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THE COLLECTED WORKS

OF PIERRE LOUŸS

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APHRODITE

WOMAN AND PUPPET

THE SONGS OF BILITIS

THE ADVENTURES OF KING PAUSOLE

THE TWILIGHT OF THE NYMPHS

SANGUINES · PSYCHE

Illustrations by Harry G. Spanner

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FOREWORD

IN 1891, a young Frenchman, Pierre Louÿs, issued to his friends a small volume of poems, "Astarte," of which seventy-five copies had been printed at his own expense. He was then twenty-one years of age and apparently well established in a chosen circle, possessed of a complete classic education, in command of five or six languages and seemingly provided with the essentials to comfortable existence. Three years later, he published "The Songs of Bilitis," "Leda," his translation of Meleager, and the first chapter of the future "Aphrodite" under the title of "Chrysis," all in strictly limited editions. In the midst of this activity, he found time, also, to polish the French phraseology of Oscar Wilde's "Salome." In the following year appeared "Ariadne," "The House on the Nile" and a translation of Lucian's hetairai dialogues. Then came "Aphrodite" on which he had been working, off and on, for several years, appearing first, under the title of "Slavery," as a serial in the *Mercure de France*, and then, under its definitive title, in an edition of six hundred and nine copies.

Up to this time, the outward course of events seemed to mark an auspicious beginning of a highly productive literary career, except for one peculiarity: the close limitation of the editions printed. But "Aphrodite" marked a turning point.

Let us turn back the years for a glance at this young author.

From the accounts of his friends, we see Pierre Louÿs as a young man of charming personality, full of energy and enthusiasm, interested in anything curious or beautiful. He is surrounded by rare books and manuscripts, all personally and carefully selected. He lives quietly and studiously, rather apart from the crowded aspects of life, and delights in playing host to his chosen friends, among whom we see Claude Debussy, André Gide, Gabriele d'Annunzio, José-Maria de Hérédia. For them, and to satisfy his creative energy, he writes always,

fining and refining into superb, poetic French the visions which glow in his imagination.

Then, almost overnight, he becomes one of the outstanding figures of the French literary world.

Commenting on "Aphrodite," François Coppée, while taking exception to some of the theories expounded in the Preface, wrote: "And now, here is a young man, a very young man—Pierre Louÿs is not yet twenty-six years old—who gives us a beautiful book, a book written in impeccable language, with classic formulas and simple words, but renovated and rejuvenated by the power of discernment and art; a very learned book which reveals on each page a profound knowledge of antiquity and of Greek literature; but without any pedantry and never smelling of oil; a book the story of which contains without doubt an ingenious and skillful symbol, but a symbol which is perfectly clear; a book, finally, which is a true product of our tradition, animated with our genius and in which beauty, power and grace display themselves with all the brilliance of dazzling sunlight."

Such praise from Coppée who, incidentally, had not met Pierre Louÿs personally, was significant. A public, unlimited edition of the book was demanded and the famous Borel edition, with illustrations by Calbet, was issued. It sold prodigiously. A public, until then acquainted only with "Venus," discarded it permanently in favor of the Greek nomenclature.

And Pierre Louÿs' intimate, scholarly world burst about him and left him standing on a pedestal in the middle of a public square. Which, evidently, was by no means what he had anticipated.

Two years later, however, he gave to the publishers his "Woman and Puppet," a realistic story founded on Casanova's adventure with the Charpillon; and, in 1901, he set all Paris laughing over "King Pausole."

But, apparently, Pierre Louÿs was far from satisfied. The widespread distribution of his books displeased him. Men and women wrote him to ask for a fuller description of Queen Berenice's "costume, shamelessly pierced." Eugène Ledrain had criticized him for representing Chrysis as a Jewess, claiming that Lesbianism did not exist among the Daughters of Israel. He felt that the true spirit of his work escaped

readers intent on unimportant details. His seclusion was endangered; he was too conscious of a public he did not particularly like. He decided it was time for him to follow the dictum he himself had put into the mouth of Phrasilas. He stopped writing.

THE fact that Pierre Louÿs' extraordinary reticence was not a pose is attested by the sincerity of the man himself and by the certainty that he spent the last twenty-five years of his life in silent, cloistered seclusion among his books, his wife deserted or deserting, waiting for the end, which came in his fifty-fifth year. The small amount of literary material released during this period was, in the main, earlier, unpublished work. His romance, "Psyche," remained, so to speak, as it fell, unfinished in spite of the pleadings of his friends. His life became one of the minor mysteries of Paris.

This abrupt and voluntary curtailment of so promising a career would seem unfortunate were it not that there is a certain amount of truth in Phrasilas' remark: "Perhaps we each have but a single thing to say in our life, and those who attempt to speak at greater length are too ambitious." Pierre Louÿs had several things to say and undoubtedly said them in an immortal manner. But he may have sensed a limitation; and, if so, he had that courage to anticipate it which may well serve as a world-wide example. It is probable, however, that he felt, not that he had said all he could, but that he had said enough.

And his feeling about his works is equally understandable. They are, in the main, very delicate in detail and atmosphere, beautiful but ethereal. They seem like timid, nude virgins, approaching with hesitant steps, uncertain whether their reception will be a gasp of admiration or a coarse grin. He had put into these books visions which men, fortunate enough to have them, usually secrete deep in their hearts.

AFTER Pierre Louÿs' death in 1925, the incomplete "Psyche" was published and, following this, a few minor writings which are relatively unimportant and which he himself would never have released. It is probable that "Psyche," being an unfinished work, will never be a famous

book; and this is unfortunate because it is, perhaps, the most delicate and most significant production of his genius. But its fabric is far too frail to be generally appreciated in today's world; and this he knew very well. It has an atmosphere as intangible as the soul. "It is too intimate."

*

IT HAS been pointed out that, in his writings, Pierre Louÿs drew copiously on classic sources. The fables of Byblis, Leda and Danaë have been expounded by many authors. Some of the songs of Bilitis are almost direct translations from the Greek Anthology. But he brought to these fragments such a wealth of imagination, such a sympathetic understanding, that they were transformed under his touch.

"Aphrodite" is an interesting example. The story of Bacchis and her mirror we find in Athenæus (Bohn XIII-66): "Plangon the Milesian was also a celebrated courtesan; and she, as she was most wonderfully beautiful, was beloved by a young man of Colophon, who had a mistress already whose name was Bacchis. Accordingly, when this young man began to address his solicitations to Plangon, she, having heard of the beauty of Bacchis, and wishing to make the young man abandon his love for her, when she was unable to effect that, she required as the price of her favors the necklace of Bacchis, which was very celebrated. And he, as he was exceedingly in love, entreated Bacchis not to see him totally overwhelmed with despair; and Bacchis, seeing the excited state of the young man, gave him the necklace. And Plangon, when she saw the freedom from jealousy which was exhibited by Bacchis, sent her back the necklace but kept the young man; and ever after Plangon and Bacchis were friends, loving the young man in common." The episode of the dream comes from Plutarch (Demetrios 27): "A young Egyptian had long made suit to Thonis, the courtesan, offering a sum of gold for her favors. But, before it came to pass, he dreamed one night that he had obtained them; and, satisfied with the shadow, felt no more desire for the substance. Upon this, Thonis brought an action for the sum. Bocchoris, the judge, on hearing the case, ordered the defendant to bring into court the full amount in a vessel which he was to move to and fro in his hand, and the shadow of it was to be adjudged to Thonis."

From these bald outlines, his classic lore and his impressions while himself walking the streets of Alexandria, Pierre Louÿs reconstructed, not merely the picture but the very spirit of the effeminate, sensuous Alexandrian manifestation. And, on his sparkling canvas, he ignored the dark side of misery, the petty inconveniences of life, exactly as the voluptuaries themselves ignored them.

*

On Pierre Louÿs' books, particularly "Aphrodite," "Bilitis" and those smaller works now collected under the title of "The Twilight of the Nymphs," were lavished the resources of the finest French illustrators and printers. Sumptuous editions were issued at high prices. The miniature books of Borel's "Collection Lotus Alba," such as Leda, although costing but a few francs, were wonders of perfection in illustration and format. And a comprehensive collection of these books might well be the pride of any bibliophile. Of them all, however, "Aphrodite" has remained the favorite. Even in 1915 a new edition was printed, and it is still kept in print to satisfy an apparently inexhaustible market.

*

Those who read these works now for the first time may expect to be occasionally startled to about the same degree that "Trilby" startled the Americans of the Nineties. Fortunately, perhaps, Pierre Louÿs was little known to us in that period; he would have been as staggering as the appearance on our sedate beaches of a present-day young lady in her "sun-tan" bathing suit.

But we have changed. Unless we are professional reformers, we are no longer shocked, except at tragedy. Our cabbage beds are not viewed as indices of the rise or fall of population, and we can, in the main, observe public semi-nudity without rioting. Even the sinister manifestations of sex are known to all who care to read about them. And our physical health and perfection now receive as much, if not more, attention than the ultimate destination of our soul. All of which is a rather encouraging development except as it tends to make our young women less content to be merely curious and the more intense of our young men to shoot themselves in the odd belief that they have been everywhere and seen everything.

Without undue distraction, therefore, we can appreciate Pierre Louÿs' earnest striving for beauty, both in the written word and in the impression conveyed. We must, however, realize that in his presentations he is often symbolic rather than realistic. We know, as he did, that worship of the physical, literally, is essentially the religion of youth; and that any religion or scheme of existence, such as the Alexandrian, which ignored maturity and old age, which depended for stimulation on physical pleasures, is falsely based and cannot endure. We can appreciate, also, throughout his works, many scenes of indescribable charm which haunt the memory, often with a touch of wistful sadness. Perhaps he may help us better to feel the spirit of the nocturnal, silver-flooded landscape, the glory in the surge of the sea, the mystery of life in the shadowy glades of the forest. We need some one to teach us such things.

MITCHELL S. BUCK

Philadelphia 12 August 1932

APHRODITE

TRANSLATED BY

MITCHELL · S · BUCK

One day, Denys brought him three courtesans and told him to choose the one who pleased him most. Aristippos kept all three, saying in excuse that Paris had been none the happier by preferring one woman above all others.

Afterwards, he conducted the girls to his door and dismissed them; with so much ease could he either indulge in love or cure himself of it.

DIOGENES LAERTIUS, *Life of Aristippos.*

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AUTHOR'S PREFACE

THE erudite Prodicos of Ceos, who flourished toward the end of the first century before our era, is the author of the celebrated apologue which St. Basil recommended to Christian meditation: "Herakles between virtue and voluptuousness." We know that Herakles decided for the first, and was thus enabled to accomplish a certain number of great crimes against the Hinds, the Amazons, the Golden Apples and the Giants. If Prodicos had limited himself to that, he would have written only a fable of readily comprehended symbolism, but he was a clever philosopher and his repertory of tales, "The Hours," which was divided into three parts, presented the moral truths under their three different aspects which correspond to the three ages of life. For little children he was pleased to propose as an example the austere choice of Herakles; to youths he doubtless related the voluptuous choice of Paris; and I imagine that, to ripe men, he said nearly this:

"Odysseus was wandering in the chase one day, at the foot of the mountains of Delphi, when he met on his path two virgins who held each other by the hand. The one had hair of violets, transparent eyes, and grave lips; she said to him: 'I am Arete.' The other had softly tinted eyelids, delicate hands and tender breasts; she said to him: 'I am Tryphe.' And they said together: 'Choose between us.' But the subtle Odysseus responded wisely: 'How could I choose—you are inseparable. The eyes which have seen you pass—one without the other—have glimpsed but a sterile shadow. Just as sincere virtue does not deprive itself of the eternal joys which voluptuousness brings to it, so luxury would go ill without a certain grandeur of soul. I will follow you both. Show me the way.' As he finished, the two visions melted together and Odysseus knew that he had spoken with the great goddess Aphrodite."

THE feminine personage who occupies the principal place in the romance whose pages you are about to turn, is an antique courtesan; but be reassured: she will not convert herself.

She will be loved neither by a monk, a prophet, nor a god. In present-day literature, this is an originality.

Rather she will be a courtesan, with all the frankness, the ardor and the pride of every human being who has a vocation and who holds in society a freely chosen place; she will aspire to raise herself to the highest point; she will not even imagine a need for excuse or mystery in her life. And this requires explanation.

Up to this day, the modern writers who have addressed themselves to a public free from the prejudices of young girls and schoolboys have employed a laborious stratagem whose hypocrisy displeases me: "I have depicted voluptuousness as it is," they say, "in order to exalt virtue." But I, at the beginning of a romance whose intrigue develops at Alexandria, refuse absolutely to commit this anachronism.

Love, with all its consequences, was, for the ancient Greeks, the sentiment most virtuous and most fecund in grandeurs. They did not attach to it those ideas of shamelessness and immodesty which Israelite tradition, along with the Christian doctrine, has handed down to us, Herodotus (1.10) says to us, quite naturally: "Among some barbarous races it is considered disgraceful to appear naked." When the Greeks or the Latins wished to insult a man who frequented "daughters of love," they called him «μοῖχος» or Moechus, which merely signifies "adulterer." On the other hand, a man and a woman who, being free from other bonds, united themselves, even though this were in public and whatever their youth might be, were considered as injuring no one and were left at liberty.

One sees that the life of the ancients could not be judged after the moral ideas which come to us at the present time from Geneva.

As for me, I have written this book with the simplicity an Athenian would have brought to a relation of the same adventures. And I hope that it will be read in the same spirit.

Judging the ancient Greeks by the ideas actually received, *not one* exact translation of their greatest writers could be left in the hands of a young student. If M. Mounet-Sully should play his rôle of Oedipos without cuts, the police would suspend the representation. If M. Leconte de Lisle had not prudently expurgated Théocritos, his version would have been suppressed the same day it was put on sale.

One considers Aristophanes exceptional? Yet we possess important fragments of fourteen hundred and forty comedies, due to one hundred and thirty-two other Greek poets, some of whom, such as Alexis, Philetor, Strattis, Eubolos and Cratinos, have left us admirable verse, and no one has yet dared translate this shameless and sublime collection.

One quotes always, for the purpose of defending Greek customs, the teachings of some philosophers who condemned the sexual pleasures. There is confusion here. Those scattered moralists reproved all excesses

of the senses indiscriminately, without the existence, for them, of an essential difference between the debauch of the bed and that of the table.

He who, today, at a restaurant in Paris, orders with impunity a six-louis dinner for himself alone, would have been judged by them as guilty, and no less so than another who would give a too intimate assignation in the middle of the street, being for that condemned by the existing laws to a year of prison. Moreover, these austere philosophers were generally regarded by antique society as abnormal and dangerous madmen; they were mocked on the stage, treated with blows in the streets, seized by tyrants to serve as court buffoons and exiled by free citizens who judged them unworthy of submitting to capital punishment.

It is then by a conscious and voluntary deceit that modern educators from the Renaissance to the present time have represented the antique moral system as the inspiration of their narrow virtues. If this moral system were great—if it merited indeed to be taken for a model and to be obeyed—it is precisely because no system has better known how to distinguish the just from the unjust according to a criterion of beauty: to proclaim the right of every man to seek individual happiness within the limits set by the rights of others and to declare that there is nothing under the sun more sacred than physical love—nothing more beautiful than the human body.

Such was the moral of the people who built the Acropolis; and if I add that it has remained that of all great minds, I will but state the value of a common-place, so well is it proven that the superior intelligences of artists, writers, warriors or statesmen have never held its majestic tolerance to be illicit. Aristotle began life by dissipating his patrimony in the company of debauched women; Sappho gave her name to a special vice; Cæsar was the *moechus calvus:*—nor can we imagine Racine avoiding girls of the theatre and Napoleon practicing abstinence. The romances of Mirabeau, the Greek verses of Chenier, the correspondence of Diderot and the minor works of Montesquieu equal in boldness even the writings of Catullus. And, of all French authors the most austere, the most pious, the most laborious—Buffon—does one wish to know by what maxim he guides his counsel of sentimental intrigues: "Love! Why dost thou form the happy state of all beings and the misfortune of man?—It is because, in this passion, *only the physical* is good, and because the moral side is worthless."

WHENCE comes this? And how does it happen that across the upsetting of antique ideas the great Greek sensuality remains like a ray of light upon the noblest foreheads?

It is because sensuality is a condition, mysterious but necessary and creative, of intellectual development. Those who have not felt to their limit the strongest demands of the flesh, whether as a blessing or as a curse, are incapable of understanding fully the demands of the spirit. Just as the beauty of the soul illumines the features, so only the virility of the body nourishes the brain. The worst insult that Delacroix could address to men—that which he threw indiscriminately at the railers of Rubens and at the detractors of Ingres was this terrible word: "Eunuchs!"

Better yet, it seems that the genius of races, like that of individuals, is, before all, sensual. All the cities which have reigned over the world —Babylon, Alexandria, Athens, Rome, Venice, Paris—have been, by a general law, all the more licentious as they were more powerful, as though their dissoluteness were necessary to their splendor. The cities where the legislator has attempted to implant artificially narrow and unproductive virtue have been, from the first day, condemned to absolute death. It was thus with Lacedæmonia which, in the midst of the most prodigious flight to which the human soul has ever risen—between Corinth and Alexandria, between Syracuse and Miletus—has left us neither a poet, a painter, a philosopher, an historian nor a scientist; barely the popular renown of a sort of Bobillot who, with his three hundred men, met death in a mountain pass without even gaining a victory. For this reason, after two thousand years measuring the emptiness of this Spartan virtue we can, according to the exhortation of Renan: "Curse the soil where this mistress of sombre errors existed and insult her because she is no more."

SHALL we ever see a return of the days of Ephesos and Cyrene? Alas! the modern world succumbs under an invasion of ugliness; the civilizations move toward the North and enter into the fog, the cold, the mud. What darkness! People clothed in black circulate through infected streets. Of what are they thinking?—we know not; but our twenty-five years shudder at being thus exiled among old men.

