schemes, each fairer than the last. Under the powerful protection of the High Chancellor, the Chief Justice, and his mother's brother — one of the originators of the Code — he was about to make a start in a coveted position before the highest court of the Empire, and he already saw himself a member of the bench whence Napoleon selected the chief functionaries of the realm. He could also promise himself a fortune handsome enough to keep up his rank, for which the slender income of five thousand francs from an estate left him by his mother would be quite insufficient.

To crown his ambitious dreams with a vision of happiness, he called up the guileless face of Mademoiselle Angelique Bontems, the companion of his childhood. Until he came to boyhood his father and mother had made no objection to his intimacy with their neighbor's pretty little daughter; but when, during his brief holiday visits to Bayeux, his parents, who prided themselves on their good birth, saw what friends the young people were, they forbade his ever thinking of her. Thus for ten years past Granville had only had occasional glimpses of the girl, whom he still sometimes thought of as "his little wife." And in those brief moments when they met free from the active watchfulness of their families, they had scarcely exchanged a few vague civilities at the church door or in the street. Their happiest days had been those when, brought together by one of those country festivities known in Normandy as *Assemblies*, they could steal a glance at each other from afar.

In the course of the last vacation Granville had twice seen Angelique, and her downcast eyes and drooping attitude had led him to suppose that she was crushed by some unknown tyranny.

He was off by seven next morning to the coach office in the Rue Notre-Dame-des-Victoires, and was so lucky as to find a vacant seat in the diligence then starting for Caen.

It was not without deep emotion that the young lawyer saw once more the spires of the cathedral at Bayeux. As yet no hope of his life had been cheated, and his heart swelled with the generous feelings that expand in the youthful soul.

After the too lengthy feast of welcome prepared by his father, who awaited him with some friends, the impatient youth was conducted to a house, long familiar to him, standing in the Rue Teinture. His heart beat high when his father — still known in the town of Bayeux as the Comte de Granville — knocked loudly at a carriage gate off which the green paint was dropping in scales. It was about four in the afternoon. A young maid-servant, in a cotton cap, dropped a short curtsey to the two gentlemen, and said that the ladies would soon be home from vespers.

The Count and his son were shown into a low room used as a drawing-room, but more like a convent parlor. Polished panels of dark walnut made it gloomy enough, and around it some old-fashioned chairs covered with worsted work and stiff armchairs were symmetrically arranged. The stone chimney-shelf had no ornament but a discolored mirror, and on each side of it were the twisted branches of a pair of candle-brackets, such as were made at the time of the Peace of Utrecht. Against a panel opposite, young Granville saw an enormous crucifix of ebony and ivory surrounded by a wreath of box that had been blessed. Though there were three windows to the room, looking out on a country-town garden, laid out in formal square beds edged with box, the room was so dark that it was difficult to discern, on the wall opposite the windows, three pictures of sacred subjects painted by a skilled hand, and purchased, no doubt, during the Revolution by old Bontems, who, as governor of the district, had never neglected his opportunities. From the carefully polished floor to the green checked holland curtains everything shone with conventual cleanliness.

The young man's heart felt an involuntary chill in this silent retreat where Angelique dwelt. The habit of frequenting the glittering Paris drawing-rooms, and the constant whirl of society, had effaced from his memory the dull and peaceful surroundings of a country life, and the contrast was so startling as to give him a sort of internal shiver. To have just left a party at the house of Cambaceres, where

life was so large, where minds could expand, where the splendor of the Imperial Court was so vividly reflected, and to be dropped suddenly into a sphere of squalidly narrow ideas — was it not like a leap from Italy into Greenland? — “Living here is not life!” said he to himself, as he looked round the Methodistical room. The old Count, seeing his son’s dismay, went up to him, and taking his hand, led him to a window, where there was still a gleam of daylight, and while the maid was lighting the yellow tapers in the candle branches he tried to clear away the clouds that the dreary place had brought to his brow.

“Listen, my boy,” said he. “Old Bontems’ widow is a frenzied bigot. ‘When the devil is old —’ you know! I see that the place goes against the grain. Well, this is the whole truth; the old woman is priest-ridden; they have persuaded her that it was high time to make sure of heaven, and the better to secure Saint Peter and his keys she pays before-hand. She goes to Mass every day, attends every service, takes the communion every Sunday God has made, and amuses herself by restoring chapels. She had given so many ornaments, and albs, and chasubles, she has crowned the canopy with so many feathers, that on the occasion of the last Corpus Christi procession as great a crowd came together as to see a man hanged, just to stare at the priests in their splendid dresses and all the vessels regilt. This house too is a sort of Holy Land. It was I who hindered her from giving those three pictures to the Church — a Domenichino, a Correggio, and an Andrea del Sarto — worth a good deal of money.”

“But Angelique?” asked the young man.

“If you do not marry her, Angelique is done for,” said the Count. “Our holy apostles counsel her to live a virgin martyr. I have had the utmost difficulty in stirring up her little heart, since she has been the only child, by talking to her of you; but, as you will easily understand, as soon as she is married you will carry her off to Paris. There, festivities, married life, the theatres, and the rush of Parisian society, will soon make her forget confessionals, and fasting, and hair shirts, and Masses, which are the exclusive nourishment of such creatures.”

“But the fifty thousand francs a year derived from Church property? Will not all that return —”

“That is the point!” exclaimed the Count, with a cunning glance. “In consideration of this marriage — for Madame Bontems’ vanity is not a little flattered by the notion of grafting the Bontems on to the genealogical tree of the

Granvilles — the aforementioned mother agrees to settle her fortune absolutely on the girl, reserving only a life-interest. The priesthood, therefore, are set against the marriage; but I have had the banns published, everything is ready, and in a week you will be out of the clutches of the mother and her Abbess. You will have the prettiest girl in Bayeux, a good little soul who will give you no trouble, because she has sound principles. She has been mortified, as they say in their jargon, by fasting and prayer — and,” he added in a low voice, “by her mother.”

A modest tap at the door silenced the Count, who expected to see the two ladies appear. A little page came in, evidently in a great hurry; but, abashed by the presence of the two gentlemen, he beckoned to a housekeeper, who followed him. Dressed in a blue cloth jacket with short tails, and blue-and-white striped trousers, his hair cut short all round, the boy's expression was that of a chorister, so strongly was it stamped with the compulsory propriety that marks every member of a bigoted household.

“Mademoiselle Gatienne,” said he, “do you know where the books are for the offices of the Virgin? The ladies of the Congregation of the Sacred Heart are going in procession this evening round the church.”

Gatienne went in search of the books.

“Will they go on much longer, my little man?” asked the Count.

“Oh, half an hour at most.”

“Let us go to look on,” said the father to his son. “There will be some pretty women there, and a visit to the Cathedral can do us no harm.”

The young lawyer followed him with a doubtful expression.

“What is the matter?” asked the Count.

“The matter, father, is that I am sure I am right.”

“But you have said nothing.”

“No; but I have been thinking that you have still ten thousand francs a year left of your original fortune. You will leave them to me — as long a time hence as possible, I hope. But if you are ready to give me a hundred thousand francs to make a foolish match, you will surely allow me to ask you for only fifty thousand to save me from such a misfortune, and enjoy as a bachelor a fortune equal to what your Mademoiselle Bontems would bring me.”

“Are you crazy?”

“No, father. These are the facts. The Chief Justice promised me yesterday that I should have a seat on the Bench. Fifty thousand francs added to what I have, and to the pay of my appointment, will give me an income of twelve thousand francs a year. And I then shall most certainly have a chance of marrying a fortune, better than this alliance, which will be poor in happiness if rich in goods.”