As for those who ever regret that they knew not this earth intoxicated youth which we call antique life, let them be permitted to live again, through a fecund illusion, in the time when human nudity—the most perfect form, since we believe in the image of God, which we can

know or even conceive—could reveal itself through the features of a sacred courtesan before the twenty thousand pilgrims upon the strands of Eleusis; where the most sensual love—the divine love whence we are born—was without stain, without shame and without sin; may they be permitted to forget eighteen barbarous, hypocritical and ugly centuries; to move from the marsh to the spring; to return piously to original beauty; amidst the sound of enchanted flutes to rebuild the Great Temple; and to enthusiastically consecrate to the sanctuaries of the true faith their hearts ever enthralled by the immortal Aphrodite.

PIERRE LOUŸS

BOOK ONE

CHAPTER ONE

Chrysis

LYING upon her breast, her elbows forward, her legs apart and her cheek resting in her hand, she pierced little symmetrical holes in the pillow of green linen with a long golden pin.

Since she had waked, two hours after the middle of the day and quite tired from having slept too much, she had remained alone upon the disordered bed, covered only on one side by a vast flood of hair.

This mass of hair was dazzling and profound, soft as the fur of a wild beast, longer than a wing, supple, numberless, animated, full of warmth. It covered the half of her back, spread itself under her naked belly and shone even as far as her knees in thick and rounded ringlets. The young woman was rolled up in this precious fleece whose golden brown, almost metallic, reflections had caused the courtesans of Alexandria to name her Chrysis.

It was not the smooth hair of the Syrians of the court nor the tinted hair of the Asiatics nor the brown and black hair of the daughters of Egypt. It was that of an Aryan race, of the Galilæans from beyond the sand.

Chrysis. She loved that name. The young men who came to see her called her Chrysé like Aphrodite in the verses which they left, with garlands of roses, at her door in the mornings. She did not believe in Aphrodite but she was pleased that they should compare her to the goddess and she went sometimes to the temple to give her, as to a friend, boxes of perfume and blue veils.

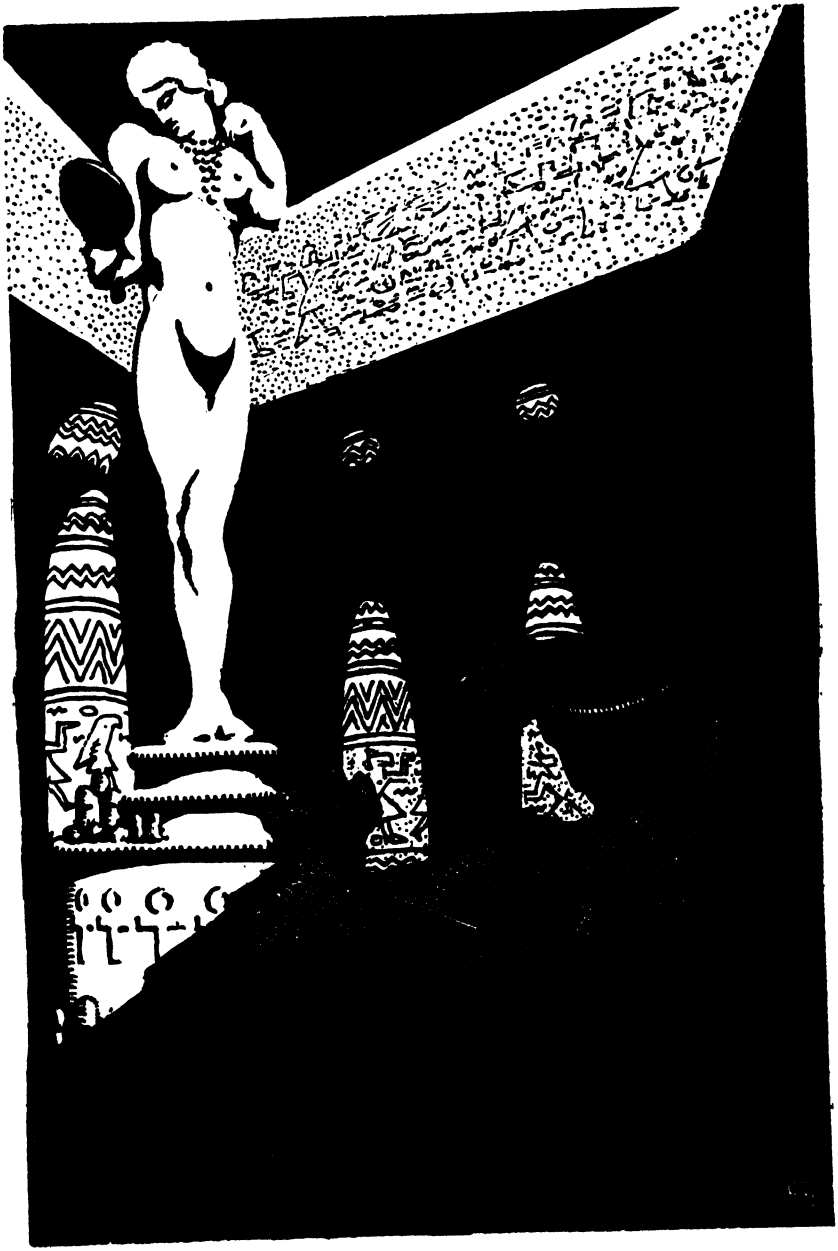
She was born on the banks of the lake of Gennesaret in a country of shadow and of sun overrun with rose-laurels. Her mother went in

the evenings to wait upon the road to Jerusalem for the travelers and merchants, and gave herself to them in the grass in the midst of the pastoral silence. She was a woman much respected in Galilee. The priests did not turn aside from her door for she was charitable and pious; the lambs of the sacrifice were always paid for by her, the benediction of the Eternal extended over her house. Now, when she became pregnant, as her condition was a scandal (for she had no husband) a man who was celebrated for having the gift of prophecy said that she would give birth to a daughter who would one day bear around her neck "The wealth and the faith of a nation." She did not quite understand how that could be, but she named the child Sarah—that is to say, *Princess* in Hebrew. And that silenced the evil speaking. Of this Chrysis had never known, the diviner having told her mother how dangerous it is to reveal to people prophecies of which they are the object. She knew nothing of her future. That is why she often thought of it. She recalled but little of her childhood and did not like to speak of it. The only very clear sentiment which had remained with her was of the fright and the vexation which were caused every day by the anxious surveillance of her mother who, the hour being come to go forth upon the road, shut her up in their room for interminable hours. She recalled also the round window through which she saw the waters of the lake, the mist-blue fields, the transparent sky, the light air of the Galilæan country. The house was surrounded by pink flax and tamarisks. Thorny caper bushes raised at hazard their green heads over the fine mist of the blue-grass. Little girls bathed in a limpid brook where one found red shells under the tufts of laurel blossoms. And there were flowers on the water, flowers in all the meadow and great lilies on the mountains.

She was twelve years old when she escaped to follow a troop of young riders who were going to Tyre as merchants of ivory and whom she accosted before a well. They had adorned their long-tailed horses with many-colored tufts. She recalled well how they took her away, pale with joy, on their mounts and how they had stopped a second time during the night—a night so light that one did not see a star.

Neither had she forgotten the entry into Tyre: she at the head upon the panniers of a pack horse, holding to the mane by her fists and letting her bare calves hang down proudly to show the women of the town that she had blood along her legs. The same evening they departed for Egypt. She followed the sellers of ivory to the market of Alexandria.

And it was there, in a little white house with a terrace and little columns, that they had left her, two months later, with her bronze



mirror, rugs, new cushions and a handsome Hindoo slave who knew how to dress the hair of courtesans. Others had come, the evening of their departure, and still others the next day.

As she dwelt in the extreme Eastern Quarter which the young Greeks of Bruchion disdained to frequent, she knew, for a long time, like her mother, only travelers and merchants. She did not see again her passing lovers: she could please herself with them and leave them quickly before loving them. However, she had inspired interminable passions. Masters of caravans had been seen to sell their merchandise at a beggarly price in order to remain where she was and ruin themselves in a few nights. With the fortunes of these men she had bought jewels, bed-cushions, rare perfumes, flowered robes and four slaves.

She had come to understand many foreign tongues and knew tales of all countries. Assyrians had told her the loves of Douzi and Iskhtar; Phœnicians those of Ashktaroth and Adonis. Greek girls of the isles had told her the legend of Iphis while teaching her strange caresses which had surprised her at first but finally charmed her to a point where she could no longer do without them for a whole day. She knew also the loves of Atalantea and how, from their example, flute-players, still virgins, enervate the most robust men. Finally, her Hindoo slave, patiently during seven years, had taught her to the last details the complex and voluptuous art of the courtesans of Palibothra.

For love, like music, is an art. It gives emotion of the same order, as delicate, as vibrating, perhaps even more intense; and Chrysis, who knew its every rhythm and subtility, esteemed herself, and rightly, a greater artist than Plango herself, who was, however, a musician of the temple.

Seven years she lived thus without dreaming of a life more happy or more diversified than hers. But a little before her twentieth year, when from a young girl she became a woman and saw, gently appearing under her breasts the first charming line of nascent maturity, ambition suddenly came to her.

And one morning as she awoke, two hours after the middle of the day, quite tired from having slept too much, she turned over on her breast across the bed, her legs apart, rested her cheek in her hand and, with a long golden pin, pierced with little symmetrical holes her pillow of green linen.

She reflected profoundly.

There were at first four little points which made a square and a point in the middle. Then four other points to make a larger square. Then she tried to make a circle. . . . But it was a little difficult.

Then she pierced points at random and commenced to call:

"Djala! Djala!"

Djala was her Hindoo slave who called herself Djalantachtchandrapchapala, which means: "Changeful-as-the-image-of-the-moon-upon-the-water." Chrysis was too lazy to say the entire name.

The slave entered and stood near the door without quite shutting it.

"Djala, who came yesterday?"

"Dost thou not know?"

"No. I did not look at him. Was he pleasing? I think I slept the whole time. I was weary. I remember nothing of it. At what hour did he go? Early this morning?"

"At sunrise he said . . ."

"What did he leave? Is it much? No—don't tell me. I don't care. What did he say? Has no one come since his departure? Will he return? Give me my bracelets."

The slave brought a casket but Chrysis did not even glance at it and, raising her arms as high as she could:

"Ah! Djala," she said, "Ah! Djala! . . . I would like to have extraordinary adventures."

"Everything is extraordinary," said Djala, "or nothing. The days are like each other."

"Not at all. Formerly it was not so. In every country in the world the gods have descended upon the earth and have loved mortal women. Ah! on what beds must they be waited for, in what forests must they be sought, they who are a little more than men? What prayers must be said that they come, they who would teach me something or make me forget everything? And if the gods will descend no more, if they are dead or if they are too old, Djala, will I also die without having seen a man who will bring tragic events into my life?"

She turned over on her back and interlaced her fingers.

"If someone should adore me, it seems to me that I would find much pleasure in making him suffer until he died of it. Those who come to me are not worthy of being wept for—and then, it is my fault too—it is I who call them, why should they love me?"

"What bracelet today?"

"I will wear them all. But leave me. I need no one. Go upon the steps of the door, and if anyone comes say that I am with my lover, a black slave whom I pay. . . . Go."

"Thou wilt not go out?"

"Yes, I will go out alone—I will dress myself alone. I will not come back. Go!—Go!"

She let one foot drop on the rug and stretched herself erect. Djala had gone out softly.

She walked very slowly through the room, her hands clasped behind her neck, absorbed in the delight of applying her bare feet, moist with perspiration, to the cool pavement. Then she entered her bath. To regard herself through the water gave her great pleasure. She saw herself like a great shell of pearl open upon a rock. Her skin became harmonious and perfect; the lines of her legs lengthened in a blue light; her whole figure was more supple; she recognized her hands no longer. The lightness of her body was such that she raised herself upon two fingers, let herself float for an instant and fall back softly upon the marble amidst a light stirring which lapped under her chin. The water penetrated her ears with the provocation of a kiss.

The hour of the bath was that where Chrysis commenced to adore herself. All the parts of her body became, one after another, the object of tender admiration and of a prolonged caress. With her hair and her breasts she made a thousand charming plays. Sometimes she even accorded a more direct satisfaction to her perpetual desires, for no place of repose seemed to her more propitious to the calculated slowness of this delicate relief.

The day drew to a close. She rose up in the basin, came out of the water and walked toward the door. The marks of her feet shone upon the stones. Swaying and as though exhausted, she opened the door wide and paused, her arm stretched out on the latch, then entered and standing, wet, near her bed, said to the slave:

"Dry me."

The Malabar woman took a large sponge in her hand and passed it into the soft golden hair of Chrysis which streamed backward, laden with water; she dried it, scattered it, shook it gently and then, plunging the sponge into a jar of oil, passed it caressingly over her mistress' body before rubbing her with a rough cloth which made the supple skin redden.

Chrysis buried herself, shuddering, in the coolness of a marble seat and murmured:

"Dress my hair."

In the level rays of the evening, the still damp and heavy hair shone like a shower luminous in the sun. The slave took it in handfuls and twisted it. She made it turn upon itself like a great serpent of metal which the straight pins of gold pierced like arrows. She rolled it about with a green band, three times crossed, in order to heighten the reflection by contrast to the silk. Chrysis held at arm's length her mirror of polished copper. Idly she watched the dark hands of the slave move in the heavy hair, round the clusters, gather in the straying locks and

sculpture the head-dress like a vase of moulded clay. When all was done, Djala went on her knees before her mistress and shaved closely the swell of the delta so that the young girl would have, in the eyes of her lovers, all the nudity of a statue.

Chrysis became more grave and said in a low voice:

"Tint me."

A little box of rosewood which came from the isle Dioscoris contained tints of all colors. With a brush of camel-hair the slave took a little black paste which she placed upon the long, finely curved lashes in order that the eyes should appear more blue. Two decided strokes of a crayon lengthened them, softened them; a bluish powder leadened the lids; two spots of bright vermilion accentuated the corners of the tears. It was necessary, to fix the tints, that the face and the breast be covered with ointment. With a soft feather dipped in white pigment, Djala painted white streaks along the arms and on the neck; with a little brush full of carmine she ensanguined the mouth and touched the points of the breasts; her fingers, which had spread over the cheeks a light cloud of red powder, marked at the top of the thighs the three deep folds of the waist and in the rounded croup two mobile dimples; then with a pad of tinted leather she slightly colored the elbows and revived the lustre of the ten nails. The toilette was finished.

Then Chrysis began to smile and said to the Hindoo:

"Sing to me."

She sat with arched back in her marble arm-chair. Her pins were like golden rays behind her face. Her hands, resting upon her breast, spaced between the shoulders the red necklace of her painted nails and her white feet were reunited upon the stone.

Djala, crouched near the wall, recalled love songs of India:

"Chrysis. . . ."

She sang in a monotonous voice.

"Chrysis, thy hair is like a swarm of bees resting upon a tree. The warm wind of the south penetrates it with the dew of the struggles of love and the damp perfume of the night-flowers."

The young girl with her slower and softer voice took up the song:

"My hair is like an infinite river in the plain where the flaming evening flows away."

And they sang, one after the other:

"Thine eyes are like blue water-lilies without stems, motionless on the pools."

"Mine eyes in the shadow of my lashes are like deep lakes under black branches."

"Thy lips are two delicate flowers where the blood of the hind has fallen."

"My lips are the edges of a burning wound."

"Thy tongue is the bloody dagger which has made the wound of thy mouth."

"My tongue is encrusted with precious stones. It is red from mirroring my lips."

"Thine arms are rounded like two defenses of ivory and thine armpits are two mouths."

"My arms are lengthened like two lily stems where my fingers shine like five petals."

"Thy thighs are the trunks of two white elephants which carry thy feet like two red flowers."

"My feet are two water-lily petals upon a pool; my thighs are two swollen water-lily buds."

"Thy breasts are two silver bucklers whose points are bathed in blood."

"My breasts are the moon and the reflection of the moon upon the water."

"Thy navel is a deep well in a desert of rosy sand and thy belly is a young kid lying upon the breast of its mother."

"My navel is a round pearl upon an inverted cup and my delta is the gleaming crescent of Phœbe among the forests."

There was a silence.—The slave raised her hands and bent forward. The courtesan continued:

"It is like a flower of crimson, full of honey and of perfumes."

"It is like a hydra of the sea, living and soft, open at night."

"It is the humid grotto, the shelter always warm, the Asylum where man rests from his march toward death."

The prostrate one murmured very low:

"It is terrifying. It is the face of Medusa."

CHRYSIS placed her foot upon the slave's neck and said, trembling:

"Djala . . ."

Little by little, the night had come; but the moon was so luminous that the room was filled with blue radiance.

Chrysis, naked, regarded her body where the reflections were motionless and where the shadows fell very black.

She arose abruptly:

"Djala, of what are we thinking! It is night and I have not yet

gone out. There will be only sleeping sailors on the Heptastadion. Tell me, Djala, am I beautiful?

"Tell me, Djala, am I more beautiful than ever, this night? I am the most beautiful woman in Alexandria, dost thou know it? Will he not follow me like a dog, he who will presently pass into the oblique regard of mine eyes? Will I not make of him what pleases me—a slave if it is my caprice, and can I not expect, from the first who comes, the most abject obedience? Dress me, Djala."

Around her arms two silver serpents twined. Upon her feet were fixed sandals attached to her brown legs by crossed leathern thongs. She herself buckled around her body a young girl's girdle which sloped from the loins along the hollow line of the groins. In her ears she placed great circular hoops, on her fingers rings and seals, on her neck three necklaces of golden phalli chiseled at Paphos by the hierodules.

She regarded herself for some time, thus nude among her jewels; then, drawing from a coffer where she had folded it, a vast transparent garment of yellow linen, she wrapped it around her, draping herself from head to foot. Diagonal folds furrowed the little that one saw of her body through the light tissue; one of her elbows thrust out under the close tunic and the other arm, which she had left bare, carried the long train so it would not drag in the dust.

She took in her hand her fan of plumes and went out nonchalantly.

Standing on the steps of the threshold, her hand resting against the white wall, Djala alone watched the courtesan depart.

She walked slowly along the houses in the deserted street where the moonlight fell. A little frisking shadow palpitated behind her steps.

*

CHAPTER TWO

On the Jetty of Alexandria

On the jetty of Alexandria, a girl stood singing. Beside her, seated on the white parapet, were two flute players.

"Deep in the lurking shadows of the woods,
Down vistas gold-flecked from the sunlight glare,
The Satyrs fast pursue the Oreads,
Clutching their virgin breasts and flying hair,
Bending their gleaming bodies, tense with fear,

Swift backward on the damp moss. Half divine,
Writhing with pain . . .
O women!
On your soft lips, Eros cries
Desires and agonies."

The flute players repeated:

"Eros!
Eros! . . ."

and sighed into their doubled reeds.

"Cybele long pursues across the plains
The godlike Attis whom her love desires,
The fleeting Attis who her love disdains.
For Eros, like a cruel god, conspires
To chill return where burning love aspires.
And, in despair, through Attis' halting breath,
Cybele weaves of death . . .
Slaying, with tortured cries,
Desires and agonies . . ."

"Eros!
Eros! . . ."

Shrill cries leaped from the flutes.

"Before the Goat-Foot, over flowery meads
Toward the watery tomb, frail Syrinx speeds,
Shuddering at Eros' kiss upon her cheek—
Eros who, later, culls the trembling reeds,
Caresses them and, living, makes them speak.
For he who conquers gods, who death disdains—
Pale Eros—reigns . . .
O women!
From a dead soul, Eros cries
Desires and agonies."

While the flutes continued the slow refrain of the last stanza, the singer held out her hand to the passers-by who stood in a circle around her and received four oboli which she slid into her foot-gear.

Little by little, the crowd dispersed, curious to watch the passing of its numberless self. The noise of steps and of voices covered even the sound of the sea. Sailors drew, with bent shoulders, merchandise upon the quay. Girls who sold fruit passed by, their full baskets in their arms. Beggars besought with a trembling hand. Asses laden with

full leathern bottles trotted before the sticks of their drivers. But it was the hour of sunset, and an idle throng, more numerous than the active crowd, covered the jetty. Here and there groups formed between which women wandered. One heard well known silhouettes called by name. The young men looked at the philosophers who contemplated the courtesans.

These were of every order and of every condition from the most celebrated, dressed in light silks and shod with gilded leather, to the most miserable who walked barefoot. The poor ones were not less beautiful than the others but less fortunate only and the attention of the sages dwelt by preference on those whose grace was not altered by the artifice of girdles and the encumberment of jewels. As it was the eve of the Festival of Aphrodite, these women had full license to choose the garment which became them best and some of the youngest had even risked wearing none at all. But their nudity shocked no one for they would not have thus exposed all the details of their bodies to the sun if one of them had been signalled by the least defect which could lead to the mockery of the married women.

"Tryphera! Tryphera!"

And a young courtesan of joyous aspect elbowed some passers-by to rejoin a friend she had seen among the crowd.

"Tryphera! Art thou invited?"

"Where, Seso?"

"To Bacchis'."

"Not yet. She gives a dinner?"

"A dinner? A banquet, my dear. She frees her handsomest slave, Aphrodisia, on the second day of the festival."

"At last! She has perceived that they come to her no longer except for her slave."

"I think she has seen nothing. It is a fancy of old Cheres, the ship captain of the quay. He wanted to buy the girl for ten minæ; Bacchis refused. Twenty minæ; she still refused."

"She is mad."

"What wouldst thou have her do? It was her ambition to have a freed slave. Beside, she was right to bargain. Cheres will give thirty-five minæ and for that price the girl will be free."

"Thirty-five minæ? Three thousand, five hundred drachmæ? Three thousand, five hundred drachmæ for a negress?"

"She is the daughter of a white."

"Yes, but her mother is black."

"Bacchis declared she would not give her for less and old Cheres is so much in love that he has consented."

"Is he invited, he at least?"

"No! Aphrodisia will be served at the banquet as the last course after the fruit. Each one will take what he wishes of her and it is only the next day they must deliver her to Cheres; but I am afraid she will be fatigued. . . ."

"Don't pity her! With him she will have time to recover. I know him, Seso. I have watched him sleep."

They laughed together at Cheres. Then they complimented each other.

"Thou hast a pretty dress," said Seso. "Didst thou have it embroidered at home?"

Tryphera's robe was of a thin glaucous stuff entirely worked with large iris flowers. A carbuncle mounted in gold gathered it in folds on the left shoulder; the robe fell like a scarf between the two breasts leaving nude all the right side of the body as far as the metal girdle; a narrow slit which opened and closed at each step alone revealed the whiteness of the leg.

"Seso!" said another voice. "Seso and Tryphera, come, if you don't know what to do. I am going to the Ceramic Wall to look for my name written there."

"Mousarion! Whence comest thou, little one?"

"From the Pharos. There is no one down there."

"What meanest thou? One needs but to throw in a line, it is so full."

"No turbots for me. So I am going to the wall. Come."

On the way, Seso recounted again the banquet project at the house of Bacchis.

"Ah! At Bacchis'!" cried Mousarion. "Thou rememberest the last dinner, Tryphera: all the things they said about Chrysis?"

"Thou must not repeat it. Seso is her friend."

Mousarion bit her lip, but already Seso was uneasy.

"What? What did they say?"

"Oh! . . . Slanders."

"People can talk," declared Seso. "She is worth more than all three of us. On the day she will be willing to leave her quarter and show herself at Bruchion, I know some of our lovers who will return to us no more."

"Oh! Oh!"

"Certainly. I would commit follies for that woman. There is no one more beautiful here, believe me."

The three young girls had arrived before the Ceramic Wall. From one end to the other of the immense white rampart inscriptions

written in black succeeded each other. When a lover desired to present himself to a courtesan it was sufficient for him to write their two names with the price which he proposed; if the man and the money were approved of, the woman remained standing under the writing until the author returned.

"Look, Seso," said Tryphera, laughing. "Who is the evil joker who has written that?"

And they read, in big letters:

BACCHIS
THERSITES
TWO OBOLI

"To make fun of women in that way should not be permitted. As for me, were I the one named I would already have made an inquiry."

But farther on Seso paused before a more serious inscription.

SESO OF KNIDOS
TIMON SON OF LYSIAS
ONE MINA

She paled slightly.

"I remain," she said.

And she backed against the wall under the envious looks of the passing women.

Some steps farther, Mousarion found a demand which was acceptable if not so generous. Tryphera returned alone to the jetty.

As the hour was advanced the crowd was less compact. However, the three musicians continued to sing and to play the flute.

Becoming aware of an unknown whose stoutness and garments were a little ridiculous, Tryphera tapped him on the shoulder.

"Well! little father! I wager thou art not an Alexandrian, eh!"

"True, my daughter," replied the good man, "and thou hast guessed it. Thou seest me quite surprised at the town and the people."

"Thou art from Bubastis?"

"No. From Cabira. I came here to sell grain and I will return tomorrow richer by fifty-two minæ. Thanks be rendered to the gods, the year has been good."

Tryphera suddenly became full of interest in this merchant.

"My child," he continued timidly, "thou canst give me a great pleasure. I would not like to return tomorrow to Cabira without being able to tell my wife and my three daughters that I have seen some celebrated men. Thou must know some celebrated men?"

"Some few," she said, laughing.

"Good. Name them to me as they pass by. I am sure that I have met in the street, within the last two days, the most illustrious philosophers and the most influential functionaries. It is my despair not to know them."

"Thou shalt be satisfied. Here is Naucrates."

"Who is this Naucrates?"

"He is a philosopher."

"And what does he preach?"

"That one must be silent."

"By Zeus, there is a doctrine which does not demand a great genius and this philosopher does not please me at all."

"Here is Phrasilas."

"Who is this Phrasilas?"

"He is a dunce."

"Then why dost thou not let him pass?"

"Because others consider him eminent."

"And what does he say?"

"He says everything with a smile, which permits him to let his mistakes be understood as voluntary and his banalities as exquisite. He has all the advantage. The world has allowed itself to be deceived."

"This is too much for me and I do not quite understand thee. Beside, the face of this Phrasilas is marked with hypocrisy."

"Here is Philodemos."

"The strategian?"

"No. A Latin poet who writes in Greek."

"Little one, he is an enemy. I wish I had not seen him."

Here the whole crowd made a movement, a murmur of voices pronounced the same name:

"Demetrios . . . Demetrios. . . ."

Tryphera mounted upon a stone and in her turn she said to the merchant:

"Demetrios . . . there is Demetrios. Thou who wanted to see some celebrated men."

"Demetrios? the lover of the queen? Is it possible?"

"Yes, thou hast had luck. He never goes out. Since I have been at Alexandria, this is the first time I have seen him on the jetty."

"Where is he?"

"It is he who leans over to see the shipping."

"There are two leaning over."

"He is the one in blue."

"I do not see him well. He turns his back to us."

"Dost thou know? he is the sculptor to whom the queen gave herself as model for the Aphrodite of the temple."

"They say he is the royal lover. They say he is the master of Egypt."

"And he is handsome as Apollo."

"Ah! there he is turning around. I am glad I came. I will say that I have seen him. I have heard many things about him. It appears that no woman has ever resisted him. He has had many adventures, has he not? How does it happen that the queen has not been informed of them?"

"The queen knows of them as well as we do. She loves him too much to speak to him about them. She is afraid lest he return to Rhodes, to his master, Pherecrates. He is as powerful as she and it is she who desired him."

"He does not appear happy. Why does he look so sad? It seems to me I would be happy if I were he. I would like very much to be he, were it but for one evening. . . ."

The sun had set. The women looked at this man who was the dream of them all. He, without appearing to be conscious of the stir which he inspired, remained leaning on the parapet, listening to the flute players.

The little musicians made one more round: then they gently threw their light flutes over their backs; the singer passed her arms around their necks and all three returned toward the town.

As darkness had come, the other women re-entered, in little groups, the immensity of Alexandria and the troop of men followed them; but as they went all looked back toward Demetrios. The last one who passed softly threw him her yellow flower and laughed. Silence fell upon the quays.

*

CHAPTER THREE

Demetrios

On the plaza abandoned by the musicians Demetrios remained alone, resting on his elbows. He heard the sea murmur, the vessels creak slowly, the wind pass beneath the stars. The whole town was lighted by a little dazzling cloud which had lingered over the moon and the light in the sky was softened.

The young man looked about him; the tunics of the flute players had left two imprints in the dust. He recalled their faces; they were two Ephesians. The eldest had seemed pretty to him, but the youngest was without charm; and, as ugliness made him suffer, he avoided thinking of her.

At his feet shone an object of ivory. He picked it up; it was a writing tablet whence hung a silver stylus. Its wax was almost used up but the letters must have been traced over several times so that, the last time, they were cut into the ivory.

He saw but three words written there:

MYRTIS LOVES RHODOCLEIA

And he asked himself to which of the two women this belonged and whether the other were the loved woman or, indeed, some unknown, abandoned at Ephesos. Then he thought a moment of rejoining the musicians to give back what was, perhaps, the souvenir of some dead beloved; but he could not have found them again without trouble and as he was already ceasing to interest himself in them he turned around idly and threw the little object into the sea.

It fell rapidly, gliding like a white bird and he heard the splash the distant black water made. This little noise made him feel the vast silence of the port.

Leaning with his back against the cold parapet, he tried to drive away every thought and began to look about him.

He had a horror of life. He left his dwelling only at the hour when life ceased and returned when the first dawn drew the fishermen and the kitchen gardeners toward the town. The pleasure of seeing in the world only the shadow of the town and his own figure became such a delight to him that, for several months, he no longer remembered having seen the sun at midday.

He was wearied. The queen was fastidious.

He could hardly understand, this night, the joy and the pride which had filled him when, three years before, the queen, seduced perhaps more by the rumor of his beauty than by the reports of his genius, had ordered him invited to the palace and announced at the Gate of Evening by the blowing of silver trumpets.

This entrance enlightened sometimes his memory with one of those souvenirs which, by reason of too much sweetness, become more and more acute in the soul to the point of becoming intolerable. The queen had received him alone in her private apartments which were composed of three little rooms enviably soft and soundless. She was lying on her left side and as though buried in a cavern of greenish

silks which bathed the black locks of her head-dress in purple reflections. Her young body was robed in a costume, shamelessly pierced, which she had ordered made for herself by a Phrygian courtesan and which left uncovered the twenty-two places of the skin where caresses are irresistible, so well that, during a whole night, even though one were to draw upon the last dreams of an amorous imagination, there was no need to take off that costume.

Demetrios, kneeling respectfully, had taken in his hand, to kiss it, as a precious and sweet object, the little foot of the queen Berenice.

Then she had risen.

Simply, like a handsome slave who serves as model, she had undone her corselet, her little bands, her last undergarment—taken even the circlets from her arms, even the rings from her toes, and she had stood, her hands open before the shoulders raising her head under a head-dress of coral which trembled in long strings along her cheeks.

She was the daughter of a Ptolemy and of a Syrian princess descended from all the gods through Astarte whom the Greeks called Aphrodite. Demetrios knew this and that she was proud of her Olympian lineage. Therefore he was not troubled when the sovereign, without moving, said to him:

"I am Astarte. Take marble and thy chisel and reveal me to the men of Egypt. I wish my image to be adored."

Demetrios looked at her and, guessing beyond all doubt what simple and fresh sensuality animated this young girl's body, he said:

"I am the first to adore it."

And he surrounded her with his arms.

The queen was not angry at this precipitancy, but demanded, drawing back:

"Dost thou think thyself Adonis, to touch the goddess?"

He replied:

"Yes."

She gazed at him, smiled a little, and concluded:

"Thou art right."

It was for this reason that he became insupportable and that his best friends were lost to him; but the hearts of all women doted upon him.

When he passed into a hall of the palace the slaves stopped, the women of the court became silent, the strangers listened to him also, for the sound of his voice was ravishing. If he retired to the queen they came even there to importune him under pretexts always new.

If he wandered through the streets, the folds of his tunic became filled with little papyri on which the passers-by had written their names with anguished words but which he, tired of such matters, crumpled without reading. When they had put his work in place in the temple of Aphrodite the enclosure was filled at every hour of the night by the crowds of adoring women who came to read his name in the stone and to offer to their living god all the doves and all the roses.

Soon his house was encumbered with gifts which he at first accepted indifferently but which later he invariably refused when he understood what was expected of him and that they were treating him like a prostitute. Even his slaves offered themselves. He had them whipped and sold them at the little porneion of Rhacotis. Then his male slaves, seduced by presents, opened the door to unknown women whom he found before his bed when he entered, in attitudes which left no doubt as to their passionate intentions. The little objects of his toilette and of his table disappeared one after another. More than one woman in the town had a sandal or a girdle of his, a cup from which he had drunk, even the kernels of fruit he had eaten. If he dropped a flower while walking he found it no more behind him. They would have gathered up even the dust crushed by his feet.

Beyond the fact that this persecution became dangerous and threatened to kill all his sensitiveness, he had arrived at the epoch of youth where the man who thinks believes it necessary to make two parts of his life and to no longer mingle the affairs of the spirit with the necessities of the senses. The statue of Aphrodite-Astarte was for him the sublime pretext for this moral conversion. All that the queen had of beauty, all that could be invented of ideals around the supple lines of her body, Demetrios had evoked from the marble and from that day he imagined that no other woman on earth would ever again attain the level of his dream. His statue became the object of his desire; henceforth he adored nothing save it alone and madly separated from the flesh the supreme idea of the goddess, all the more immaterial if he had attached it to life.

When he again saw the queen herself, he found her despoiled of all which had constituted her charm. She sufficed him still for a time to deceive his aimless desires but she was at the same time too different from the Other and also too similar. When, emerging from his embrace, she fell back, worn out, and slept upon the spot, he regarded her as though an intruder had usurped his bed in taking the resemblance of the loved woman. Her arms were more slender, her breasts more sharp, her hips more narrow than those of the True. She

had not, between the groins, the three folds, slender as lines, which he had graved in the marble. He finished by tiring of her.

His adorers knew it and though he continued his daily visits it was known that he had ceased to love Berenice. And around him the ardor redoubled. He did not notice it. In fact, the change which he needed was of another nature.

It is rare that, between two mistresses, a man should not have an interval of life where vulgar debauch tempts and satisfies him. Demetrios abandoned himself to it. When the necessity of going to the palace displeased him more than usual, he went at night to the garden of the sacred courtesans which surrounded the temple on all sides. The women who were there did not know him at all. Beside, so many superfluous loves had left them so that they had no more cries or tears and the satisfaction that he sought was not troubled, there at least, by the plaints of an amorous cat with which the queen enervated him. The conversation that he held with these beautiful calm persons was idle and without research. The visitors of the day, the weather of the morrow, the sweetness of the grass and of the night, were its charming subjects. They did not beseech him to expose his theories on sculpture and did not give their opinions of the Achilles of Skopas. If they happened to thank the lover who chose them, to find him well made and to tell him so, he had the right not to believe in their disinterestedness.

Coming forth from their religious arms, he mounted the steps of the temple and fell into ecstasy before the statue.

Between the slender columns topped with Ionian volutes, the goddess, on a pedestal of rosy stone laden with pendent treasures, appeared as though living. She was naked and sexed, vaguely tinted according to the colors of woman; she held in one hand her mirror whose handle was fashioned like a phallos and with the other adorned her beauty with a seven-fold necklace of pearls. One pearl, larger than the others, silvery and elongated, shone between her two breasts like a nocturnal crescent between two round clouds.

Demetrios contemplated her tenderly and longed to believe, like the people, that those were the true sacred pearls born of the water drops which had rolled in the shell of the Anadyomene.