“It is very clear,” said his father, “that you were not brought up under the old *regime*. Does a man of our rank ever allow his wife to be in his way?”

“But, my dear father, in these days marriage is —”

“Bless me!” cried the Count, interrupting his son, “then what my old *emigre* friends tell me is true, I suppose. The Revolution has left us habits devoid of pleasure, and has infected all the young men with vulgar principles. You, like my Jacobin brother-in-law, will harangue me, I suppose, on the Nation, Public Morals, and Disinterestedness! — Good Heavens! But for the Emperor’s sisters, where should we be?”

The still hale old man, whom the peasants on the estate persisted in calling the Signeur de Granville, ended his speech as they entered the Cathedral porch. In spite of the sanctity of the place, and even as he dipped his fingers in the holy water, he hummed an air from the opera of *Rose et Colas*, and then led the way down the side aisles, stopping by each pillar to survey the rows of heads, all in lines like ranks of soldiers on parade.

The special service of the Sacred Heart was about to begin. The ladies affiliated to that congregation were in front near the choir, so the Count and his son made their way to that part of the nave, and stood leaning against one of the columns where there was least light, whence they could command a view of this mass of faces, looking like a meadow full of flowers. Suddenly, close to young Granville, a voice, sweeter than it seemed possible to ascribe to a human being, broke into song, like the first nightingale when winter is past. Though it mingled with the voices of a thousand other women and the notes of the organ, that voice stirred his nerves as though they vibrated to the too full and too piercing sounds of a harmonium. The Parisian turned round, and, seeing a young figure, though the head being bent, her face was entirely concealed by a large white bonnet, concluded that the voice was hers. He fancied that he recognized Angelique in

spite of a brown merino pelisse that wrapped her, and he nudged his father's elbow.

"Yes, there she is," said the Count, after looking where his son pointed, and then, by an expressive glance, he directed his attention to the pale face of an elderly woman who had already detected the strangers, though her false eyes, deep set in dark circles, did not seem to have strayed from the prayer-book she held.

Angelique raised her face, gazing at the altar as if to inhale the heavy scent of the incense that came wafted in clouds over the two women. And then, in the doubtful light that the tapers shed down the nave, with that of a central lamp and of some lights round the pillars, the young man beheld a face which shook his determination. A white watered-silk bonnet closely framed features of perfect regularity, the oval being completed by the satin ribbon tie that fastened it under her dimpled chin. Over her forehead, very sweet though low, hair of a pale gold color parted in two bands and fell over her cheeks, like the shadow of leaves on a flower. The arches of her eyebrows were drawn with the accuracy we admire in the best Chinese paintings. Her nose, almost aquiline in profile, was exceptionally firmly cut, and her lips were like two rose lines lovingly traced with a delicate brush. Her eyes, of a light blue, were expressive of innocence.

Though Granville discerned a sort of rigid reserve in this girlish face, he could ascribe it to the devotion in which Angelique was rapt. The solemn words of prayer, visible in the cold, came from between rows of pearls, like a fragrant mist, as it were. The young man involuntarily bent over her a little to breathe this diviner air. This movement attracted the girl's notice; her gaze, raised to the altar, was diverted to Granville, whom she could see but dimly in the gloom; but she recognized him as the companion of her youth, and a memory more vivid than prayer brought a supernatural glow to her face; she blushed. The young lawyer was thrilled with joy at seeing the hopes of another life overpowered by those of love, and the glory of the sanctuary eclipsed by earthly reminiscences; but his triumph was brief. Angelique dropped her veil, assumed a calm demeanor, and went on singing without letting her voice betray the least emotion.

Granville was a prey to one single wish, and every thought of prudence vanished. By the time the service was ended, his impatience was so great that he could not leave the ladies to go home alone, but came at once to make his bow to

“his little wife.” They bashfully greeted each other in the Cathedral porch in the presence of the congregation. Madame Bontems was tremulous with pride as she took the Comte de Granville’s arm, though he, forced to offer it in the presence of all the world was vexed enough with his son for his ill-advised impatience.

For about a fortnight, between the official announcement of the intended marriage of the Vicomte de Granville to Mademoiselle Bontems and the solemn day of the wedding, he came assiduously to visit his lady-love in the dismal drawing-room, to which he became accustomed. His long calls were devoted to watching Angelique’s character; for his prudence, happily, had made itself heard again in the day after their first meeting. He always found her seated at a little table of some West Indian wood, and engaged in marking the linen of her trousseau. Angelique never spoke first on the subject of religion. If the young lawyer amused himself with fingering the handsome rosary that she kept in a little green velvet bag, if he laughed as he looked at a relic such as usually is attached to this means of grace, Angelique would gently take the rosary out of his hands and replace it in the bag without a word, putting it away at once. When, now and then, Granville was so bold as to make mischievous remarks as to certain religious practices, the pretty girl listened to him with the obstinate smile of assurance.

“You must either believe nothing, or believe everything the Church teaches,” she would say. “Would you wish to have a woman without a religion as the mother of your children? — No. — What man may dare judge as between disbelievers and God? And how can I then blame what the Church allows?”

Angelique appeared to be animated by such fervent charity, the young man saw her look at him with such perfect conviction, that he sometimes felt tempted to embrace her religious views; her firm belief that she was in the only right road aroused doubts in his mind, which she tried to turn to account.

But then Granville committed the fatal blunder of mistaking the enchantment of desire for that of love. Angelique was so happy in reconciling the voice of her heart with that of duty, by giving way to a liking that had grown up with her from childhood, that the deluded man could not discern which of the two spoke the louder. Are not all young men ready to trust the promise of a pretty face and to infer beauty of soul from beauty of feature? An indefinable impulse leads them to believe that moral perfection must co-exist with physical perfection. If Angelique had not been at liberty to give vent to her sentiments, they would soon have dried

up in her heart like a plant watered with some deadly acid. How should a lover be aware of bigotry so well hidden?

This was the course of young Granville's feelings during that fortnight, devoured by him like a book of which the end is absorbing. Angelique, carefully watched by him, seemed the gentlest of creatures, and he even caught himself feeling grateful to Madame Bontems, who, by implanting so deeply the principles of religion, had in some degree inured her to meet the troubles of life.

On the day named for signing the inevitable contract, Madame Bontems made her son-in-law pledge himself solemnly to respect her daughter's religious practices, to allow her entire liberty of conscience, to permit her to go to communion, to church, to confession as often as she pleased, and never to control her choice of priestly advisers. At this critical moment Angelique looked at her future husband with such pure and innocent eyes, that Granville did not hesitate to give his word. A smile puckered the lips of the Abbe Fontanon, a pale man, who directed the consciences of this household. Mademoiselle Bontems, by a slight nod, seemed to promise that she would never take an unfair advantage of this freedom. As to the old Count, he gently whistled the tune of an old song, *Va-t-en-voir s'ils viennent* ("Go and see if they are coming on!")

A few days after the wedding festivities of which so much is thought in the provinces, Granville and his wife went to Paris, whither the young man was recalled by his appointment as public prosecutor to the Supreme Court of the Seine circuit.

When the young couple set out to find a residence, Angelique used the influence that the honeymoon gives to every wife in persuading her husband to take a large apartment in the ground-floor of a house at the corner of the *Vieille Rue du Temple* and the *Rue Nueve Saint-Francois*. Her chief reason for this choice was that the house was close to the *Rue d'Orleans*, where there was a church, and not far from a small chapel in the *Rue Saint-Louis*.

"A good housewife provides for everything," said her husband, laughing.