"O divine Sister," he said, "O flowering, O transfigured one! thou art no longer the little Asiatic whom I made thine unworthy model. Thou art her immortal Idea, the terrestrial Soul of the Astarte who was the progenitor of her race. Thou didst shine in her ardent eyes, thou didst burn in her sombre lips, thou didst faint in her soft

hands, thou didst pant in her great breasts, thou didst stretch in her enlacing legs, in former times, before thy birth; and that which would satiate the daughter of a fisherman would prostrate thee also, thee, goddess, thee—mother of gods and men—the joy and the sorrow of the world! But I have seen, evoked, seized thee, O marvelous Cytheraea! I have revealed thee to the earth. It is not thine image, it is thyself to whom I have given thy mirror and whom I have covered with pearls as on the day when thou wast born of the bleeding sky and the foamy smile of the waters and Aurora, dripping with dew, with a cortège of blue tritons, acclaimed thee to the shores of Cypros."

He had just adored her thus when he entered upon the jetty at the hour when the crowd was dispersing and heard the sorrowful songs of the flute players. But this evening he had refused himself to the courtesans of the temple because a couple, half seen under the branches, had filled him with disgust and revolted his very soul.

Little by little, the gentle influence of the night worked upon him. He turned his face toward the wind which had passed over the sea and seemed to draw toward Egypt the scent of the roses of Amathos.

Lovely feminine forms sketched themselves in his thought. He had been requested to make, for the garden of the goddess, a group of the three Charites enlaced; but his youth revolted at copying conventions and he dreamed of uniting on the same block of marble the three gracious movements of woman: two of the Charites would be clothed, one holding a fan and half closing her eyelids at the breath of the swaying plumes; the other dancing among the folds of her robe. The third, behind her sisters, would be nude and her raised arms would twist upon the nape of her neck the mass of her rolled hair.

He engendered in his spirit still other projects as—to attach to the rocks of the Pharos an Andromeda of black marble before the rough monster of the sea; to enclose the hill of Bruchion between the four horses of the rising sun, each one a mettlesome Pegasus—and with what intoxication did he not exult at the idea which was coming to birth in him of a Zagreus terrified before the approach of the Titans. Ah! how he was seized by all beauty! how he tore himself from love! how he "separated from the flesh the supreme idea of the goddess"! how free he felt, at last!

Now he turned his head toward the quays and saw, shining in the distance, the yellow veil of a woman who was walking.

CHAPTER FOUR

The Passer-by

SHE came slowly with her head on one side, over the deserted jetty where the moonlight fell. A little flickering shadow palpitated before her steps.

Demetrios watched her advance.

Diagonal folds furrowed the little that could be seen of her body through the light tissue; one of her elbows thrust out under the close tunic and the other arm, which she had left bare, carried the long train so it would not drag in the dust.

He recognized by her jewels that she was a courtesan; to spare himself a salute from her he crossed over quickly.

He did not wish to look at her. Wilfully he occupied his thought with the great sketch of Zagreus. And yet his eyes returned toward her who passed.

Then he saw that she did not stop at all, that she did not concern herself with him, that she did not even pretend to look at the sea nor to raise her veil before her face nor to be absorbed in her reflections; but that she was simply walking alone and sought nothing there but the coolness of the wind, solitude, freedom, the light quiver of the silence.

Without stirring, Demetrios did not turn his gaze from her and lost himself in a singular astonishment.

She continued to walk like a yellow shade in the distance, indifferent, and preceded by the little black shadow.

He heard, at each step, the gentle sound of her footwear in the dust of the way.

She walked to the isle of the Pharos and mounted among the rocks.

Suddenly and as though, long ago, he had loved this unknown, Demetrios ran after her, then stopped, retraced his steps, trembled, grew angry at himself, attempted to leave the jetty; but he had never employed his will except to serve his own pleasure and when it was time to make it act for the welfare of his character and the ordering of his life he felt himself filled with impotence and nailed to the spot where he stood.

As he could no longer avoid thinking of her he tried to find an excuse for the preoccupation which distracted him so violently. He imagined his admiration for her gracious passing was purely an æsthetic

sentiment. And he said to himself that she would be an ideal model for the Charite with the fan which he proposed to sketch on the morrow. Then suddenly all his thoughts were upset and a crowd of anxious questions flowed into his spirit around this woman in yellow.

What was she doing on the island at this hour of the night? Why, for whom, had she come out so late? Why had she not accosted him? She had seen him, certainly she had seen him as he crossed the jetty. Why, without a word of greeting had she continued on her way? The rumor ran that certain women sometimes chose the cool hours before the dawn to bathe in the sea. But no one bathed at the Pharos. The sea was too deep there. Beside, how unlikely that a woman would thus have covered herself with jewels to go only to the bath.... Then, what drew her so far from Rhacotis? An assignation, perhaps? Some young man of the world, curious of variety, who took for an instant, as a bed, the great rocks polished by the waves?

Demetrios wished to assure himself. But already the young woman was returning, with the same soft and tranquil step, lighted full in the face by the slow lunar brightness and sweeping the dust of the parapet with the tip of her fan.

CHAPTER FIVE

The Mirror, the Comb and the Necklace

SHE had a special beauty. Her hair seemed two masses of gold but it was too abundant and weighted her forehead with two deep shadow-laden waves which swallowed up the ears and wound seven-fold upon the nape of the neck. The nose was delicate with slender nostrils which sometimes palpitated above the full and tinted mouth with rounded, mobile corners. The supple line of the body undulated with each step, animated by the balancing of the free breasts or by the curving of the beautiful hips upon which the rounded waist swayed.

When she was no more than ten steps from the young man she turned her gaze toward him. Demetrios trembled. They were extraordinary eyes, blue, but deep and brilliant at the same time, moist, weary, in tears and in fire, almost closed under the weight of the lashes and the lids. They looked, these eyes, as the sirens sing. He who passed into their light was inevitably taken. She knew it well and used them skilfully; but she counted more on indifference affected

toward the man whom so much unfeigned love had not been able to touch sincerely.

The navigators who have sailed over the purple seas beyond the Ganges tell that they have seen, under the waters, rocks which are of lodestone. When vessels pass near them, the nails and the ironwork tear themselves away toward the submarine cliff and unite with it forever. And that which was a rapid ship, a dwelling, a living being, becomes no more than a flotilla of planks dispersed by the wind, driven by the tides. Thus Demetrios himself was lost before two great magnetic eyes and all his strength fled from him.

She lowered her eyelids and passed near him.

He could have cried out with impatience. His fists clenched; he was afraid that he could not recover a calm attitude for he must speak to her. However, he accosted her with the customary words.

"I salute thee," he said.

"I salute thee also," replied the passing one.

Demetrios continued:

"Whither goest thou, so little hurried?"

"I return."

"All alone?"

"All alone."

And she made a movement to resume her promenade.

Then Demetrios thought that perhaps he was deceived in judging her a courtesan. For some time past the wives of the magistrates and of the functionaries had dressed and tinted themselves like the daughters of pleasure. This one might be a person very honorably known and it was without irony that he finished his questions thus:

"To thy husband?"

Resting her hands on the parapet behind her, she began to laugh.

"I have none this evening."

Demetrios bit his lip and hazarded, almost timidly:

"Seek him not. Thou hast begun too late. There is no longer any one here."

"Who told thee I was seeking? I am walking alone and seek nothing."

"Whence camest thou, then? For thou hast not put on all these jewels for thyself—and here is a silken veil . . ."

"Wouldst thou have me go out naked or dressed in wool like a slave? I dress myself only for my pleasure; I love to know that I am beautiful and, while walking, I look at my fingers to see all my rings."

"Thou shouldst have a mirror in thine hand and look at nothing

but thine eyes. They were not born at Alexandria, those eyes. Thou art a Jewess, I hear it in thy voice which is softer than ours."

"No, I am not a Jewess. I am a Galilæan."

"How dost thou call thyself—Miriam or Noemi?"

"My Syrian name . . . thou shalt not know it. It is a royal name which no one bears here. My friends call me Chrysis, which is a compliment thou mightest have paid me."

He put his hand on her arm.

"Oh! no, no," she said mockingly, "it is much too late for those pleasantries. Let me return quickly. It is almost three hours since I arose; I am dying of fatigue."

Leaning over she took her foot in her hand.

"See how my little thongs hurt me. They were pulled much too tight. If I do not loosen them in an instant I will have a mark on my foot and that will be pretty when someone embraces me! Let me go quickly. Ah! what a nuisance! If I had known, I would not have stopped. My yellow veil is all crumpled at the waist—look!"

Demetrios passed his hand over his forehead; then, with the disengaged tone of a man who condescends to make his choice, he murmured:

"Show me the way."

"I will certainly not!" cried Chrysis with an astonished air. "Thou dost not even ask if it is my pleasure. 'Show me the way!' How he says that! Dost thou take me for a girl of the porneion who puts herself on her back for three oboli without even looking to see who has her? Dost thou know if I am free? Dost thou know the detail of my assignations? Hast thou followed me in the streets? Hast thou noticed the doors which open for me? Hast thou counted the men who believe themselves loved of Chrysis? 'Show me the way!' I will not show it to thee if it pleases thee. Remain here or go, but elsewhere than with me!"

"Thou dost not know who I am . . ."

"Thou? Come, come! Thou art Demetrios of Sais; thou hast made the statue of my goddess; thou art the lover of my queen and the master of my city. But for me thou art but a handsome slave because thou hast seen me and because thou lovest me."

She drew nearer and pursued with a coaxing voice:

"Yes—thou lovest me. Oh! do not speak—I know what thou wilt tell me; thou lovest no one, thou art loved. Thou art the Well-Beloved, the Cherished, the Idol. Thou hast refused Glykera who had refused Antiochos. Demonassa the Lesbian who had sworn to die virgin slipped into thy bed during thy sleep and would have taken

thee by force if thy two Lybian slaves had not thrust her, quite naked, from the door. Callistion the well-named, despairing of approaching thee, bought the house which is opposite thine and in the morning shows herself in the opening of the window as little dressed as Artemis at the bath. Thou thinkest I do not know all that? But everything is told, among courtesans. The night of thine arrival at Alexandria they spoke to me of thee; and since then not a single day has passed on which thy name has not been pronounced before me. I know even the things thou hast forgotten. I know even the things thou dost not yet know. Poor little Phyllis hanged herself day before yesterday at the bar of thy door, did she not? Well—it is a fashion which spreads. Lydia has done like Phyllis; I saw her this evening as I passed; she was quite blue but tears on her cheeks were not yet dry. Thou dost not know who Lydia is?—a child, a little courtesan of fifteen years whom her mother had sold last month to a ship captain of Samos who passed the night at Alexandria before going up the river to Thebes. She came to me. I gave her advice; she knew absolutely nothing, not even how to play at dice. I took her often in my bed because, when she had no lover, she had no place to sleep. And she loved thee! If thou couldst have seen her draw me upon her and call me by thy name! . . . She wished to write to thee. Dost thou understand? I told her it was not worth the trouble . . ."

Demetrios watched her without hearing.

"Yes, it is all the same to thee, is it not?" continued Chrysis. "Thou didst not love her. It is I whom thou lovest. Thou hast not even heard what I have just told thee. I am sure thou couldst not repeat a word of it. Thou art well occupied wondering how my eyelids are made, how good my mouth must be, how soft my hair. Ah! how many others know that! All, all who have desired me have burned out their desire upon me: men, young men, old men, children, women, young girls. I have refused no one—dost thou hear? For seven years, Demetrios, I have slept alone but three nights. Count how many lovers that makes! Two thousand five hundred and more, for I do not count those of the day. Last year I danced naked before twenty thousand persons and I know thou wert not one of them. Dost thou believe that I hide myself? Ah! why that! All women have seen me at the bath. All men have seen me in bed. Thou alone—thou shalt never see me. I refuse thee—I refuse thee! Of what I am, of what I feel, of my beauty, of my love, thou shalt know nothing, ever—ever! thou art an abominable man, a coxcomb, cruel, insensitive and cowardly! I do not know why one of us has not had hate enough

to kill you both, one upon the other, thou the first and thy queen next."

Demetrios took her quietly by the two arms and without a word of reply bent her violently backward.

She had a moment of anguish; but suddenly closed her knees, bent her elbows, straightened her back and said in a low voice:

"Ah! I do not fear that, Demetrios! Thou wouldst never take me by force, were I as weak as an amorous virgin and thou vigorous as an Atlantid. Thou dost not wish only thy pleasure, thou desirest mine above all. Thou wishest also to see me, to see me entirely, because thou believest me fair and that I am indeed. Now the moon gives less light than my twelve torches of wax. It is almost dark here. And then, it is not the custom to disrobe on the jetty. I could not clothe myself again, thou seest, if I had not my slave. Let me rise, thou art hurting my arms."

They were silent for a few moments; then Demetrios continued:

"This must stop, Chrysis. Thou knowest well I will not force thee. But let me follow thee. So proud as thou art, it is a glory which will cost thee dear—to refuse Demetrios."

Chrysis remained silent.

He continued more gently:

"What dost thou fear?"

"Thou art accustomed to the love of others. Dost thou know what one should give to a courtesan who does not love?"

He grew impatient.

"I do not ask thee to love me. I am tired of being loved. I do not wish to be loved. I ask thee to abandon thyself. For that I will give thee the gold of the world. I have it here in Egypt."

"I have it in my hair. I am tired of gold. I do not want gold. I wish for but three things. Wilt thou give them to me?"

Demetrios felt that she was going to demand the impossible. He looked at her anxiously. But she began to smile and said in a slow voice:

"I wish for a silver mirror to reflect my eyes in my eyes."

"Thou shalt have it. What more wishest thou? Say quickly."

"I wish a comb of carved ivory to plunge into my hair like a net into the sunlit water."

"Then?"

"Thou wilt give me my comb?"

"Surely. Finish."

"I wish a pearl necklace to spread over my breast when I shall dance for thee in my chamber the nuptial dances of my country."

He raised his eyebrows.

"That is all?"

"Thou wilt give me my necklace?"

"The one which shall please thee."

Her voice became very tender.

"The one which shall please me? Ah! that is exactly what I wished to ask thee. Wilt thou let me choose my presents?"

"Of course."

"Thou swearest it?"

"I swear it."

"What oath dost thou make?"

"Name it."

"By the Aphrodite which thou hast sculptured."

"I swear by the Aphrodite. But why this precaution?"

"Well . . . I was not quite sure. Now I am."

She raised her head.

"I have chosen my gifts."

Demetrios became restless once more and asked:

"So soon?"

"Yes. . . . Dost thou think that I would accept any silver mirror bought from a merchant of Smyrna or from some unknown courtesan? I wish that of my friend Bacchis who took a lover from me last week and who mocked me evilly in a little debauch which she had with Tryphera, Mousarion and some other young fools who brought the whole thing to me. It is a mirror of which she is very fond because it once belonged to Rhodopis—she who was a slave with Aesop and was bought back by the brother of Sappho. Thou knowest that she is a very celebrated courtesan. Her mirror is magnificent. They say that Sappho has gazed in it and because of that Bacchis keeps it jealously. She has nothing more precious in the world; but I know where thou wilt find it. She told me one night when she was drunk. It is under the third stone of the altar. It is there she puts it every evening when she goes out at sunset. Go tomorrow to her house at that hour and fear nothing; her slaves go out with her."

"It is madness!" cried Demetrios. "Dost thou wish me to steal?"

"Dost thou not love me? I thought that thou didst love me. And then, hast thou not sworn? I thought that thou hadst sworn. If I am mistaken, let us speak no more of it."

He understood that she would ruin him but let himself be drawn away without a struggle, almost voluntarily.

"I will do what thou sayest," he replied.

"Oh! I know very well thou wilt do it. But thou didst hesitate at first. I can understand that. It is not an ordinary gift; I would not demand it from a philosopher. I demand it from thee. I know well thou wilt give it to me."

She played an instant with the peacock plumes of her round fan, then, suddenly:

"Ah; . . . Neither do I wish a comb of common ivory bought from a vendor of the town. Thou didst tell me I might choose, didst thou not? Very well, I wish . . . I wish the comb of carved ivory which is in the hair of the High Priest's wife. It is much more precious still than the mirror of Rhodopis. It comes from a queen of Egypt who lived a long, long time ago and whose name is so difficult I cannot pronounce it. So the ivory is very old and yellow as though it were gilded. They have graved upon it a young girl who passes through a marsh of lotos taller than she, where she walks upon the tips of her toes to avoid getting wet. . . . It is truly a beautiful comb . . . I will be content when thou givest it to me . . . I have also a little grudge against the one who possesses it. Last month I offered a blue veil to the Aphrodite; I saw it the next day upon the head of this woman. It was a little hasty and I was angry at her. Her comb will repay me for my veil."

"And how will I get it?" demanded Demetrios.

"Ah; that will be a little more difficult. She is an Egyptian, thou knowest, and she dresses her two hundred plaits but once a year like the other women of her race. But I wish my comb tomorrow and thou wilt kill her to get it. Thou hast sworn an oath."

She made a little grimace at Demetrios who was looking at the ground. Then she finished thus, very quickly:

"I have chosen my necklace also. I wish the seven row necklace of pearls which is about the neck of the Aphrodite."

Demetrios started.

"Ah! this time, it is too much! Thou shalt not laugh at me to the end! Nothing, dost thou hear—nothing! neither the mirror nor the comb nor the necklace shalt thou have . . ."