Angelique pointed out to him that this part of Paris, known as the *Marais*, was within easy reach of the *Palais de Justice*, and that the lawyers they knew lived in the neighborhood. A fairly large garden made the apartment particularly advantageous to a young couple; the children — if Heaven should send them any

— could play in the open air; the courtyard was spacious, and there were good stables.

The lawyer wished to live in the Chaussee d'Antin, where everything is fresh and bright, where the fashions may be seen while still new, where a well-dressed crowd throngs the Boulevards, and the distance is less to the theatres or places of amusement; but he was obliged to give way to the coaxing ways of a young wife, who asked this as his first favor; so, to please her, he settled in the Marais. Granville's duties required him to work hard — all the more, because they were new to him — so he devoted himself in the first place to furnishing his private study and arranging his books. He was soon established in a room crammed with papers, and left the decoration of the house to his wife. He was all the better pleased to plunge Angelique into the bustle of buying furniture and fittings, the source of so much pleasure and of so many associations to most young women, because he was rather ashamed of depriving her of his company more often than the usages of early married life require. As soon as his work was fairly under way, he gladly allowed his wife to tempt him out of his study to consider the effect of furniture or hangings, which he had before only seen piecemeal or unfinished.

If the old adage is true that says a woman may be judged of from her front door, her rooms must express her mind with even greater fidelity. Madame de Granville had perhaps stamped the various things she had ordered with the seal of her own character; the young lawyer was certainly startled by the cold, arid solemnity that reigned in these rooms; he found nothing to charm his taste; everything was discordant, nothing gratified the eye. The rigid mannerism that prevailed in the sitting-room at Bayeux had invaded his home; the broad panels were hollowed in circles, and decorated with those arabesques of which the long, monotonous mouldings are in such bad taste. Anxious to find excuses for his wife, the young husband began again, looking first at the long and lofty ante-room through which the apartment was entered. The color of the panels, as ordered by his wife, was too heavy, and the very dark green velvet used to cover the benches added to the gloom of this entrance — not, to be sure, an important room, but giving a first impression — just as we measure a man's intelligence by his first address. An ante-room is a kind of preface which announces what is to follow, but promises nothing.

The young husband wondered whether his wife could really have chosen the

lamp of an antique pattern, which hung in the centre of this bare hall, the pavement of black and white marble, and the paper in imitation of blocks of stone, with green moss on them in places. A handsome, but not new, barometer hung on the middle of one of the walls, as if to accentuate the void. At the sight of it all, he looked round at his wife; he saw her so much pleased by the red braid binding to the cotton curtains, so satisfied with the barometer and the strictly decent statue that ornamented a large Gothic stove, that he had not the barbarous courage to overthrow such deep convictions. Instead of blaming his wife, Granville blamed himself, accusing himself of having failed in his duty of guiding the first steps in Paris of a girl brought up at Bayeux.

From this specimen, what might not be expected of the other rooms? What was to be looked for from a woman who took fright at the bare legs of a Caryatid, and who would not look at a chandelier or a candle-stick if she saw on it the nude outlines of an Egyptian bust? At this date the school of David was at the height of its glory; all the art of France bore the stamp of his correct design and his love of antique types, which indeed gave his pictures the character of colored sculpture. But none of these devices of Imperial luxury found civic rights under Madame de Granville's roof. The spacious, square drawing-room remained as it had been left from the time of Louis XV., in white and tarnished gold, lavishly adorned by the architect with checkered lattice-work and the hideous garlands due to the uninventive designers of the time. Still, if harmony at least had prevailed, if the furniture of modern mahogany had but assumed the twisted forms of which Boucher's corrupt taste first set the fashion, Angelique's room would only have suggested the fantastic contrast of a young couple in the nineteenth century living as though they were in the eighteenth; but a number of details were in ridiculous discord. The consoles, the clocks, the candelabra, were decorated with the military trophies which the wars of the Empire commended to the affections of the Parisians; and the Greek helmets, the Roman crossed daggers, and the shields so dear to military enthusiasm that they were introduced on furniture of the most peaceful uses, had no fitness side by side with the delicate and profuse arabesques that delighted Madame de Pompadour.

Bigotry tends to an indescribably tiresome kind of humility which does not exclude pride. Whether from modesty or by choice, Madame de Granville seemed to have a horror of light and cheerful colors; perhaps, too, she imagined that brown and purple beseeemed the dignity of a magistrate. How could a girl

accustomed to an austere life have admitted the luxurious divans that may suggest evil thoughts, the elegant and tempting boudoirs where naughtiness may be imagined?

The poor husband was in despair. From the tone in which he approved, only seconding the praises she bestowed on herself, Angelique understood that nothing really pleased him; and she expressed so much regret at her want of success, that Granville, who was very much in love, regarded her disappointment as a proof of her affection instead of resentment for an offence to her self-conceit. After all, could he expect a girl just snatched from the humdrum of country notions, with no experience of the niceties and grace of Paris life, to know or do any better? Rather would he believe that his wife's choice had been overruled by the tradesmen than allow himself to own the truth. If he had been less in love, he would have understood that the dealers, always quick to discern their customers' ideas, had blessed Heaven for sending them a tasteless little bigot, who would take their old-fashioned goods off their hands. So he comforted the pretty provincial.

“Happiness, dear Angelique, does not depend on a more or less elegant piece of furniture; it depends on the wife's sweetness, gentleness, and love.”

“Why, it is my duty to love you,” said Angelique mildly, “and I can have no more delightful duty to carry out.”

Nature has implanted in the heart of woman so great a desire to please, so deep a craving for love, that, even in a youthful bigot, the ideas of salvation and a future existence must give way to the happiness of early married life. And, in fact, from the month of April, when they were married, till the beginning of winter, the husband and wife lived in perfect union. Love and hard work have the grace of making a man tolerably indifferent to external matters. Being obliged to spend half the day in court fighting for the gravest interests of men's lives or fortunes, Granville was less alive than another might have been to certain facts in his household.

If, on a Friday, he found none but Lenten fare, and by chance asked for a dish of meat without getting it, his wife, forbidden by the Gospel to tell a lie, could still, by such subterfuges as are permissible in the interests of religion, cloak what was premeditated purpose under some pretext of her own carelessness or the scarcity in the market. She would often exculpate herself at the expense of the cook, and even go so far as to scold him. At that time young lawyers did not, as they do now,

keep the fasts of the Church, the four rogation seasons, and the vigils of festivals; so Granville was not at first aware of the regular recurrence of these Lenten meals, which his wife took care should be made dainty by the addition of teal, moor-hen, and fish-pies, that their amphibious meat or high seasoning might cheat his palate. Thus the young man unconsciously lived in strict orthodoxy, and worked out his salvation without knowing it.

On week-days he did not know whether his wife went to Mass or no. On Sundays, with very natural amiability, he accompanied her to church to make up to her, as it were, for sometimes giving up vespers in favor of his company; he could not at first fully enter into the strictness of his wife's religious views. The theatres being impossible in summer by reason of the heat, Granville had not even the opportunity of the great success of a piece to give rise to the serious question of play-going. And, in short, at the early stage of a union to which a man has been led by a young girl's beauty, he can hardly be exacting as to his amusements. Youth is greedy rather than dainty, and possession has a charm in itself. How should he be keen to note coldness, dignity, and reserve in the woman to whom he ascribes the excitement he himself feels, and lends the glow of the fire that burns within him? He must have attained a certain conjugal calm before he discovers that a bigot sits waiting for love with her arms folded.