But she closed his mouth with her hand and resumed her coaxing tone:

"Do not say that. Thou knowest well thou wilt give me this also. I am very certain of it. I shall have the three gifts. Thou wilt come to me tomorrow evening and the day after tomorrow if thou wishest and every evening. At thine hour I will be there, in the costume thou preferrest, tinted according to thy taste, my hair dressed to thy fancy, ready for the last of thy caprices. If thou wishest but

tenderness, I will cherish thee as a child. If thou desirest from me the most singular pleasures, I will not refuse even the most painful. If thou wishest silence I will be silent. . . . When thou wouldst have me sing—Ah! thou wilt see, Well-Beloved! I know the songs of all countries. I know those which are soft as the murmur of springs, others which are terrible as the approaching thunder. I know some so naïve and so fresh that a young girl could sing them to her mother; and I know those they would not sing at Lampsakos; I know some that Elephantis would have blushed to hear and that I would not dare sing above a whisper. Nights when thou wishes me to dance I will dance until morning. I will dance quite clothed, with my mantle dragging, or under a transparent veil or with open tunic and a corselet with two openings for the breasts. But have I promised thee to dance naked? I will dance naked if thou likest it better. Naked and with flowers upon my head or naked in my floating hair, tinted like a divine image. I know how to balance the hands, round the arms, stir the breasts, move the belly, flex the croup—thou shalt see! I dance on the tips of my toes or lying on the rugs. I know all the dances of Aphrodite, those that they dance before Urania and those that they dance before Astarte. I know even those which they dare not dance. I will dance for thee all the loves . . . when they are finished, everything will commence. Thou shalt see! The queen is richer than I but in all the palace there is not a chamber so amorous as mine. I will not tell thee what thou wilt find there. There are things so beautiful that I could not give thee an idea of them and others which are so shameful that I have no words with which to tell of them. And then, dost thou know what thou wilt see which surpasses all the rest? Thou shalt see Chrysis whom thou lovest and whom thou dost not yet know. Yes, thou hast seen but my face, thou dost not know how fair I am. Ah! Ah! . . . Ah! Ah! Thou wilt have many surprises. Ah! how thou wilt play with the tips of my breasts, how thou wilt tremble in the embrace of my knees, how thou wilt swoon upon my moving body. And how good my mouth will be! Ah! my kisses!"

Demetrios threw upon her a despairing look. She continued, tenderly:

"What—thou wilt not give me a poor old silver mirror when thou wilt have all my hair like a golden forest in thy hands?"

Demetrios wished to touch it . . .

She drew back and said:

"Tomorrow."

"Thou shalt have it," he murmured.

"And thou wilt not take for me a little ivory comb which pleases

me when thou wilt have my two arms like two branches of ivory around thy neck?"

He attempted to caress them. . . . She drew them back and repeated:

"Tomorrow."

"I will bring it to thee," he said, very low.

"Ah! I knew it well!" cried the courtesan. "And thou wilt give me also the necklace of pearls which is about the neck of the Aphrodite and for which I will sell thee all my body which is like a half open pearly shell and more kisses in thy mouth than there are pearls in the sea!"

Demetrios, supplicating, advanced his head. . . . Her vivid gaze overwhelmed his as she lent her luxurious lips . . .

When he opened his eyes she was already far away. A little shadow, more dim, darted behind her floating veil.

He walked vaguely toward the town, his head bent under an inexpressible shame.

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CHAPTER SIX

The Virgins

THE faint dawn rose over the sea. All things were tinted with lilac. The flame-streaming brazier lighted on the tower of the Pharos was extinguished with the moon. Fugitive yellow glows appeared in the violet waves like faces of sirens under hair of mauve seaweed. It was suddenly light.

The jetty was deserted. The city was dead. It was the sombre light before the first dawn, which lightens the slumber of the world and brings the enervating dreams of the morning.

Nothing existed but the silence.

Like sleeping birds, the long ships ranged near the quays allowed their parallel oars to hang in the water. The perspective of the streets lay in pure architectural lines uninterrupted by a wagon, a horse or a slave. Alexandria was but a vast solitude, the vision of an antique city abandoned for centuries.

Now a light sound of footsteps palpitated upon the soil and two young girls appeared, one dressed in yellow, the other in blue.

They both wore the girdles of virgins which passed around the hips and tied very low upon their young bodies. It was the singer of the night past and one of the flute players.

The musician was younger and prettier than her friend. Pale as the blue of her robe, her eyes smiled faintly, half drowned under the eyelids. The two slender flutes hung at her back from the flowered knot at her shoulder. A double garland of iris about her rounded legs undulated under the light stuff of her garment and was attached at the ankles to two silver anklets. She said:

"Myrtocleia, be not saddened because thou hast lost our tablets. Wilt thou ever forget that the love of Rhodis is thine or canst thou think, naughty one, that thou wouldst have ever read alone the line written by my hand? Am I one of those bad friends who graves upon her finger nail the name of her sister of the bed and goes to unite herself to another when the nail has grown to the end? Hast thou need of a souvenir of me when thou hast me entire and living? Hardly am I at the age when girls marry, yet I was not half so old, on the day I saw thee for the first time. Thou wilt recall it. It was at the bath. Our mothers held us under our arms and we toddled toward each other. We played a long time upon the marble before dressing again. Since that day we never separated and, five years after, we loved each other."

Myrtocleia replied:

"There was another first day, Rhodis, thou knowest. It was that day when thou didst write the three words upon my tablets, mingling our names. That was the first. We will never find it again. But never mind. Every day is new for me and when thou awakenest toward the evening it seems as though I had never seen thee before. I believe thou art not a girl: thou art a little nymph of Arcadia who has left her forest because Phœbos has dried her fountain. Thy body is supple as an olive branch, thy skin is soft as water in summer, iris winds about thy legs and thou bearest the lotus flower as Astarte the open fig. In what wood peopled by immortals did thy mother sleep before thy most happy birth? And what rash ægipan or what god of what divine river united himself to her in the grass? When we shall have quitted this frightful African sun thou wilt lead me to thy spring far behind Psophis and Pheneos in the vast shade-filled forest where one sees upon the soft earth the double trail of satyrs mingled with the light steps of the nymphs. There thou wilt seek a polished rock and thou wilt grave in the stone what thou didst write upon the wax: the three words which are our joy. Listen, listen, Rhodis! By the girdle of Aphrodite on which are broidered all the desires, all desires are strangers to me since thou art more than my dream! By the horn of Amalthæa whence issue all the good things of the world, the world is indifferent to me since thou art the only good I have

found in it! When I look upon thee and when I see myself, I know not why thou lovest me in return. Thy hair is blond as a sheaf of wheat, mine is black as that of a goat. Thy skin is white as shepherd's cheese, mine is tanned as the sand of the beaches. Thy tender breast is flowery as an orange tree in autumn, mine is thin and sterile as a pine among the rocks. If my face is embellished, it is because of having loved thee. O Rhodis, thou knowest, my singular virginity is like the lips of Pan eating a sprig of myrtle, thine is rosy and pretty as the mouth of a little child. I know not why thou lovest me, but if thou shouldst cease to love me one day and, like thy sister Theano who plays the flute next thee, remain to sleep in the houses where we are employed, then I would never even think of sleeping alone in our bed and thou, returning, wouldst find me strangled with my girdle."

The long eyes of Rhodis filled with tears and smiles, so cruel and so mad was the idea. She placed her foot upon a stone.

"The flowers between my legs annoy me. Undo them, adored Myrto. I have finished dancing for this night."

The singer shrugged.

"Oh! it is true. I had forgotten them already, those men and girls. They made you both dance, thou in this robe of Cos which is transparent as water and thy sister naked with thee. If I had not defended thee, they would have taken thee like a prostitute as they took thy sister before us in the same room. . . . Ah! what an abomination! Didst thou hear her cries and her plaints! How grievous is the love of a man!"

She knelt by Rhodis and detached the two garlands, then the three flowers placed higher, putting a kiss in the place of each. When she arose the child put her arm around her neck and swooned under her lips.

"Myrto, thou art not jealous of all those debauched people? What does it matter to thee that they should have seen me? Theano suffices them, I have left her to them. They shall not have me, dear Myrto. Be not jealous of them."

"Jealous! . . . I am jealous of all that approaches thee. That thy robes may not have thee alone, I put them on when thou hast worn them. That the flowers in thy hair do not remain in love with thee, I deliver them to the poor courtesans who soil them in orgies. Nor have I given thee aught so that nothing may possess thee. I am afraid of everything thou touchest and I hate everything thou lookest upon. I would wish to be all my life between the walls of a prison where there were but thee and me and unite myself to thee so profoundly, hide thee so well in my arms, that not an eye would suspect thee there.

I would like to be the fruit thou eatest, the perfume which pleases thee, the slumber which enters beneath thine eyelids, the love which convulses thy limbs. I am jealous of the happiness which I give thee, nevertheless I would give thee as much as I have from thee. Behold my jealousies; but I do not fear thy mistresses of one night when they aid me in satisfying thy youthful desires; as for lovers, I know thou canst not love man, intermittent and brutal man."

Rhodis cried sincerely:

"Rather would I go, like Nausithoe, to sacrifice my virginity to the god Priapos whom they adore at Thasos. But not this morning, my dear. I have danced a long time, I am very tired. I would like to go home, to sleep on thine arm."

She smiled and continued:

"Theano must be told that our bed is no longer hers. We will make her another at the right of the door. After what I have seen tonight, I could never again embrace her. Myrto, truly it is horrible. Is it possible that one loves thus? Is it that which they call love?"

"It is that."

"They are wrong, Myrto. They do not know."

Myrtocleia took her in her arms and both were silent together.

The wind mingled their hair.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Chrysis' Hair

"H A," cried Rhodis. "Look! Someone."

The singer looked. A woman, far from them, was walking rapidly down the quay.

"I recognize her," continued the child. "It is Chrysis. She is wearing her yellow robe."

"What, is she already dressed?"

"I don't understand it. Usually she does not go out before noon, and the sun has scarcely risen. Something has happened to her. Good fortune, doubtless; she has such good luck."

They went to meet her, and said:

"Greeting, Chrysis."

"Greeting. How long have you been here?"

"I don't know. It was already light when we came."

"Was anyone on the jetty?"

"No one."

"Not a man? Are you sure?"

"Oh! quite sure. Why dost thou ask that?"

Chrysis made no reply. Rhodis continued:

"Didst thou wish to see someone?"

"Yes . . . perhaps . . . I think it is better that I should not see him. Yes, it is better. I was wrong to return; but I could not help it."

"What is happening, Chrysis, wilt thou tell us?"

"Oh! no."

"Not even us? not even us, thy friends?"

"Thou wilt know it later, with the whole town."

"That is kind of thee."

"A little earlier, if you insist upon it; but it is impossible, this morning. Extraordinary things are happening, my children. I am dying to tell you; but I must hold my tongue. Were you going home? Come lie at my house. I am all alone."

"O Chrysé, Chrysidion, we are too tired! We were going home indeed, but it was certainly to sleep."

"Well! you shall sleep afterward. This is the eve of the Festival of Aphrodite. Is it a time for repose? If you wish the goddess to protect you and make you happy this coming year you must arrive at the temple with eyelids dark as violets and cheeks white as lilies. We will attend to that; come with me."

She placed her arms about their waists and, closing her caressing hands over their little, half naked breasts, bore them hurriedly away.

Rhodis, however, was still preoccupied.

"And when we shall be in thy bed," she continued, "thou wilt not yet tell us what is coming to thee, what thou awaitest?"

"I will tell you many things, all that you please; but that I will not tell."

"Even when we shall be in thine arms, quite naked, and without light?"

"Do not insist, Rhodé. Thou wilt know it tomorrow. Wait until tomorrow."

"Thou art to be very happy? or very powerful?"

"Very powerful."

Rhodis opened her eyes wide and cried:

"Thou sleepest with the queen!"

"No," said Chrysis, laughing; "but I shall be as powerful as she. Hast thou need of me? Desirest thou anything?"

"Oh! yes!"

And the child became thoughtful again.

"Well, what is it?" inquired Chrysis.

"It is an impossible thing. Why should I ask it?"

Myrtocleia spoke for her:

"At Ephesos in our country, when two girls, marriageable and virgin, like Rhodis and me, love each other, the law permits them to marry. They both go to the temple of Athena to consecrate their double girdle; then to the sanctuary of Iphinoe to offer a lock of their mingled hair and finally under the Peristyle of Dionysos where, to the more male, is given a little whetted, golden knife and a white linen cloth to staunch the blood. In the evening, she of the two who is bride is brought to her new dwelling, seated upon a flower-decked car between her 'husband' and the paranymph, surrounded by torches and flute players. And thenceforward they have all the rights of those who are married; they may adopt little girls and make them a part of their intimate life. They are respected. They have a family. That is Rhodis' dream. But here it is not the custom. . . ."

"The law shall be changed," said Chrysis; "and you shall marry each other; I will make it my business."

"Oh! truly?" cried the little one, red with joy.

"Yes; and I do not ask which of you will be the husband. I know that Myrto has all that is necessary to give the illusion of it. Thou art lucky, Rhodis, to have such a friend. No matter what is said, they are rare."

They had arrived at the door where Djala, seated on the threshold, was weaving a towel of flax. The slave arose to let them pass, and entered after them.

In an instant the two flute players had slipped out of their simple garments. Each washed the other carefully in a green marble bowl which emptied into the basin. Then they rolled upon the bed.

Chrysis looked at them without seeing. The slightest words of Demetrios repeated themselves endlessly, word for word, in her memory. She did not feel that Djala, in silence, untied and unrolled her long saffron veil, unbuckled the girdle, opened the necklaces, drew off the rings, the seals, the circlets, the silver serpents, drew out the golden pins; but the tickling of her falling hair awoke her vaguely.

She demanded her mirror.

Did she fear that she was not beautiful enough to retain this new lover—for he must be held—after the mad enterprises she had demanded of him? Or did she wish, through the examination of each of her beauties, to calm any unrest and justify her confidence?

She presented her mirror to all parts of her body, touching them one after the other. She considered the whiteness of her skin, esti-

mated its softness by long caresses, its warmth by embraces. She tested the fullness of her breasts, the firmness of her body, the tightness of her flesh. She measured her hair and considered its brilliance. She tried the strength of her gaze, the expression of her mouth, the fire of her breath and from the edge of the arm pit to the bend of the elbow, she slowly drew a kiss along her arm.

An extraordinary emotion, made of surprise and pride, of certainty and impatience, seized her at the contact of her own lips. She turned as though she sought someone but, discovering on her bed the two Ephesians whom she had forgotten, she leaped between them, separated them, clasped them with a sort of amorous fury, and her long golden hair enveloped the three young heads.

BOOK TWO

CHAPTER ONE

The Gardens of the Goddess

THE temple of Aphrodite-Astarte was erected outside the gates of the city in an immense park full of flowers and shadowy places where the water of the Nile, brought through seven aqueducts, nourished at all seasons a prodigious verdure.

This flowering forest at the edge of the sea, these deep brooks, these lakes, these sombre fields, had been created in the desert more than two centuries before by the first of the Ptolemies. Since then, the sycamores planted by his orders had become gigantic; under the influence of the fecund waters the lawns had grown into meadows, the pools had enlarged into lakes; from a park Nature had evolved a vast region.

The gardens were more than a valley, more than a region or country; they were a complete world enclosed by boundaries of stone and ruled by a goddess, the soul and centre of this universe. All around rose a circular terrace, eighty stadia long and thirty-two feet high. This was not a wall, it was a colossal city made of fourteen-hundred houses. An equal number of prostitutes inhabited this sacred city and represented in this unique place seventy different nationalities.

The plan of these sacred houses was uniform and as follows: the door, of red copper (the metal dedicated to the goddess) bore a knocker shaped like a phallos which struck a plate in relief, image of the feminine sex; and beneath was engraved the name of the courtesan with the initials of the usual phrase:

Ω.Ξ.Ε.
ΚΟΧΛΙΣ
Π.Π.Π.

On each side of the door opened two rooms in the form of shops, that is to say: without a wall on the side of the gardens. That on the right, called "the exposed room," was the place where the bedecked courtesan reposed upon a high seat at the hour when the men arrived. That on the left was at the disposition of lovers who wished to pass the night in the open air without, however, sleeping on the grass.

Through the opened door a corridor gave access to a vast, marble-paved court, the centre of which was occupied by an oval pool. A peristyle shaded this great spot of light and protected by a zone of coolness the entrance to the seven rooms of the house. At the back rose the altar which was of rose-granite.

Each woman had brought from her own land a little idol of the goddess, and, placed upon the domestic altar, she adored it in her own tongue without ever understanding the others. Lakmi, Ashktoreth, Venus, Ishtar, Freia, Mylitta, Kypris, such were the religious names of their deified Pleasure. Some venerated her under a symbolic form: a red boulder, a conical stone, a great spiny shell. Most of them raised upon a pedestal of soft wood a coarse statuette with thin arms, heavy breasts and excessive hips whose hand pointed to its delta which was carved like hair. They laid at its feet a branch of myrtle, strewed the altar with rose leaves, and burned a grain of incense for each prayer that was granted. It was the confidant of all their sorrows, witness of all their labors, supposed source of all their pleasure. And at their death it was put into their fragile little coffin as guardian of their entombment.

The handsomest of these girls came from the kingdoms of Asia. Every year, vessels which brought to Alexandria the presents of tributaries or of allies, disembarked, with the bales and the leathern bottles, an hundred virgins chosen by the priests for the service of the sacred garden. There were Mysians and Jewesses, Phrygians and Cretans, girls from Ecbatana and from Babylon, from the shores of the Gulf of Pearls and from the sacred banks of the Ganges. Some were white of skin, with medallion-like faces and firm breasts; others, brown as the earth under the rain, wore golden circles in their nostrils and shook dark masses of short hair upon their shoulders.

Some came from farther yet, little beings, slender and slow, whose language no one knew and who resembled yellow monkeys. Their eyes lengthened toward the temples; their straight black hair was fantastically dressed. These girls remained all their lives timid as lost animals. They knew the movements of love but refused to kiss upon the mouth. Between passing unions they might be seen play-

ing with each other and, seated upon their little feet, amusing themselves childishly.

In a separate meadow the blond and rosy daughters of the North lived in a troop, lying upon the grass. There were Sarmatians with triple plaits, with robust legs and square shoulders, who made themselves crowns with branches of trees and wrestled to divert themselves; Scythians, flat-nosed, full-breasted, hairy, who coupled only in the posture of animals; gigantic Teutons who terrified the Egyptians by their hair pale as that of old men and their flesh softer than that of children; Gauls with hair red as that of cows, who laughed without cause; young Celts with sea-green eyes, who never went out naked.