Granville, therefore, believed himself happy till a fatal event brought its influence to bear on his married life. In the month of November 1808 the Canon of Bayeux Cathedral who had been the keeper of Madame Bontems' conscience and her daughter's, came to Paris, spurred by the ambition to be at the head of a church in the capital — a position which he regarded perhaps as the stepping-stone to a bishopric. On resuming his former control of this wandering lamb, he was horrified to find her already so much deteriorated by the air of Paris, and strove to reclaim her to his chilly fold. Frightened by the exhortations of this priest, a man of about eight-and-thirty, who brought with him, into the circle of the enlightened and tolerant Paris clergy, the bitter provincial catholicism and the inflexible bigotry which fetter timid souls with endless exactions, Madame de Granville did penance and returned from her Jansenist errors.

It would be tiresome to describe minutely all the circumstances which insensibly brought disaster on this household; it will be enough to relate the simple facts without giving them in strict order of time.

The first misunderstanding between the young couple was, however, a serious one.

When Granville took his wife into society she never declined solemn functions, such as dinners, concerts, or parties given by the Judges superior to her husband in the legal profession; but for a long time she constantly excused herself on the plea of a sick headache when they were invited to a ball. One day Granville, out of patience with these assumed indispositions, destroyed a note of invitation to a ball at the house of a Councillor of State, and gave his wife only a verbal invitation. Then, on the evening, her health being quite above suspicion, he took her to a magnificent entertainment.

“My dear,” said he, on their return home, seeing her wear an offensive air of depression, “your position as a wife, the rank you hold in society, and the fortune you enjoy, impose on you certain duties of which no divine law can relieve you. Are you not your husband’s pride? You are required to go to balls when I go, and to appear in a becoming manner.”

“And what is there, my dear, so disastrous in my dress?”

“It is your manner, my dear. When a young man comes up to speak to you, you look so serious that a spiteful person might believe you doubtful of your own virtue. You seem to fear lest a smile should undo you. You really look as if you were asking forgiveness of God for the sins that may be committed around you. The world, my dearest, is not a convent. — But, as you mentioned your dress, I may confess to you that it is no less a duty to conform to the customs and fashions of Society.”

“Do you wish that I should display my shape like those indecent women who wear gowns so low that impudent eyes can stare at their bare shoulders and their —”

“There is a difference, my dear,” said her husband, interrupting her, “between uncovering your whole bust and giving some grace to your dress. You wear three rows of net frills that cover your throat up to your chin. You look as if you had desired your dressmaker to destroy the graceful line of your shoulders and bosom with as much care as a coquette would devote to obtaining from hers a bodice that might emphasize her covered form. Your bust is wrapped in so many folds that every one was laughing at your affectation of prudery. You would be really grieved

if I were to repeat the ill-natured remarks made on your appearance.”

“Those who admire such obscenity will not have to bear the burthen if we sin,” said the lady tartly.

“And you did not dance?” asked Granville.

“I shall never dance,” she replied.

“If I tell you that you ought to dance!” said her husband sharply. “Yes, you ought to follow the fashions, to wear flowers in your hair, and diamonds. Remember, my dear, that rich people — and we are rich — are obliged to keep up luxury in the State. Is it not far better to encourage manufacturers than to distribute money in the form of alms through the medium of the clergy?”

“You talk as a statesman!” said Angelique.

“And you as a priest,” he retorted.

The discussion was bitter. Madame de Granville’s answers, though spoken very sweetly and in a voice as clear as a church bell, showed an obstinacy that betrayed priestly influence. When she appealed to the rights secured to her by Granville’s promise, she added that her director specially forbade her going to balls; then her husband pointed out to her that the priest was overstepping the regulations of the Church.

This odious theological dispute was renewed with great violence and acerbity on both sides when Granville proposed to take his wife to the play. Finally, the lawyer, whose sole aim was to defeat the pernicious influence exerted over his wife by her old confessor, placed the question on such a footing that Madame de Granville, in a spirit of defiance, referred it by writing to the Court of Rome, asking in so many words whether a woman could wear low gowns and go to the play and to balls without compromising her salvation.

The reply of the venerable Pope Pius VII. came at once, strongly condemning the wife’s recalcitrancy and blaming the priest. This letter, a chapter on conjugal duties, might have been dictated by the spirit of Fenelon, whose grace and tenderness pervaded every line.

“A wife is right to go wherever her husband may take her. Even if she sins by his command, she will not be ultimately held answerable.” These two sentences of the Pope’s homily only made Madame de Granville and her director accuse him of

irreligion.

But before this letter had arrived, Granville had discovered the strict observance of fast days that his wife forced upon him, and gave his servants orders to serve him with meat every day in the year. However much annoyed his wife might be by these commands, Granville, who cared not a straw for such indulgence or abstinence, persisted with manly determination.

Is it not an offence to the weakest creature that can think at all to be compelled to do, by the will of another, anything that he would otherwise have done simply of his own accord? Of all forms of tyranny, the most odious is that which constantly robs the soul of the merit of its thoughts and deeds. It has to abdicate without having reigned. The word we are readiest to speak, the feelings we most love to express, die when we are commanded to utter them.

Ere long the young man ceased to invite his friends, to give parties or dinners; the house might have been shrouded in crape. A house where the mistress is a bigot has an atmosphere of its own. The servants, who are, of course, under her immediate control, are chosen among a class who call themselves pious, and who have an unmistakable physiognomy. Just as the jolliest fellow alive, when he joins the *gendarmerie*, has the countenance of a gendarme, so those who give themselves over to the habit of lowering their eyes and preserving a sanctimonious mien clothes them in a livery of hypocrisy which rogues can affect to perfection.

And besides, bigots constitute a sort of republic; they all know each other; the servants they recommend and hand on from one to another are a race apart, and preserved by them, as horse-breeders will admit no animal into their stables that has not a pedigree. The more the impious — as they are thought — come to understand a household of bigots, the more they perceive that everything is stamped with an indescribable squalor; they find there, at the same time, an appearance of avarice and mystery, as in a miser's home, and the dank scent of cold incense which gives a chill to the stale atmosphere of a chapel. This methodical meanness, this narrowness of thought, which is visible in every detail, can only be expressed by one word — Bigotry. In these sinister and pitiless houses Bigotry is written on the furniture, the prints, the pictures; speech is bigoted, the silence is bigoted, the faces are those of bigots. The transformation of men and things into bigotry is an inexplicable mystery, but the fact is evident. Everybody can see that bigots do not walk, do not sit, do not speak, as men of the world walk,

sit, and speak. Under their roof every one is ill at ease, no one laughs, stiffness and formality infect everything, from the mistress' cap down to her pincushion; eyes are not honest, the folks are more like shadows, and the lady of the house seems perched on a throne of ice.

One morning poor Granville discerned with grief and pain that all the symptoms of bigotry had invaded his home. There are in the world different spheres in which the same effects are seen though produced by dissimilar causes. Dulness hedges such miserable homes round with walls of brass, enclosing the horrors of the desert and the infinite void. The home is not so much a tomb as that far worse thing — a convent. In the center of this icy sphere the lawyer could study his wife dispassionately. He observed, not without keen regret, the narrow-mindedness that stood confessed in the very way that her hair grew, low on the forehead, which was slightly depressed; he discovered in the perfect regularity of her features a certain set rigidity which before long made him hate the assumed sweetness that had bewitched him. Intuition told him that one day of disaster those thin lips might say, "My dear, it is for your good!"

Madame de Granville's complexion was acquiring a dull pallor and an austere expression that were a kill-joy to all who came near her. Was this change wrought by the ascetic habits of a pharisaism which is not piety any more than avarice is economy? It would be hard to say. Beauty without expression is perhaps an imposture. This imperturbable set smile that the young wife always wore when she looked at Granville seemed to be a sort of Jesuitical formula of happiness, by which she thought to satisfy all the requirements of married life. Her charity was an offence, her soulless beauty was monstrous to those who knew her; the mildness of her speech was an irritation: she acted, not on feeling, but on duty.