Elsewhere, the brown-breasted Iberians met during the day. They had masses of heavy hair that they dressed cleverly and nervous bellies which they left unshaven. Their firm skin and strong croups were much fancied by the Alexandrians. They were chosen for dancers as often as for mistresses.

Under the wide shadow of the palms dwelt the daughters of Africa: the Numidians veiled in white, the Carthaginians draped with black gauzes, the Negresses enveloped in multicolored costumes.

There were fourteen hundred.

When a woman entered there she never went forth again until the first day of her old age. She gave to the temple the half of her gains and the rest sufficed for her repasts and her perfumes.

They were not slaves, and each one actually possessed one of the houses of the Terrace; but all were not equally popular, and the luckiest ones often found means to buy neighboring houses which their inhabitants sold in order to save themselves from starvation. These latter then transported their obscene statuette into the park and sought an altar made of a flat stone, in a corner which they left no more. The poor merchants knew this, and addressed themselves more willingly to those who slept thus exposed to the wind upon the moss near their sanctuaries; but sometimes even these men did not present themselves, and then these poor girls united their miseries in couples—passionate friendships which became almost conjugal love, households where all was shared, to the last linen rag, and where alternating complaisances consoled for long chastities.

Those who had no woman-friend offered themselves as voluntary slaves to their more fortunate comrades. It was forbidden that these should have in their service more than twelve of the poor girls; but twenty-two courtesans were known who had attained the maximum and had chosen a variegated household from among all races.

If by chance, a woman conceived a son he was brought up in

the temple close to the contemplation of the perfect form and to the service of his divinity. If she were delivered of a daughter, the child was born for the goddess. The first day of her life, her symbolic marriage with the son of Dionysos was celebrated and the Hierophant himself deflowered her with a little golden knife, for virginity displeases Aphrodite. Later, she entered the Didascalion, the great monument-school situated behind the temple where the little girls learned, in seven classes, the theory and method of all the erotic arts: the gaze, the clasp, the movements of the body, the complications of the caress, the secret processes of the bite, of glottism and of the kiss. The pupil chose at will the day of her first experience because desire is an order of the goddess who must not be thwarted; this day she was given one of the houses of the Terrace; and some of these children who were not even nubile were counted among the most indefatigable and the most often desired.

The interior of the Didascalion, the seven classes, the little theatre and the peristyle of the court were ornamented with ninety-two frescoes which summed up the teachings of love. They were the work of a man's entire life—Cleochares of Alexandria, disciple and natural son of Apelles, had finished them, dying. Recently Berenice the queen who was much interested in the celebrated school and had sent her young sisters there, had ordered from Demetrios a series of marble groups to complete the decoration; but until now only one had been placed, in the children's class.

At the end of each year, in the presence of all the assembled courtesans a great competition took place which excited an extraordinary emulation in this crowd of women, for the twelve prizes awarded gave the right to the most supreme glory of which they could dream: the entry into the Cotytteion.

This last monument was enveloped in so many mysteries that a detailed description of it cannot now be given. We know only that it was included in the garden and that it had the form of a triangle whose base was a temple of the goddess Cotytto, in whose name fearful, unknown debauches were accomplished. The other two sides of the monument were composed of eighteen houses. Thirty-six courtesans dwelt there, so sought by rich lovers that they would by no means give themselves for less than two minæ; they were the Baptes of Alexandria. Once a month, at the full moon, they gathered in the close of the temple, maddened by aphrodisiac beverages and girdled by canonical phalli. The eldest of the thirty-six had to take a mortal dose of the terrible erotogenous philtre. The certainty of her speedy death made her attempt without fear all the dangerous excesses before which the living

recoil. Her body, everywhere foaming, became the centre and the model of the whirling orgy; in the midst of long yells, cries, tears and dances, the other naked women clasped her, bathed their hair in her sweat, chafed themselves against her burning skin and excited new ardors in the uninterrupted spasm of this furious agony. Three years these women lived thus and, at the end of the thirty-sixth month, such was the intoxication of their end.

Other less venerated sanctuaries had been raised by the women in honor of the other names of the many-formed Aphrodite. There was even an altar consecrated to the Uranian, who received the chaste vows of sentimental courtesans; another to the Epistrophia who brought forgetfulness of unhappy loves; another to the Chryseia, who attracted rich lovers; another to the Genetyllis, who protected pregnant girls; another to the Coliade, who approved gross passions, for all that touched love was piety for the goddess. But the special altars had efficacy and virtue only in regard to small desires. They were served from day to day, their favors were quotidian and their commerce familiar. The successful suppliants placed simple flowers upon them; those who were not gratified soiled them with their excrements. They were neither consecrated nor kept up by the priests and in consequence their profanation was not punishable.

Quite otherwise was the discipline of the Temple.

The Temple, the High-Temple of the High-Goddess, the holiest place in all Egypt, the inviolable Astarteion, was a colossal edifice three hundred and thirty-six feet in length, elevated upon seventeen steps at the height of the gardens. Its golden doors were guarded by twelve hermaphroditic hierodules, symbols of the two objects of love and the twelve hours of the night.

The entrance was not turned toward the east but in the direction of Paphos, that is to say, toward the north-east; the rays of the sun never penetrated directly into the sanctuary of the great nocturnal Immortal. Eighty-six columns sustained the architrave; they were tinted with crimson to half their height, and the upper parts disengaged themselves from these red vestments with an ineffable whiteness like the torsos of standing women.

Between the epistyle and the corona, the long girdling zoophoros unrolled its ornamentation, bestial, erotic and fabulous; one saw there female centaurs mounted by stallions, goats covered by thin satyrs, virgins covered by monstrous bulls, naiads covered by stags, Bacchantes loved by tigers, lionesses seized by gryphons. The great multitude of beings hurled thus, inspired by the irresistible divine passion. The male stretched forward, the female opened and in the fusion of the creative

springs, awoke the first stirring of life. The crowd of obscure couples ranged sometimes by chance about an immortal scene: Europa, inclining, supporting the handsome Olympian animal; Leda guiding the robust swan between her young compliant thighs. Farther, the insatiable Siren exhausted the expiring Glaucos; the god Pan possessed, standing, a hamadryad with flying hair; the Sphinx raised her croup to the level of the horse Pegasus,—and, at the end of the frieze, the sculptor himself was figured before the goddess Aphrodite, modeling, from her own person, in soft wax the contours of a perfect cteis, as though all his ideal of beauty, joy and virtue, had long since taken refuge in that precious and fragile flower.

CHAPTER TWO

Melitta

"PURIFY thyself, Stranger."

"I shall enter pure," said Demetrios.

Dipping the end of her hair in water, the young guardian of the gate touched first his eyelids, then his lips and fingers, that his glance, the kiss of his mouth and the caress of his hands should be sanctified.

And he advanced into the wood of Aphrodite.

Through the branches which had become black, he perceived at the western horizon a sun of dark crimson which no longer dazzled the eyes. It was the sun of the same day upon which the meeting with Chrysis had thrown his life out of its groove.

The feminine soul is of a simplicity incredible to man. Where there is but a straight line they obstinately seek the complexity of a web; they find space and lose themselves in it. It was thus that the soul of Chrysis, transparent as that of a little child, appeared to Demetrios more mysterious than a problem of metaphysics. After leaving this woman upon the jetty, he returned home as though in a dream, incapable of replying to all the questions which tormented him. What did she wish with the three gifts? It would be impossible for her to carry or sell a stolen famous mirror, the comb of a murdered woman, the goddess' necklace of pearl. In keeping them at home she would expose herself each day to a fatal discovery. Then why demand them? to destroy them? He knew too well that women do not enjoy things in secret and that happy events do not begin to please them until the day they become known. And then, by what divination, by what prodigious clairvoyance,

had she judged him capable of accomplishing for her three actions so extraordinary? Assuredly, if he wished, Chrysis, carried from her house, delivered over to his mercy, could be made his mistress, his wife or his slave, according to his choice. He was even free to simply destroy her. Former revolutions had accustomed the citizens to frequent violent deaths and no one would have given a second thought to a vanished courtesan. Chrysis must know this, yet she had dared . . .

The more he thought of her, the more pleased he was that she had so prettily varied the debate of the proposition. How many women, desirable as she, would have presented themselves awkwardly! This one, what had she demanded? neither love, nor gold, nor jewels, but three incredible crimes! She interested him keenly. He had offered her all the treasures of Egypt; he felt now that, had she accepted them, she would not have received two oboli and that he would have been weary of her even before having known her. Three crimes were surely an unusual fee; but she was worthy of receiving it since she was the woman to demand it, and he promised himself to continue the adventure.

To give himself no time to withdraw from his firm resolution, he went the same day to Bacchis', found the house empty, took the silver mirror and went to the gardens.

Must he go directly to Chrysis' second victim? He did not think so. The Priestess Touni, who possessed the famous ivory comb, was so charming and so delicate that he feared his heart would be touched if he appeared before her without a preliminary precaution. He retraced his steps and walked along the Great Terrace.

The courtesans were on display in their "exposed chambers" like flowers at an exhibition. Their attitudes and their costumes had no less diversity than their ages, types and races. The most beautiful, following the tradition of Phryne, left uncovered only the oval of their face, enveloping themselves from head to foot in their great garment of fine linen. Others had adopted the fashion of transparent robes under which their beauties were mysteriously distinguished as one sees green mosses like spots of shadow at the bottom of limpid waters. Those who had but their youth for their charm were naked to the girdle, arching their body forward to best display the firmness of their breasts. But the more mature, knowing the features of the feminine face grow old much more quickly than the skin of the body, sat quite naked, supporting their breasts in their hands, and parting their heavy thighs as though they must prove they were still women.

Demetrios passed slowly before them and did not weary of admiring. He had never been able to see without intense emotion the nakedness of a woman.

He understood neither disgust before dead youth nor insensibility before very young girls. Any woman, this evening, could have charmed him. Provided she was silent and displayed no more ardors than the minimum exacted by the politeness of the bed, he dispensed with her beauty. More yet, he preferred that she could have a coarse body, for the more his thought dwelt upon perfect forms the more his desire retreated from them. The emotion given him by the impression of living beauty was an exclusively cerebral sensuality which quite destroyed the aphrodisia. He remembered with anguish having remained an entire hour impotent as an old man by the most admirable woman whom he had ever held in his arms. And from that night he had learned to choose less perfect mistresses.

"Friend," said a voice, "dost thou not know me?"

He turned, made a negative sign, and continued his way, for he never twice disrobed the same girl. It was the only principle he followed in his visits to the gardens. A woman one has not yet possessed has something virginal; but what good result, what surprise awaits a second meeting? It would be almost marriage. Demetrios did not expose himself to the disillusions of the second night. The queen Berenice sufficed for his rare conjugal desires and beyond her he carefully renewed, each evening, the accomplice of the indispensable adultery.

"Clonarion!"

"Gnathene!"

"Plango!"

"Mnais!"

"Crobyle!"

"Ioesa!"

They cried out their names as he passed and some added the affirmation of their ardent nature or the offer of an abnormal practice. Demetrios followed the way; he was disposed, according to his habit, to select at hazard in the troop, when a little girl all dressed in blue leaned her head upon her shoulders and said to him, softly, without rising:

"Is there no way?"

The unexpectedness of this formula made him smile. He stopped.

"Open the door," he said. "I choose thee."

The little one joyously sprang to her feet and struck two blows with the phallic hammer. An old female slave came to open.

"Gorgo," said the child, "I have someone; quick, Cretan wine, cakes, and make the bed."

And she turned to Demetrios.

"Thou hast no need of satyrion?"

"No," said the young man, laughing, "hast thou any?"

"I must have it," said the child, "they ask for it oftener than thou thinkest. Come this way; take care of the steps, one of them is broken. Enter my chamber; I will come back."

The room was quite plain, like that of all novice courtesans. A great bed, a second bed for repose, some rugs and some seats furnished it insufficiently; but, through a large open bay, one saw the gardens, the sea, the double roadstead of Alexandria. Demetrios stood looking at the distant city.

Setting suns beyond the harbors;—peerless glories of maritime cities—calm of the heavens, purple of the waters—upon what soul clamorous with joy or sorrow dost thou not cast silence! What steps do not halt, what enjoyments do not suspend, what voices do not fail before thee! ... Demetrios gazed; a surge of torrential flame seemed to issue from the sun half plunged into the sea, and to flow directly to the curved shore of the wood of Aphrodite. From one horizon to the other, the sumptuous scale of crimson swept over the Mediterranean in zones of tints without transitions from golden red to cold violet. Between this quivering splendor and the greened mirror of Lake Mareotis, the white mass of the town was quite clothed with red-violet reflections. The different orientation of its twenty-thousand flat houses accented it marvelously with twenty-thousand spots of color—a perpetual metamorphosis according to the decreasing phases of the occidental radiance. It was quick and incendiary; then, suddenly, the sun was swallowed up and the first inflow of the night laved the whole earth with a tremor, a veiled breeze, uniform and transparent.

"Here are figs, here are cakes, a comb of honey, wine—a woman. The figs must be enjoyed while it is still day and the woman after the darkness has come!"

The little girl had returned, laughing. She made the young man sit down, placed herself astride his knees, and, raising her hands behind her head, secured a falling rose in her chestnut hair.

Demetrios uttered an involuntary exclamation of surprise; she was completely naked and, thus freed of her billowy robe, her little body appeared so young, so childish of breast, so narrow of hip, so visibly immature, that Demetrios was seized with pity, like a rider about to make a delicate filly carry all his man's weight.

"But thou art not a woman!" he cried.

"I am not a woman! By the two goddesses, what am I then? A Thracian, a porter or an old philosopher?"

"How old art thou?"

"Ten years and a half. Eleven years. I can say eleven. I was born in the gardens. My mother is a Milesian. She is Pythias, whom they call 'The Goat.' Shall I send for her if thou findest me too little? She has a soft skin, she is beautiful."

"Wast thou at the Didascalion?"

"I am still there, in the sixth class. I shall finish next year; it will not be too soon."

"Art thou weary of it?"

"Ah! if thou knewest how exacting the mistresses are! They make us do the same lesson twenty-five times over! Quite useless things, which the men never demand. And then, one is tired for nothing; I do not like that. Come, take a fig; not that one, it is not ripe. I will teach thee a new way to eat them: look."

"I know it. It is longer but it is no better. I think thou art a good pupil."

"Oh! what I know I have learned all alone. The mistresses wish to make us think they know more than we. They are handier at it, possibly, but they have invented nothing."

"Thou hast many lovers?"

"All too old; it is inevitable. Young men are so stupid! They love only women forty years old. At times I have seen some pass who are pretty as Eros, and if thou couldst see what they choose!—hippopotami! It is enough to make one turn pale. I hope I will not live to the age of those women. I would be too ashamed to undress. Thou seest I am so glad, so glad to be still quite young. The breasts always grow too soon. It seems to me that the first month I see my blood flow I shall believe myself already near death. Let me give thee a kiss. I love thee."

Here the conversation took a turn less balanced, if not more silent, and Demetrios soon perceived that his scruples were unnecessary with a little person already so well informed. She seemed to take into account that she was but a rather sparse pasture for a young man's appetite, and she disordered her lover by a prodigious activity of furtive touches which he could neither foresee nor permit, nor direct, and which never allowed the repose of a loving embrace. The firm, agile little body multiplied around him, offered and refused, slipped, turned, struggled. At length they seized each other. But the half hour was but one long play.

She leaped first from the bed, dipped her finger in the cup of honey and dabbled her lips with it; then, with a thousand efforts not to laugh, she leaned over Demetrios, rubbing her mouth upon his. Her

long ringlets danced at each side of their cheeks. The young man smiled and leaned on his elbow.

"What is thy name?" he asked.

"Melitta. Didst thou not see my name on the door?"

"I did not look."

"Thou canst see it in my room. They have all written upon my walls. I shall soon be obliged to have them repainted."

Demetrios raised his head; the four panels of the room were covered with inscriptions.

"Why, how curious," he said. "May I read them?"

"Oh! if thou wishest. I have no secrets."

He read. The name of Melitta was repeated several times with the names of men and with barbarous drawings. Phrases, tender, obscene or comic were grotesquely intermingled. Lovers boasted of their vigor, or detailed the charms of the little courtesan, or even made fun of her comrades. All of which was hardly interesting except as a written proof of a general abjection. But toward the end of the panel on the right, Demetrios received a shock.

"Who is this? Who is this? Tell me!"

"Who? What?" said the child. "What is the matter with thee?"

"Here. That name. Who wrote that?"

And his finger stopped under this double line:

ΜΕΛΙΤΤΑ .Λ. ΧΡΥΣΙΔΑ
ΧΡΥΣΙΣ .Λ. ΜΕΛΙΤΤΑΝ

"Ah!" she replied, "I did. I wrote that."

"But who is this Chrysis?"

"She is my best friend."

"I suppose so. That is not what I asked thee. Which Chrysis? There are many."

"Mine is the most beautiful. Chrysis of Galilee."

"Thou knowest her? thou knowest her? Tell me, then! Whence comes she? where does she live? who is her lover? tell me everything!"

He sat down on the bed and took the young girl on his knees.

"Then thou lovest her?" she asked.

"It matters little to thee. Tell me what thou knowest. I am anxious to hear everything."

"Oh! I know nothing at all; only that she has come twice to me; and thou canst imagine I have not asked information about her family. I was too happy to have her and I lost no time in conversation."

"How is she made?"

"She is made like a pretty girl; what dost thou wish me to say?

Must I name for thee every part of her body, adding that it is beautiful? And then, *she* is a woman; a real woman . . . When I think of her, I wish for somebody at once."

And she put her arm around Demetrios' neck.

"Thou knowest nothing," he resumed, "nothing about her?"

"I know . . . I know that she comes from Galilee, that she is almost twenty years old and that she lives in the Jewish Quarter, at the end of the city near the gardens. But that is all."

"And about her life, about her tastes? thou canst tell me nothing? She loves women, since she comes to thee. But is she entirely Lesbian?"

"Certainly not. The first night which she passed here she brought a lover, and I swear to thee she simulated nothing. When a woman is sincere, I see it in her eyes. That did not prevent her from once returning quite alone . . . And she has promised me a third night."

"Thou dost not know whether she has another friend in the gardens? No one?"

"Yes, a woman from her country, Chimairis, a poor woman."

"Where does she live? I must see her."

"She has slept in the wood for a year. She sold her house. But I know where her den is. I can lead thee there, if thou wishest it. Put on my sandals for me, wilt thou?"

With a rapid hand Demetrios tied the cords of plaited leather over Melitta's slender ankles. Then he held for her a short robe which she took simply over her arm, and they went out hastily.

They walked for a long time—the park was immense. Long distances apart, a girl under a tree spoke her name, opening her robe, then lay down again, her eyes upon her hand. Melitta knew some of them who kissed her without stopping her. While passing before a worn altar, she plucked three large flowers and placed them upon the stone.

The night was not yet dark. There is, in the intense light of summer days, something durable which lingers vaguely in the slow twilight. The pale, moist stars, hardly lighter than the depths of the sky, twinkled with a soft palpitation, and the shadows of the branches were undefined.

"Ah!" cried Melitta, "Mamma. There is Mamma!"

A woman alone, robed in a triple muslin rayed with blue, was advancing with a tranquil step. As soon as she perceived the child, she ran to her, lifted her from the ground, took her in her arms and kissed her vigorously on the cheeks.

"My little girl! my little love, where art thou going?"

"I am leading someone who wishes to see Chimairis. And thou? Art thou taking a walk?"

"Corinna is delivered. I went to her; I dined at her bedside."

"And what has she made? a boy?"

"Twin girls, my dear, pink as wax dolls. Thou mayest go there tonight. She will show them to thee."

"Oh! how nice! Two little courtesans. What are their names?"

"Both Pannychis, because they were born on the eve of the festival of Aphrodite. It is a divine presage. They will be pretty."

She replaced the child upon her feet and, addressing herself to Demetrios:

"How dost thou find my daughter? Have I the right to be proud of her?"

"You may be satisfied with each other," he said, calmly.

"Kiss Mamma," said Melitta.

Silently, he placed a kiss between her breasts. Pythias returned it upon his mouth and they separated.

Demetrios and the child took a few steps more under the trees, while the courtesan went away, turning her head to watch them. At length they arrived and Melitta said:

"It is here."

Chimairis was crouching on her left heel, on a little strip of lawn between two trees and a bush. She had spread out beneath her a sort of red rag which was her last garment during the day and upon which she lay naked at the time the men passed by. Demetrios contemplated her with growing interest. She had the feverish look of those thin brown women whose wild bodies seem consumed by an ever palpitating ardor. Her muscular lips, her excessive gaze, her large, livid eyelids, composed a double expression, of sensual greed and of exhaustion. The curve of her concave belly and of her nervous thighs hollowed itself as though to receive; and, as she had sold everything, even her combs and pins, even her depilatories, her hair was matted in an inextricable disorder, while a black pubescence added to her nudity something, wild, furred and shameless.

Near her, a large goat stood upon his rigid hoofs, attached to a tree by a golden chain which had formerly shone fourfold upon the breast of his mistress.

"Chimairis," said Melitta, "arise. Here is someone who wishes to speak to thee."

The Jewess looked but did not stir. Demetrios advanced.

"Thou knowest Chrysis?" he asked.

"Yes."

"Thou seest her often?"

"Yes."

"Canst thou tell me of her?"

"No."

"What—no? What, thou canst not?"

"No."

Melitta was astonished.

"Speak to him," she said. "Have confidence. He loves her; he wishes her well."

"I see clearly that he loves her," replied Chimairis. "If he loves her he wishes her ill. If he loves her I will not speak."

Demetrios trembled with anger, but was silent.

"Give me thy hand," said the Jewess to him. "I shall see there if I am wrong."

She took the young man's left hand and turned it toward the moonlight. Melitta leaned forward to see, for, although she could not read the mysterious lines, their fatality attracted her.

"What dost thou see?" said Demetrios.

"I see . . . can I tell thee what I see? Wilt thou be pleased with me? Wilt thou even believe me? . . . I see first, all happiness; but it is in the past. I also see all love, but that is lost in blood."

"Mine?"

"The blood of a woman. Then the blood of another woman. Last of all, thine own; but a little later."

Demetrios shrugged; Melitta screamed.

"She is afraid," continued Chimairis. "However, it is no concern of hers nor of mine. Let things take their course, since they cannot be stopped. From before thy birth, thy destiny was fixed. Go. I will speak no more."

And she let his hand fall.

CHAPTER THREE

Love and Death

"THE blood of a woman. Then the blood of another woman. Last of all, thine own, but a little later."

As he walked, Demetrios repeated these words and, in spite of all, a belief in them oppressed him. He had never placed confidence in

oracles drawn from the bodies of victims or the movements of planets. Such affinities seemed too problematic. But the complex lines of the hand have, in themselves, the aspect of an exclusively individual horoscope which he regarded uneasily. And so the prediction of the Chiromant haunted his spirit.

In his turn, he considered the palm of his left hand where his life was summed up in secret and ineffaceable signs.

He saw first, at the summit, a sort of regular crescent whose points were turned toward the base of the fingers. Below, a quadruple line, knotted and pink, was hollowed, marked in two places by bright red points. Another more slender line descended, at first parallel, then turned abruptly toward the wrist. Finally, a third, short and pure, outlined the base of the thumb, which was entirely covered with lightly traced lines. He saw all that; but not knowing how to read the hidden symbol, he drew his hand over his eyes and changed the subject of his meditation.

Chrysis, Chrysis, Chrysis. The name pulsed in him like a fever. To satisfy her, conquer her, enclose her in his arms—fly with her, into Syria, into Greece, to Rome, no matter where, if only it were a place where he should have no mistresses and she no lovers: that was what must be done, and immediately, immediately!

Of the three gifts which she had demanded, one was already secured. Two others remained: the comb and the necklace.

"The comb first," he thought.

And he hastened his steps.

Every evening, after sunset, the wife of the High-Priest sat upon a marble bench, placed with its back to the forest, whence one could view the whole sea. Demetrios knew this well, for this woman, like so many others, had been in love with him, and she had once told him that on the day he wished for her he could find her there.

Accordingly he went thither.

She was indeed there: but she did not see him approach; she sat with closed eyes, her body reposing against the back of the bench, her arms relaxed.

She was an Egyptian. Her name was Touni. She wore a light tunic of vivid purple without buckles or girdle, and without other embroidery than two black stars to mark the points of the breasts. The thin stuff, ironed into folds, broke its fall upon the delicate roundings of her knees, and little sandals of blue leather gloved her slender, rounded feet. Her skin was quite brown, her lips very thick, her shoulders small, her fragile and supple figure seemed fatigued by

the weight of her full breasts. She slept with open mouth and dreamed gently.

Demetrios noiselessly sat down on the bench at her side.

He slowly drew nearer and nearer. A young shoulder, smooth and dark, muscular near the armpit and joined to the breast by a shadow of the skin, offered him its delicacy.

Lower, the tunic of purple muslin opened, as far as the hips, in a long, loose slit. Demtrios gently passed his hand through this flowing opening and the tips of his curved fingers touched the swell of the moist breast. Its nipple rose in his palm.

Meanwhile Touni did not awaken.

Her dream changed gradually but did not dissolve. Her breath came more rapidly through her partly opened lips and she murmured a long, unintelligible phrase as her fevered head fell back.

With the same gentleness, Demetrios withdrew his hand and opened it to the sweep of the breeze.

Beyond the obscure blue slopes, the eternal sea shuddered beneath the immense scintillation of the night. Like another breast of another priestess, it undulated beneath the stars, uplifted by the antique dreams which still cause it to thrill beneath our tardy eyes and of which the last beings will seek the mystery ere it is effaced at the end of the ages. The moon inclined her great goblet of blood over the waters. Far away, in the purest atmosphere which had ever united heaven and earth, a slight red trail, shot with dark veins, trembled upon the brightness of the sea beneath the rising moon like the quiver of a nocturnal breast beneath a caress that remains after the touch has passed.

Touni still slumbered, her head inclined, her body almost naked in its tinted muslin.

The redness of the moon, yet on the horizon, came to her over the water. Its shining, fatal glimmer bathed her in a flame which seemed immobile; but slowly the reflection raised over the Egyptian; one by one, her small black curls appeared, and finally, from the shadow, the Comb, the royal Comb desired by Chrysis appeared suddenly, its diadem of ivory struck by the crimson radiance.

Then the sculptor took Touni's soft face between his hands and turned it toward his own. Her eyes opened, widened:

"Demetrios! . . . Demetrios! . . . Thou!"

And she clasped him in her arms.

"Oh," she murmured, in a voice which sang with happiness, "Oh, thou hast come, thou art here . . . is it thou, Demetrios, in whose

hands I awaken? Is it thou, son of my goddess, god of my body and my life?"

Demetrios recoiled. With one movement she was beside him.

"No," she cried. "What dost thou fear? For thee I am not she who is surrounded by the omnipotence of the High-Priest and from whom the people draw away. Forget my name, Demetrios. Women in their lovers' arms have no name. I am no longer she thou knewest. I am only a woman who loves thee—whose desire for thee fills her even to the tips of the breasts."

Demetrios did not open his lips.

"Listen once more," she resumed. "I know who possesses thee; I myself do not aspire to be thy mistress nor to become, in any way, the rival of my queen. No, Demetrios, do with me as thou wilt; take me as a little slave whom one possesses for an instant, then abandons and soon forgets. Take me as the lowest, poorest courtesan who waits at the roadside for the charity of some furtive and brutal love. In fact, who am I but one of them? and what have the Immortals given me, more than the most servile of all my slaves? Thou, at least, thou hast the Beauty which is dispensed like an emanation from the gods."

Demetrios, exceedingly grave, pierced her with his gaze:

"And what, thinkest thou, unfortunate one, what powers emanate from the gods except . . ."

"Love . . ."

"Or death."

She started up.

"What meanest thou . . . Death . . . yes, Death . . . But it is so far from me . . . in sixty years I may think of it. But why speak to me of Death, Demetrios?"

He said simply:

"Death this night."

Terror-struck, she laughed shrilly:

"Tonight . . . no, no . . . who said that? Why should I die? . . . answer me . . . speak . . . what horrible jesting. . . ."

"Thou art condemned."

"By whom?"

"By thy destiny."

"How knowest thou?"

"I know because I am woven, Touni, with thy destiny."

"And my destiny wills that I die?"

"Thy destiny wills that thou shalt die, by my hand, upon this bench."

He seized her wrist.

"Demetrios," she stammered, terrified, "I will not cry out. I will not call for aid. Let me speak . . ."

And she wiped her perspiring forehead.

"If death . . . comes to me from thee . . . death . . . will be sweet to me . . . I accept it, I desire it, but listen . . ."

Staggering from stone to stone, she dragged him into the darkness of the wood.

"Since thou holdest within thy hands all that we receive from the gods . . . The thrill which gives us life and that which snatches it away, open thy two hands upon mine eyes, Demetrios . . . that of love . . . and that of Death . . . do this and I will die without regret."

There was no reply in the look he turned toward her, but she imagined there the "yes" which he had not uttered.

Transfigured for a second time, she lifted a new face where new-born desire, strong in despair, drove terror away.

She spoke no more, but already, between her lips which were never to close again, each breath sang softly as though she were deep in love even before receiving the embrace.

Nevertheless, she gained this supreme victory.

With a single movement, she tore off her light tunic, rolled it into a ball of muslin and, with a smile but slightly tinged with sorrow, threw it behind her. Her young, delicate body stretched out for the last time in a happiness too great to be less than eternal, and, as her distracted lover, hesitating and perhaps anxious, completed the action of love without planning that of death:

"Ah . . ." she cried suddenly, "kill me now, Demetrios. Why dost thou wait!"

He raised himself upon his fists, looked once more at Touni whose great eyes, from beneath him, were raised in ecstasy to his. Then, drawing out one of the long, golden pins which glittered behind her ears, he drove it home under her left breast.

CHAPTER FOUR

Moonlight

HOWEVER, this woman would have given him her comb and even her hair as well, for love.

If he did not ask it of her, it was because of his scruples; Chrysis had very precisely demanded a crime—not any ancient jewel,

thrust into the hair of a young woman. That is why he believed it his duty to consent to some shedding of blood.

Still, he might have considered that the oaths one makes to women during the crises of love may be forgotten in the interval without great injury to the moral value of the lover who has sworn them; and that, if ever this involuntary forgetfulness needed to cover itself with an excuse, it would surely be in a case where the life of another assuredly innocent woman lay in the balance. But Demetrios did not pause to reason in this way. The adventure which he pursued was really too curious for him to trifle with its violent incidents. He feared lest he regret, later, having effaced from the intrigue some scene which, though short, was necessary to the beauty of the whole. Often but one virtuous qualm is necessary to reduce a tragedy to the commonplace of normal existence. The death of Cassandra, he mused, was not an indispensable fact in the development of "Agamemnon," but if it had not taken place, all the "Orestes" would have been spoiled.

That is why, having cut away Touni's hair, he folded the engraved ivory comb in his garments and, without reflecting farther, undertook the third of the labors commanded by Chrysis: the rape of the necklace of Aphrodite.

He was not obliged to consider entering the temple by the Great Gate. The twelve hermaphrodites who guarded the entry would doubtless have let Demetrios pass, in spite of the prohibition which halted all the profane in the absence of the priest; but there was no reason why he should prove his future guilt so naïvely, since a secret entrance led to the sanctuary.

Demetrios turned into a part of the deserted woods where lay the Necropolis of the High-Priests of the goddess. He counted the first tombs, turned the door of the seventh, and closed it behind him.

With great difficulty, for the stone was heavy, he raised the funeral slab under which a marble stairway led downward, and descended, step by step.

He knew that one could make sixty paces in a straight line, and that afterward it was necessary to follow the wall by touch in order not to collide with the subterranean stairway of the temple.

The full coolness of the earth-depths calmed him, little by little.

In a few moments he arrived at the end.

He ascended, he opened.

The night was light outside and black inside the divine enclosure. When, with care he had gently closed the too sonorous door, he felt himself full of tremors and as though surrounded by the cold of the

stones. He dared not raise his eyes. The black silence terrified him; the obscurity peopled itself with the unknown. He laid his hand on his forehead like a man who does not wish to awake for fear of finding himself living. At last he looked.

In the full moonlight, the goddess, upon a pedestal of rosy stone, laden with pendent treasures, appeared as though living. She was naked and sexed, vaguely tinted according to the colors of woman; she held in one hand her mirror whose handle was fashioned like a phallos, and with the other adorned her beauty with a seven-fold necklace of pearls. One pearl, larger than the others, silvery and elongated, shone between her two breasts like a nocturnal crescent between two round clouds. And they were the true holy pearls born of the water drops which rolled in the shell of the Anadyomene.

Demetrios lost himself in ineffable adoration. He believed in truth that Aphrodite herself was there. He recognized his work no longer, so profound was the abyss between what he had been and what he had become. He held forth his arms and murmured the mysterious words by which the goddess is supplicated in the Phrygian ceremonies.

Supernatural, luminous, impalpable, naked and pure, the softly palpitating vision hovered upon the stone. He fixed his eyes upon her although he feared lest the caress of his look make the delicate hallucination evaporate into the air. He advanced very gently, touched with his finger the rosy toe, as though to assure himself of the existence of the statue, and, incapable of stopping, so much she drew him to her, he ascended until he stood beside her and, placing his hands upon the white shoulders, gazed contemplatively into her eyes.

He trembled, he swooned, he laughed with joy. His hands wandered over the naked arms, pressed the cold, hard waist, descended along the legs, caressed the globe of the stomach. With all his strength he strained himself to this Immortality. He looked at himself in the mirror, he lifted the necklace of pearls, took it off, swung it, gleaming, in the moonlight, and replaced it timidly. He kissed the curving hand, the round neck, the undulous bosom, the partly opened marble mouth. Then he drew back to the edge of the pedestal and, holding the divine arms, gazed tenderly at the adorable bowed head.

The hair, dressed in the oriental manner, lightly veiled the forehead. The half-closed eyes elongated, smiling. The lips were parted as though swooning from a kiss.

Silently he disposed the seven rows of round pearls upon the dazzling breast and descended to the floor to see the idol from a distance.

Then it seemed to him that he awoke. He recalled what he had come to do, what he had wished, nearly accomplished; a monstrous thing. He blushed to the temples. The remembrance of Chrysis passed like a gross apparition before his memory. He enumerated everything dubious in the courtesan's beauty: the thick lips, the puffed hair, the languid gait. He had forgotten her hands, but he imagined them large to add an odious detail to the image he repulsed. His state of mind became like that of a man surprised at dawn by his unique mistress in the bed of a base girl, who could not explain to himself how he could have permitted himself to be tempted the evening before. He found neither an excuse, nor even a serious reason. Evidently he had been, for a day, victim of a sort of passing madness, a physical unrest, a malady. He felt himself cured, but still dizzy with intoxication.

To complete the return to himself, he leaned back against the wall of the temple and remained a long time standing before the statue. The light of the moon continued to descend through the square opening in the roof; Aphrodite shone resplendent; and, as her eyes were in the shadow, he sought their gaze . . .

. . . So the night passed. Then the day came and the statue took in turn the rosy lividity of the dawn and the golden reflection of the sun.

Demetrios had ceased to think. The ivory comb and the silver mirror which he bore in his tunic had passed from his memory. He abandoned himself gently to serene contemplation.

Outside, a tempest of bird cries clamored, piped and sang in the garden. The voices of women talked and laughed at the foot of the walls. The agitation of morning surged up from the awakened earth. Demetrios was filled only with delicious emotions.