There are faults which may yield in a wife to the stern lessons of experience, or to a husband's warnings; but nothing can counteract false ideas of religion. An eternity of happiness to be won, set in the scale against worldly enjoyment, triumphs over everything and makes every pang endurable. Is it not the apotheosis of egotism, of Self beyond the grave? Thus even the Pope was censured at the tribunal of the priest and the young devotee. To be always in the right is a feeling which absorbs every other in these tyrannous souls.

For some time past a secret struggle had been going on between the ideas of the husband and wife, and the young man was soon weary of a battle to which

there could be no end. What man, what temper, can endure the sight of a hypocritically affectionate face and categorical resistance to his slightest wishes? What is to be done with a wife who takes advantage of his passion to protect her coldness, who seems determined on being blandly inexorable, prepares herself ecstatically to play the martyr, and looks on her husband as a scourge from God, a means of flagellation that may spare her the fires of purgatory? What picture can give an idea of these women who make virtue hateful by defying the gentle precepts of that faith which Saint John epitomized in the words, "Love one another"?

If there was a bonnet to be found in a milliner's shop that was condemned to remain in the window, or to be packed off to the colonies, Granville was certain to see it on his wife's head; if a material of bad color or hideous design were to be found, she would select it. These hapless bigots are heart-breaking in their notions of dress. Want of taste is a defect inseparable from false pietism.

And so, in the home-life that needs the fullest sympathy, Granville had no true companionship. He went out alone to parties and the theatres. Nothing in his house appealed to him. A huge Crucifix that hung between his bed and Angelique's seemed figurative of his destiny. Does it not represent a murdered Divinity, a Man-God, done to death in all the prime of life and beauty? The ivory of that cross was less cold than Angelique crucifying her husband under the plea of virtue. This it was that lay at the root of their woes; the young wife saw nothing but duty where she should have given love. Here, one Ash Wednesday, rose the pale and spectral form of Fasting in Lent, of Total Abstinence, commanded in a severe tone — and Granville did not deem it advisable to write in his turn to the Pope and take the opinion of the Consistory on the proper way of observing Lent, the Ember days, and the eve of great festivals.

His misfortune was too great! He could not even complain, for what could he say? He had a pretty young wife attached to her duties, virtuous — nay, a model of all the virtues. She had a child every year, nursed them herself, and brought them up in the highest principles. Being charitable, Angelique was promoted to rank as an angel. The old women who constituted the circle in which she moved — for at that time it was not yet "the thing" for young women to be religious as a matter of fashion — all admired Madame de Granville's piety, and regarded her, not indeed as a virgin, but as a martyr. They blamed not the wife's scruples, but the barbarous

philoprogenitiveness of the husband.

Granville, by insensible degrees, overdone with work, bereft of conjugal consolations, and weary of a world in which he wandered alone, by the time he was two-and-thirty had sunk into the Slough of Despond. He hated life. Having too lofty a notion of the responsibilities imposed on him by his position to set the example of a dissipated life, he tried to deaden feeling by hard study, and began a great book on Law.

But he was not allowed to enjoy the monastic peace he had hoped for. When the celestial Angelique saw him desert worldly society to work at home with such regularity, she tried to convert him. It had been a real sorrow to her to know that her husband's opinions were not strictly Christian; and she sometimes wept as she reflected that if her husband should die it would be in a state of final impenitence, so that she could not hope to snatch him from the eternal fires of Hell. Thus Granville was a mark for the mean ideas, the vacuous arguments, the narrow views by which his wife — fancying she had achieved the first victory — tried to gain a second by bringing him back within the pale of the Church.

This was the last straw. What can be more intolerable than the blind struggle in which the obstinacy of a bigot tries to meet the acumen of a lawyer? What more terrible to endure than the acrimonious pin-pricks to which a passionate soul prefers a dagger-thrust? Granville neglected his home. Everything there was unendurable. His children, broken by their mother's frigid despotism, dared not go with him to the play; indeed, Granville could never give them any pleasure without bringing down punishment from their terrible mother. His loving nature was weaned to indifference, to a selfishness worse than death. His boys, indeed, he saved from this hell by sending them to school at an early age, and insisting on his right to train them. He rarely interfered between his wife and her daughters; but he was resolved that they should marry as soon as they were old enough.

Even if he had wished to take violent measures, he could have found no justification; his wife, backed by a formidable army of dowagers, would have had him condemned by the whole world. Thus Granville had no choice but to live in complete isolation; but, crushed under the tyranny of misery, he could not himself bear to see how altered he was by grief and toil. And he dreaded any connection or intimacy with women of the world, having no hope of finding any consolation.

The improving history of this melancholy household gave rise to no events

worthy of record during the fifteen years between 1806 and 1825. Madame de Granville was exactly the same after losing her husband's affection as she had been during the time when she called herself happy. She paid for Masses, beseeching God and the Saints to enlighten her as to what the faults were which displeased her husband, and to show her the way to restore the erring sheep; but the more fervent her prayers, the less was Granville to be seen at home.

For about five years now, having achieved a high position as a judge, Granville had occupied the *entresol* of the house to avoid living with the Comtesse de Granville. Every morning a little scene took place, which, if evil tongues are to be believed, is repeated in many households as the result of incompatibility of temper, of moral or physical malady, or of antagonisms leading to such disaster as is recorded in this history. At about eight in the morning a housekeeper, bearing no small resemblance to a nun, rang at the Comte de Granville's door. Admitted to the room next to the Judge's study, she always repeated the same message to the footman, and always in the same tone:

"Madame would be glad to know whether Monsieur le Comte has had a good night, and if she is to have the pleasure of his company at breakfast."

"Monsieur presents his compliments to Madame la Comtesse," the valet would say, after speaking with his master, "and begs her to hold him excused; important business compels him to be in court this morning."

A minute later the woman reappeared and asked on madame's behalf whether she would have the pleasure of seeing Monsieur le Comte before he went out.

"He is gone," was always the reply, though often his carriage was still waiting.

This little dialogue by proxy became a daily ceremonial. Granville's servant, a favorite with his master, and the cause of more than one quarrel over his irreligious and dissipated conduct, would even go into his master's room, as a matter of form, when the Count was not there, and come back with the same formula in reply.

The aggrieved wife was always on the watch for her husband's return, and standing on the steps so as to meet him like an embodiment of remorse. The petty aggressiveness which lies at the root of the monastic temper was the foundation of Madame de Granville's; she was now five-and-thirty, and looked forty. When the count was compelled by decency to speak to his wife or to dine at home, she was

only too well pleased to inflict her company upon him, with her acid-sweet remarks and the intolerable dulness of her narrow-minded circle, and she tried to put him in the wrong before the servants and her charitable friends.

When, at this time, the post of President in a provincial court was offered to the Comte de Granville, who was in high favor, he begged to be allowed to remain in Paris. This refusal, of which the Keeper of the Seals alone knew the reasons, gave rise to extraordinary conjectures on the part of the Countess' intimate friends and of her director. Granville, a rich man with a hundred thousand francs a year, belonged to one of the first families of Normandy. His appointment to be Presiding Judge would have been the stepping-stone to a peer's seat; whence this strange lack of ambition? Why had he given up his great book on Law? What was the meaning of the dissipation which for nearly six years had made him a stranger to his home, his family, his study, to all he ought to hold dear? The Countess' confessor, who based his hopes of a bishopric quite as much on the families he governed as on the services he rendered to an association of which he was an ardent propagator, was much disappointed by Granville's refusal, and tried to insinuate calumnious explanations: "If Monsieur le Comte had such an objection to provincial life, it was perhaps because he dreaded finding himself under the necessity of leading a regular life, compelled to set an example of moral conduct, and to live with the Countess, from whom nothing could have alienated him but some illicit connection; for how could a woman so pure as Madame de Granville ever tolerate the disorderly life into which her husband had drifted?" The sanctimonious woman accepted as facts these hints, which unluckily were not merely hypothetical, and Madame de Granville was stricken as by a thunderbolt.

Angelique, knowing nothing of the world, of love and its follies, was so far from conceiving of any conditions of married life unlike those that had alienated her husband as possible, that she believed him to be incapable of the errors which are crimes in the eyes of any wife. When the Count ceased to demand anything of her, she imagined that the tranquillity he now seemed to enjoy was in the course of nature; and, as she had really given to him all the love which her heart was capable of feeling for a man, while the priest's conjectures were the utter destruction of the illusions she had hitherto cherished, she defended her husband; at the same time, she could not eradicate the suspicion that had been so ingeniously sown in her soul.

These alarms wrought such havoc in her feeble brain that they made her ill; she was worn by low fever. These incidents took place during Lent 1822; she would not premit her austerities, and fell into a decline that put her life in danger. Granville's indifference was added torture; his care and attention were such as a nephew feels himself bound to give to some old uncle.

Though the Countess had given up her persistent nagging and remonstrances, and tried to receive her husband with affectionate words, the sharpness of the bigot showed through, and one speech would often undo the work of a week.

Towards the end of May, the warm breath of spring, and more nourishing diet than her Lenten fare, restored Madame de Granville to a little strength. One morning, on coming home from Mass, she sat down on a stone bench in the little garden, where the sun's kisses reminded her of the early days of her married life, and she looked back across the years to see wherein she might have failed in her duty as a wife and mother. She was broken in upon by the Abbe Fontanon in an almost indescribable state of excitement.

"Has any misfortune befallen you, Father?" she asked with filial solicitude.

"Ah! I only wish," cried the Normandy priest, "that all the woes inflicted on you by the hand of God were dealt out to me; but, my admirable friend, there are trials to which you can but bow."

"Can any worse punishments await me than those with which Providence crushes me by making my husband the instrument of His wrath?"

"You must prepare yourself, daughter, to yet worse mischief than we and your pious friends had ever conceived of."

"Then I may thank God," said the Countess, "for vouchsafing to use you as the messenger of His will, and thus, as ever, setting the treasures of mercy by the side of the scourges of His wrath, just as in bygone days He showed a spring to Hagar when He had driven her into the desert."

"He measures your sufferings by the strength of your resignation and the weight of your sins."

"Speak; I am ready to hear!" As she said it she cast her eyes up to heaven. "Speak, Monsieur Fontanon."

"For seven years Monsieur Granville has lived in sin with a concubine, by

whom he has two children; and on this adulterous connection he has spent more than five hundred thousand francs, which ought to have been the property of his legitimate family.”

“I must see it to believe it!” cried the Countess.

“Far be it from you!” exclaimed the Abbe. “You must forgive, my daughter, and wait in patience and prayer till God enlightens your husband; unless, indeed, you choose to adopt against him the means offered you by human laws.”

The long conversation that ensued between the priest and his penitent resulted in an extraordinary change in the Countess; she abruptly dismissed him, called her servants who were alarmed at her flushed face and crazy energy. She ordered her carriage — countermanded it — changed her mind twenty times in the hour; but at last, at about three o’clock, as if she had come to some great determination, she went out, leaving the whole household in amazement at such a sudden transformation.

“Is the Count coming home to dinner?” she asked of his servant, to whom she would never speak.

“No, madame.”

“Did you go with him to the Courts this morning?”

“Yes, madame.”

“And today is Monday?”

“Yes, madame.”

“Then do the Courts sit on Mondays nowadays?”

“Devil take you!” cried the man, as his mistress drove off after saying to the coachman:

“Rue Taitbout.”

Mademoiselle de Bellefeuille was weeping: Roger, sitting by her side, held one of her hands between his own. He was silent, looking by turns at little Charles — who, not understanding his mother’s grief, stood speechless at the sight of her tears — at the cot where Eugenie lay sleeping, and Caroline’s face, on which grief had the effect of rain falling across the beams of cheerful sunshine.

“Yes, my darling,” said Roger, after a long silence, “that is the great secret: I

am married. But some day I hope we may form but one family. My wife has been given over ever since last March. I do not wish her dead; still, if it should please God to take her to Himself, I believe she will be happier in Paradise than in a world to whose griefs and pleasures she is equally indifferent.”

“How I hate that woman! How could she bear to make you unhappy? And yet it is to that unhappiness that I owe my happiness!”

Her tears suddenly ceased.

“Caroline, let us hope,” cried Roger. “Do not be frightened by anything that priest may have said to you. Though my wife’s confessor is a man to be feared for his power in the congregation, if he should try to blight our happiness I would find means —”

“What could you do?”

“We would go to Italy: I would fly —”

A shriek that rang out from the adjoining room made Roger start and Mademoiselle de Bellefeuille quake; but she rushed into the drawing-room, and there found Madame de Granville in a dead faint. When the Countess recovered her senses, she sighed deeply on finding herself supported by the Count and her rival, whom she instinctively pushed away with a gesture of contempt. Mademoiselle de Bellefeuille rose to withdraw.

“You are at home, madame,” said Granville, taking Caroline by the arm. “Stay.”

The Judge took up his wife in his arms, carried her to the carriage, and got into it with her.

“Who is it that has brought you to the point of wishing me dead, of resolving to fly?” asked the Countess, looking at her husband with grief mingled with indignation. “Was I not young? you thought me pretty — what fault have you to find with me? Have I been false to you? Have I not been a virtuous and well-conducted wife? My heart has cherished no image but yours, my ears have listened to no other voice. What duty have I failed in? What have I ever denied you?”

“Happiness, madame,” said the Count severely. “You know, madame, that there are two ways of serving God. Some Christians imagine that by going to church at fixed hours to say a *Paternoster*, by attending Mass regularly and

avoiding sin, they may win heaven — but they, madame, will go to hell; they have not loved God for himself, they have not worshiped Him as He chooses to be worshiped, they have made no sacrifice. Though mild in seeming, they are hard on their neighbors; they see the law, the letter, not the spirit. — This is how you have treated me, your earthly husband; you have sacrificed my happiness to your salvation; you were always absorbed in prayer when I came to you in gladness of heart; you wept when you should have cheered my toil; you have never tried to satisfy any demands I have made on you.”

“And if they were wicked,” cried the Countess hotly, “was I to lose my soul to please you?”

“It is a sacrifice which another, a more loving woman, has dared to make,” said Granville coldly.

“Dear God!” she cried, bursting into tears, “Thou hearest! Has he been worthy of the prayers and penance I have lived in, wearing myself out to atone for his sins and my own? — Of what avail is virtue?”

“To win Heaven, my dear. A woman cannot be at the same time the wife of a man and the spouse of Christ. That would be bigamy; she must choose between a husband and a nunnery. For the sake of future advantage you have stripped your soul of all the love, all the devotion, which God commands that you should have for me, you have cherished no feeling but hatred —”

“Have I not loved you?” she put in.

“No, madame.”

“Then what is love?” the Countess involuntarily inquired.

“Love, my dear,” replied Granville, with a sort of ironical surprise, “you are incapable of understanding it. The cold sky of Normandy is not that of Spain. This difference of climate is no doubt the secret of our disaster. — To yield to our caprices, to guess them, to find pleasure in pain, to sacrifice the world’s opinion, your pride, your religion even, and still regard these offerings as mere grains of incense burnt in honor of the idol — that is love —”

“The love of ballet-girls!” cried the Countess in horror. “Such flames cannot last, and must soon leave nothing but ashes and cinders, regret or despair. A wife ought, in my opinion, to bring you true friendship, equable warmth —”

“You speak of warmth as negroes speak of ice,” retorted the Count, with a sardonic smile. “Consider that the humblest daisy has more charms than the proudest and most gorgeous of the red hawthorns that attract us in spring by their strong scent and brilliant color. — At the same time,” he went on, “I will do you justice. You have kept so precisely in the straight path of imaginary duty prescribed by law, that only to make you understand wherein you have failed towards me, I should be obliged to enter into details which would offend your dignity, and instruct you in matters which would seem to you to undermine all morality.”

“And you dare to speak of morality when you have but just left the house where you have dissipated your children’s fortune in debaucheries?” cried the Countess, maddened by her husband’s reticence.

“There, madame, I must correct you,” said the Count, coolly interrupting his wife. “Though Mademoiselle de Bellefeuille is rich, it is at nobody’s expense. My uncle was master of his fortune, and had several heirs. In his lifetime, and out of pure friendship, regarding her as his niece, he gave her the little estate of Bellefeuille. As for anything else, I owe it to his liberality —”

“Such conduct is only worthy of a Jacobin!” said the sanctimonious Angelique.

“Madame, you are forgetting that your own father was one of the Jacobins whom you scorn so uncharitably,” said the Count severely. “Citizen Bontems was signing death-warrants at a time when my uncle was doing France good service.”

Madame de Granville was silenced. But after a short pause, the remembrance of what she had just seen reawakened in her soul the jealousy which nothing can kill in a woman’s heart, and she murmured, as if to herself — “How can a woman thus destroy her own soul and that of others?”

“Bless me, madame,” replied the Count, tired of this dialogue, “you yourself may some day have to answer that question.” The Countess was scared. “You perhaps will be held excused by the merciful Judge, who will weigh our sins,” he went on, “in consideration of the conviction with which you have worked out my misery. I do not hate you — I hate those who have perverted your heart and your reason. You have prayed for me, just as Mademoiselle de Bellefeuille has given me her heart and crowned my life with love. You should have been my mistress and

the prayerful saint by turns. — Do me the justice to confess that I am no reprobate, no debauchee. My life was cleanly. Alas! after seven years of wretchedness, the craving for happiness led me by an imperceptible descent to love another woman and make a second home. And do not imagine that I am singular; there are in this city thousands of husbands, all led by various causes to live this twofold life.”

“Great God!” cried the Countess. “How heavy is the cross Thou hast laid on me to bear! If the husband Thou hast given me here below in Thy wrath can only be made happy through my death, take me to Thyself!”

“If you had always breathed such admirable sentiments and such devotion, we should be happy yet,” said the Count coldly.

“Indeed,” cried Angelique, melting into a flood of tears, “forgive me if I have done any wrong. Yes, monsieur, I am ready to obey you in all things, feeling sure that you will desire nothing but what is just and natural; henceforth I will be all you can wish your wife to be.”

“If your purpose, madame, is to compel me to say that I no longer love you, I shall find the cruel courage to tell you so. Can I command my heart? Can I wipe out in an instant the traces of fifteen years of suffering? — I have ceased to love. — These words contain a mystery as deep as lies the words *I love*. Esteem, respect, friendship may be won, lost, regained; but as to love — I might school myself for a thousand years, and it would not blossom again, especially for a woman too old to respond to it.”

“I hope, Monsieur le Comte, I sincerely hope, that such words may not be spoken to you some day by the woman you love, and in such a tone and accent —”

“Will you put on a dress *a la Grecque* this evening, and come to the Opera?”

The shudder with which the Countess received the suggestion was a mute reply.

Early in December 1833, a man, whose perfectly white hair and worn features seemed to show that he was aged by grief rather than by years, was walking at midnight along the Rue Gaillon. Having reached a house of modest appearance, and only two stories high, he paused to look up at one of the attic windows that pierced the roof at regular intervals. A dim light scarcely showed through the humble panes, some of which had been repaired with paper. The man below was watching the wavering glimmer with the vague curiosity of a Paris idler, when a

young man came out of the house. As the light of the street lamp fell full on the face of the first comer, it will not seem surprising that, in spite of the darkness, this young man went towards the passer-by, though with the hesitancy that is usual when we have any fear of making a mistake in recognizing an acquaintance.

“What, is it you,” cried he, “Monsieur le President? Alone at this hour, and so far from the Rue Saint–Lazare. Allow me to have the honor of giving you my arm. — The pavement is so greasy this morning, that if we do not hold each other up,” he added, to soothe the elder man’s susceptibilities, “we shall find it hard to escape a tumble.”

“But, my dear sir, I am no more than fifty-five, unfortunately for me,” replied the Comte de Granville. “A physician of your celebrity must know that at that age a man is still hale and strong.”

“Then you are in waiting on a lady, I suppose,” replied Horace Bianchon. “You are not, I imagine, in the habit of going about Paris on foot. When a man keeps such fine horses ——”

“Still, when I am not visiting in the evening, I commonly return from the Courts or the club on foot,” replied the Count.

“And with large sums of money about you, perhaps!” cried the doctor. “It is a positive invitation to the assassin’s knife.”

“I am not afraid of that,” said Granville, with melancholy indifference.

“But, at least, do not stand about,” said the doctor, leading the Count towards the boulevard. “A little more and I shall believe that you are bent of robbing me of your last illness, and dying by some other hand than mine.”

“You caught me playing the spy,” said the Count. “Whether on foot or in a carriage, and at whatever hour of the night I may come by, I have for some time past observed at a window on the third floor of your house the shadow of a person who seems to work with heroic constancy.”

The Count paused as if he felt some sudden pain. “And I take as great an interest in that garret,” he went on, “as a citizen of Paris must feel in the finishing of the Palais Royal.”

“Well,” said Horace Bianchon eagerly, “I can tell you —”

“Tell me nothing,” replied Granville, cutting the doctor short. “I would not

give a centime to know whether the shadow that moves across that shabby blind is that of a man or a woman, nor whether the inhabitant of that attic is happy or miserable. Though I was surprised to see no one at work there this evening, and though I stopped to look, it was solely for the pleasure of indulging in conjectures as numerous and as idiotic as those of idlers who see a building left half finished. For nine years, my young —” the Count hesitated to use a word; then he waved his hand, exclaiming —“No, I will not say friend — I hate everything that savors of sentiment. — Well, for nine years past I have ceased to wonder that old men amuse themselves with growing flowers and planting trees; the events of life have taught them disbelief in all human affection; and I grew old within a few days. I will no longer attach myself to any creature but to unreasoning animals, or plants, or superficial things. I think more of Taglioni’s grace than of all human feeling. I abhor life and the world in which I live alone. Nothing, nothing,” he went on, in a tone that startled the younger man, “no, nothing can move or interest me.”

“But you have children?”

“My children!” he repeated bitterly. “Yes — well, is not my eldest daughter the Comtesse de Vandenesse? The other will, through her sister’s connections, make some good match. As to my sons, have they not succeeded? The Viscount was public prosecutor at Limoges, and is now President of the Court at Orleans; the younger is public prosecutor in Paris. — My children have their own cares, their own anxieties and business to attend to. If of all those hearts one had been devoted to me, if one had tried by entire affection to fill up the void I have here,” and he struck his breast, “well, that one would have failed in life, have sacrificed it to me. And why should he? Why? To bring sunshine into my few remaining years — and would he have succeeded? Might I not have accepted such generosity as a debt? But, doctor,” and the Count smiled with deep irony, “it is not for nothing that we teach them arithmetic and how to count. At this moment perhaps they are waiting for my money.”

“O Monsieur le Comte, how could such an idea enter your head — you who are kind, friendly, and humane! Indeed, if I were not myself a living proof of the benevolence you exercise so liberally and so nobly —”

“To please myself,” replied the Count. “I pay for a sensation, as I would tomorrow pay a pile of gold to recover the most childish illusion that would but make my heart glow. — I help my fellow-creatures for my own sake, just as I

gamble; and I look for gratitude from none. I should see you die without blinking; and I beg of you to feel the same with regard to me. I tell you, young man, the events of life have swept over my heart like the lavas of Vesuvius over Herculaneum. The town is there — dead.”

“Those who have brought a soul as warm and as living as yours was to such a pitch of indifference are indeed guilty!”

“Say no more,” said the Count, with a shudder of aversion.

“You have a malady which you ought to allow me to treat,” said Bianchon in a tone of deep emotion.

“What, do you know of a cure for death?” cried the Count irritably.

“I undertake, Monsieur le Comte, to revive the heart you believe to be frozen.”

“Are you a match for Talma, then?” asked the Count satirically.

“No, Monsieur le Comte. But Nature is as far above Talma as Talma is superior to me. — Listen: the garret you are interested in is inhabited by a woman of about thirty, and in her love is carried to fanaticism. The object of her adoration is a young man of pleasing appearance but endowed by some malignant fairy with every conceivable vice. This fellow is a gambler, and it is hard to say which he is most addicted to — wine or women; he has, to my knowledge, committed acts deserving punishment by law. Well, and to him this unhappy woman sacrificed a life of ease, a man who worshiped her, and the father of her children. — But what is wrong, Monsieur le Comte?”

“Nothing. Go on.”

“She has allowed him to squander a perfect fortune; she would, I believe, give him the world if she had it; she works night and day; and many a time she has, without a murmur, seen the wretch she adores rob her even of the money saved to buy the clothes the children need, and their food for the morrow. Only three days ago she sold her hair, the finest hair I ever saw; he came in, she could not hide the gold piece quickly enough, and he asked her for it. For a smile, for a kiss, she gave up the price of a fortnight’s life and peace. Is it not dreadful, and yet sublime? — But work is wearing her cheeks hollow. Her children’s crying has broken her heart; she is ill, and at this moment on her wretched bed. This evening they had nothing to eat; the children have not strength to cry, they were silent when I went

up.”

Horace Bianchon stood still. Just then the Comte de Granville, in spite of himself, as it were, had put his hand into his waistcoat pocket.

“I can guess, my young friend, how it is that she is yet alive if you attend her,” said the elder man.

“O poor soul!” cried the doctor, “who could refuse to help her? I only wish I were richer, for I hope to cure her of her passion.”

“But how can you expect me to pity a form of misery of which the joys to me would seem cheaply purchased with my whole fortune!” exclaimed the Count, taking his hand out of his pocket empty of the notes which Bianchon had supposed his patron to be feeling for. “That woman feels, she is alive! Would not Louis XV. have given his kingdom to rise from the grave and have three days of youth and life! And is not that the history of thousands of dead men, thousands of sick men, thousands of old men?”

“Poor Caroline!” cried Bianchon.

As he heard the name the Count shuddered, and grasped the doctor’s arm with the grip of an iron vise, as it seemed to Bianchon.

“Her name is Caroline Crochard?” asked the President, in a voice that was evidently broken.

“Then you know her?” said the doctor, astonished.

“And the wretch’s name is Solvet. — Ay, you have kept your word!” exclaimed Granville; “you have roused my heart to the most terrible pain it can suffer till it is dust. That emotion, too, is a gift from hell, and I always know how to pay those debts.”

By this time the Count and the doctor had reached the corner of the Rue de la Chaussee d’Antin. One of those night-birds who wonder round with a basket on their back and crook in hand, and were, during the Revolution, facetiously called the Committee of Research, was standing by the curbstone where the two men now stopped. This scavenger had a shriveled face worthy of those immortalized by Charlet in his caricatures of the sweepers of Paris.

“Do you ever pick up a thousand-franc note?”

“Now and then, master.”

“And you restore them?”

“It depends on the reward offered.”

“You’re the man for me,” cried the Count, giving the man a thousand-franc note. “Take this, but, remember, I give it to you on condition of your spending it at the wineshop, of your getting drunk, fighting, beating your wife, blacking your friends’ eyes. That will give work to the watch, the surgeon, the druggist — perhaps to the police, the public prosecutor, the judge, and the prison warders. Do not try to do anything else, or the devil will be revenged on you sooner or later.”

A draughtsman would need at once the pencil of Charlet and of Callot, the brush of Teniers and of Rembrandt, to give a true notion of this night-scene.

“Now I have squared accounts with hell, and had some pleasure for my money,” said the Count in a deep voice, pointing out the indescribable physiognomy of the gaping scavenger to the doctor, who stood stupefied. “As for Caroline Crochard! — she may die of hunger and thirst, hearing the heartrending shrieks of her starving children, and convinced of the baseness of the man she loves. I will not give a sou to rescue her; and because you have helped her, I will see you no more ——”

The Count left Bianchon standing like a statue, and walked as briskly as a young man to the Rue Saint-Lazare, soon reaching the little house where he resided, and where, to his surprise, he found a carriage waiting at the door.

“Monsieur, your son, the attorney-general, came about an hour since,” said the man-servant, “and is waiting for you in your bedroom.”

Granville signed to the man to leave him.

“What motive can be strong enough to require you to infringe the order I have given my children never to come to me unless I send for them?” asked the Count of his son as he went into the room.

“Father,” replied the younger man in a tremulous voice, and with great respect, “I venture to hope that you will forgive me when you have heard me.”

“Your reply is proper,” said the Count. “Sit down,” and he pointed to a chair, “But whether I walk up and down, or take a seat, speak without heeding me.”

“Father,” the son went on, “this afternoon, at four o’clock, a very young man who was arrested in the house of a friend of mine, whom he had robbed to a considerable extent, appealed to you. — He says he is your son.”

“His name?” asked the Count hoarsely.

“Charles Crochard.”

“That will do,” said the father, with an imperious wave of the hand.

Granville paced the room in solemn silence, and his son took care not to break it.

“My son,” he began, and the words were pronounced in a voice so mild and fatherly, that the young lawyer started, “Charles Crochard spoke the truth. — I am glad you came to me to-night, my good Eugene,” he added. “Here is a considerable sum of money” — and he gave him a bundle of banknotes — “you can make any use of them you think proper in this matter. I trust you implicitly, and approve beforehand whatever arrangements you may make, either in the present or for the future. — Eugene my dear son, kiss me. We part perhaps for the last time. I shall tomorrow crave my dismissal from the King, and I am going to Italy.

“Though a father owes no account of his life to his children, he is bound to bequeath to them the experience Fate sells him so dearly — is it not a part of their inheritance? — When you marry,” the count went on, with a little involuntary shudder, “do not undertake it lightly; that act is the most important of all which society requires of us. Remember to study at your leisure the character of the woman who is to be your partner; but consult me too, I will judge of her myself. A lack of union between husband and wife, from whatever cause, leads to terrible misfortune; sooner or later we are always punished for contravening the social law. — But I will write to you on this subject from Florence. A father who has the honor of presiding over a supreme court of justice must not have to blush in the presence of his son. Good-bye.”

PARIS, February 1830-January 1842.