The sun was already high and the shadow of the roof had moved when he heard a confused sound of light feet ascending the outer steps.

It was doubtless a sacrifice which they were about to offer the goddess, a procession of young women coming to fulfill vows or pronounce them before the statue for the first day of the Aphrodisian Festivals.

Demetrios wished to avoid them.

The sacred pedestal opened in the rear in a fashion known only to the priests and the sculptor. There the Hierophant stood to dictate to a young girl whose voice was clear and high, the miraculous utterances which issued from the statue on the third day of the festival. Through it, the gardens could be reached. Demetrios entered and

paused before the bronze-edged opening which pierced the thick stone.

The two golden doors opened heavily. Then the procession entered.

CHAPTER FIVE

The Invitation

TOWARD the middle of the night, Chrysis was awakened by three knocks at the door.

She had slept the whole day between the two Ephesians and, except for the disorder of the bed, they might have been taken for three sisters together. Rhodis was cuddled against the Galilæan whose sweat-moistened leg lay heavy upon her. Myrtocleia slept face down, her eyes upon her arm and her back naked.

Chrysis disengaged herself carefully, took three steps upon the bed, descended, and partly opened her door.

A sound of voices came from the entrance.

"Who is it, Djala? who is it?" she asked.

"It is Naucrates who wishes to speak with thee. I am telling him that thou art not free."

"Oh, how stupid! Certainly I am free. Enter, Naucrates, I am in my room."

And she returned to the bed.

Naucrates stood for some time on the threshold as though he feared being indiscreet. The two musicians opened sleep-laden eyes but could not tear themselves from their dreams.

"Seat thyself," said Chrysis. "I have no coquetries to make between us. I know thou hast not come for me. What wishest thou of me?"

Naucrates was a well-known philosopher who, for more than twenty years had been the lover of Bacchis and had never deceived her, more through indolence than by fidelity. His gray hair was trimmed short, his beard pointed after the manner of Demosthenes and his moustache cut even with his lips. He wore a large white garment of seamless wool.

"I have come with an invitation for thee," he said. "Bacchis gives, tomorrow, a dinner to be followed by a festival. We will be seven, if thou comest. Do not fail us."

"A festival? What is the occasion?"

"She will free her handsomest slave, Aphrodisia. There will be

dancers and auletrides. I believe thy two friends are engaged, and for that reason they should not be here. The others are rehearsing even now at Bacchis'."

"Oh! that is true," cried Rhodis, "we had forgotten it. Arise, Myrto, we are very late."

But Chrysis protested.

"No! Not yet! how wicked thou art to take my women away from me! If I had suspected that, I would not have received thee. Oh! see, they are already prepared!"

"Our robes are not complicated," said the child. "And we are not beautiful enough to spend a long time dressing."

"Will I see you at the temple, at least?"

"Yes, tomorrow morning; we will bring doves. I am taking a drachma from thy purse, Chrysé; we have nothing with which to buy them. Until tomorrow."

They ran out. Naucrates looked for some time at the door closed after them; then he folded his arms and, turning toward Chrysis, said in a low voice:

"Good. Thou conductest thyself well."

"How?"

"One alone no longer suffices thee. Thou needest two, now. Thou takest them even from the street. That is a fine example. And then, wilt thou tell me, what remains for us, for us, the men? You all have lovers and, leaving their enervating arms, you can give of your passion only what they have been willing to leave you. Dost thou think this can endure for long? If it continues thus, we will be forced to go to Bathyllos . . ."

"Ah! no!" cried Chrysis, "I will never admit that! I know very well people make that comparison. But it is foolish and I am astonished that thou, who professest to think, should not understand how absurd it is."

"And what difference dost thou find?"

"There is no question of difference. There is no relation between the one and the other; that is clear."

"I do not say thou art wrong. I wish to know thy reasons."

"Oh! they can be given in two words; listen carefully. Woman is, in point of love, a finished instrument. From head to foot, she is made uniquely, marvelously, for love. *She alone knows how to love. She alone knows how to be loved.* Consequently: if a loving couple is composed of two women, it is perfect; if there is but one woman, it is only half as good; if there be none, it is absolutely idiotic. That is all."

"Thou art hard on Plato, my girl."

"The great men are not, any more than the gods, great in all circumstances. Pallas understands nothing of commerce, Sophocles knew not how to paint, Plato knew not how to love. Philosophers, poets, orators, those who make use of his name, are no better and, however admirable they may be in their art, in love they are simpletons. Believe me, Naucrates, I feel that I am right."

The philosopher made a gesture.

"Thou art a little irreverent," he said, "but I by no means feel thou art wrong. My indignation was not real. There is something charming in the union of two young women, provided that they are both quite willing to remain wholly feminine, to retain their long hair, uncover their breasts, and refrain from dressing up with artificial instruments as though, by an inconsequence, they envied the gross sex which they despise so prettily. Yes, their alliance is remarkable because their caresses are all superficial and their voluptuousness so much the more refined. They do not embrace, they impress delicately to taste the supreme joy. Their wedding night is not bloody. They are virgins, Chrysis. They know nothing of brutal action; because of this they are superior to Bathyllos who pretends to offer the equivalent, forgetting that you too, even for this pitiful thing, could compete with him. Human love is distinguished from the stupid heat of animals only by two divine functions: the caress and the kiss. Now these are the only things known to the women of whom we are speaking. They have even perfected them."

"One can do no better," said Chrysis, amazed. "But then why dost thou reproach me?"

"I reproach thee for being an hundred thousand. Already a large number of women have no perfect pleasure except with their own sex. Soon you will receive us no more, even as a last resort. I am scolding thee from jealousy."

Here Naucrates found that the conversation had lasted long enough and he arose, simply.

"I can tell Bacchis she may count on thee?" he asked.

"I will come," replied Chrysis.

The philosopher kissed her knees and went out slowly.

Then she clasped her hands and spoke aloud, although she was alone.

"Bacchis . . . Bacchis . . . He comes from her and does not know! . . . Is the mirror still there, then? . . . Demetrios has forgotten me . . . if he has hesitated the first day, I am lost; he will do noth-

ing . . . but it is possible that all is done! Bacchis has other mirrors which she uses oftener. Perhaps she does not know yet . . . Gods! Gods! no way of hearing, and perhaps . . . Ah! Djala! Djala!"

The slave entered.

"Give me my dice," said Chrysis. "I wish to cast."

And she threw the four little dice into the air . . .

"Oh! . . . Oh! . . . Djala, look! the cast of Aphrodite!"

Thus was called a rather rare throw by which the cubes all presented a different face. There were exactly thirty-five chances to one against this arrangement. It was the best cast of the game.

Djala observed coldly:

"What didst thou ask?"

"That is true," said Chrysis, disappointed, "I forgot to make a wish. I thought, indeed, of something, but I said nothing. Does that count the same?"

"I think not; thou must begin again."

A second time Chrysis threw the dice.

"The cast of Midas, now. What dost thou think of it?"

"It is hard to say. Good and bad. It is a throw which is explained by the following one. Begin again with a single die."

A third time Chrysis interrogated the play; but as soon as the die had fallen she stammered:

"The . . . the point of Kios!"

And she burst into sobs.

Djala said nothing, herself uneasy: Chrysis wept upon the couch, her hair spread out around her head. At length she turned with a movement of anger.

"Why didst thou make me begin again? I am sure the first throw counted."

"If thou didst make a wish, yes. If thou didst not, no. Thou alone knowest," said Djala.

"Beside, the dice prove nothing. It is a Greek game. I do not believe in it. I will try something else."

She dried her tears and crossed the room. She took a box of white chips on a tablet, counted out twenty-two, then, with the point of a pearl clasp, she graved upon them, one after the other, the twenty-two letters of the Hebrew alphabet. They were the arcana of the Kabala which she had learned in Galilee.

"Here is something I trust. Here is something which never deceives," she said. "Raise the fold of thy robe; that will be my bag."

She threw the twenty-two counters into the slave's tunic, repeating mentally:

"Shall I wear the necklace of Aphrodite? Shall I wear the necklace of Aphrodite? Shall I wear the necklace of Aphrodite?"

And she drew out the tenth arcanum which clearly betokened: "Yes."

*

CHAPTER SIX

The Rose of Chrysis

IT was a procession white and blue, yellow and rose and green.

Thirty courtesans advanced carrying baskets of flowers, snow-white doves with red feet, veils of the most fragile azure, and precious ornaments.

An old white-bearded priest, enveloped even around the head in a stiff unbleached material, walked before the young cortège and guided the file of bowed devotees toward the stone altar.

They sang, and their song was slow as the sea, sighing like the wind of midday, fitful as the breath of an amorous mouth. The first two bore harps which, sustained in the hollow of their left hands, curved forward like sickles of slender wood.

One of them advanced and said:

"Tryphera, O beloved Cypris, offers thee this blue veil, woven by herself, that thou mayest continue thy favor toward her."

Another:

"Mousarion lays at thy feet, O Goddess of the Fair Crown, these wreaths of gilliflower and this bouquet of bowing narcissi. She has worn them in the orgy and has invoked thy name in the intoxication of their perfume. O Victorious, receive these spoils of love."

Still another:

"As an offering to thee, Golden Cytheræa, Timon consecrates this spiral bracelet. Mayest thou entwine vengeance around the throat of her thou knowest, as this silver serpent twined about her naked arm."

Myrtocleia and Rhodis came forward, holding each other by the hand.

"Here are two doves from Smyrna with wings white as caresses, with feet red as kisses. O Double Goddess of Amathos, accept them from our joined hands if it be true that the gentle Adonis alone sufficeth thee not and that an embrace still gentler delays, at times, thy slumber."

A very young courtesan followed.

"Aphrodite Peribasia, receive my virginity with this tunic spotted with blood. I am Pannychis of Pharos; since last night I have dedicated myself to thee."

Another:

"Dorothæa conjures thee, O charitable Epistrophia, to take from her spirit the desire cast there by Eros or at length to inflame for her the eyes of him who refuseth himself. She offers thee this branch of myrtle because it is the tree which thou preferrest."

Another:

"Upon thine altar, O Paphia, Callistion lays sixty drachmæ of silver, the remainder of four minæ which she received from Cleomenes. Give her a lover more generous still, if the offering seem good to thee."

There remained before the idol only a blushing child who had placed herself last. She held in her hand only a little wreath of crocus and the priest scorned her for an offering so slight.

She said:

"I am not rich enough to give thee silver pieces, O Brilliant Olympian. Moreover, what could I give thee which thou dost not already possess? Here are yellow and green flowers, woven in a wreath for thy feet. And now . . ."

She unclasped the two buckles of her tunic, appearing naked as the clothes slipped to the ground.

". . . behold me wholly thine, Beloved Goddess. I wish to enter thy gardens, to die a courtesan of the temple. I swear to desire only love, I swear to love only loving, and I renounce the world and sink myself in thee."

The priest then covered her with perfumes and enveloped her nakedness with the veil woven by Tryphera. They left the nave together, through a door leading to the gardens.

The procession seemed finished and the other courtesans were about to withdraw when a last woman, late coming, appeared on the threshold.

This one had nothing in her hand and it seemed that she also had come to offer only her beauty. Her hair seemed like two floods of gold, two deep, shadow-laden waves which swallowed up the ears and wound seven-fold upon the nape of her neck. The nose was delicate, with thin nostrils which sometimes palpitated above the full and tinted mouth with rounded mobile corners. The supple line of the body undulated with each step, animated by the swaying of the hips or by

the balancing of the free breasts below which the rounded waist curved.

Her eyes were extraordinary, blue, but deep and brilliant at the same time, changing as moonstones, half closed under the drowsy lids. They looked, those eyes, as the sirens sing . . .

The priest turned toward her, awaiting her speech.

She said:

"Chrysis, O Chryseia, supplicates thee. Receive the slight gifts she lays at thy feet. Listen, hear, love and relieve her who lives after thine example and for the glory of thy name."

She stretched forth hands golden with rings and bowed, her legs together.

The vague song recommenced. The murmur of the harps mounted toward the statue with the rapid smoke of the incense which the priest burned in a simmering basin.

She straightened slowly and presented a bronze mirror which had been fastened at her girdle.

"To thee," she said, "Astarte of the Night who minglest hands and lips and whose symbol is like the print of does' feet upon the pale earth of Syria, Chrysis consecrates her mirror. It has seen the darkening rings encircle the eyelids, the flash of eyes after love, the hair clinging to the temples in the sweat of thy struggles, Combatant with Eager Hands who minglest bodies and mouths."

The priest placed the mirror at the feet of the statue. Chrysis drew from her golden hair a long comb of red copper, the planetary metal of the goddess.

"To thee," she said, "Anadyomene, who wast born of the bleeding dawn and the foamy smile of the waters: to thee, Nakedness streaming with pearls, who didst knot thy dampened hair with ribbons of green seaweed, Chrysis consecrates her comb. It has plunged into her hair disordered by thy movements, O furious, panting Adonienne who holloweth the sweep of the loins and contracteth the stiffened knees."

She gave the comb to the old man and leaned her head to the right to remove her necklace of emeralds.

"To thee," she said. "Oh Hetara who dispellest the blush of shamefaced virgins and counselest the immodest laugh: to thee, for whom we offer for sale the streaming love of our entrails, Chrysis consecrates her necklace. It was given in fee by a man whose name she knows not, and each emerald is a kiss where thou hast lived an instant."

She bowed a last time, profoundly, put the necklace into the hands of the priest, and took a step to go.

The priest detained her.

"What dost thou ask of the goddess for these precious offerings?"

She smiled, shaking her head, and said:

"I ask nothing."

Then she passed along the procession, stole a rose from a basket and put it to her mouth as she went out.

One by one, all the women followed. The door closed again upon the empty temple.

Demetrios remained alone, hidden in the bronze pedestal. He had not lost a gesture or a word of all this scene and when all was finished he remained a long time motionless, tormented afresh by irresolved passion.

He had believed himself well cured of his recent folly and had thought that nothing, thenceforth, could throw him a second time into the ardent shadow of this unknown woman.

But he had reckoned without her.

Women! O women! if you wish to be loved, show yourselves, return, be at hand! The emotion he had felt upon the entrance of the courtesan was so complete and so violent that it could no longer be fought against by an effort of will. Demetrios was bound like a barbarian slave to a triumphal chariot. To escape was an illusion. Without knowing it, and naturally, she had laid her hand upon him.

He had seen her coming at a great distance, for she wore the same yellow robe as on her walk along the jetty. She moved with slow and supple steps, softly undulating her hips. She had come direct to him as though she had divined him behind the stone.

From the first instant he knew that he would fall again at her feet. When she drew the mirror of polished bronze from her girdle, she looked into it for some time before giving it to the priest, and the brilliance of her eyes became stupefying. When, to take out her copper comb, she placed her hand upon her hair, raising a bended arm, according to the gesture of the Charites, all the beautiful line of her body developed under the garment, and the sun illumined in the armpit a brilliant and slight dew of perspiration. At last, when, to lift and undo her necklace of heavy emeralds, she put aside the folded silk which veiled her double breast to the sweet shadow-filled space where one could slip only a bouquet, Demetrios felt himself seized with such

a frenzy to place his lips there and tear off the whole robe . . . But Chrysis began to speak.

She spoke and each of her words tore him with anguish. She seemed to take pleasure in insisting and expanding upon the prostitution of his vessel of beauty that she was, white as the statue itself and full of gold which streamed forth in her hair. She announced her door open for the idleness of passers-by, the contemplation of her body abandoned to the unworthy, and the willingness to fire her cheeks for awkward children. She announced the venal fatigue of her eyes, her lips hired for the night, her hair confided to brutal hands, her plowed divinity.

The excessive ease which surrounded her approach inclined Demetrios toward her, determined as he was to use it for himself alone to close the door behind him. So true is it that a woman is most seductive when one has occasion to be jealous of her.

Therefore, having given to the goddess her green necklace in exchange for the one she hoped for, Chrysis returned toward the town—carrying a human will upon her lips like the little stolen rose whose stem she nibbled.

Demetrios waited until he was left alone in the precinct; then he issued from his retreat.

He looked uneasily at the statue, expecting a struggle in himself. But, as he was incapable of renewing a very violent emotion after so brief an interval, he became again astonishingly calm and without premature remorse.

Carelessly, he ascended softly to the statue, lifted from the bowed neck the Necklace of the True Pearls of the Anadyomene, and slipped it into his garments.

*

CHAPTER SEVEN

The Tale of the Enchanted Lyre

He walked rapidly in the hope of finding Chrysis still upon the road which led to the town, fearing, if he delayed longer, lest he again lose his courage and desire.

The road, white with heat, was so luminous that Demetrios closed his eyes as in the noonday sun. He went thus without looking before him and nearly collided with four black slaves who walked at the head of a new procession, when a little, singing voice said, softly:

"Well-Beloved! how glad I am!"

He raised his head; it was Queen Berenice reclining on her elbow in her litter.

She ordered:

"Stop, bearers!" and held out her arms to her lover.

Demetrios was much annoyed; but he could not refuse and he ascended with a sulky air.

Then Queen Berenice, mad with joy, drew herself on her hands to the depths of the litter, and rolled among the cushions like a cat which wishes to play.

For this litter was a room and twenty-five slaves carried it. Twelve women could lie in it at ease, scattered upon the dull blue rug among the cushions and stuffs; and its height was such that one could not touch the roof, even with the tip of a fan. It was more long than wide, closed in front and on the two sides by three very yellow curtains which flared with light. The back was of cedar wood, draped with a long veil of orange silk. Above this brilliant wall, the great golden hawk of Egypt spread out its stiffened wings; lower, sculptured in ivory and silver, the antique symbol of Astarte opened over a lighted lamp which contended with the day in imperceptible reflections. Below, Queen Berenice reclined between two Persian slaves who waved about her two fans of peacock feathers.

With her eyes, she invited the young sculptor to her side, and repeated:

"Well-Beloved, I am glad."

She laid his hand on her cheek.

"I was seeking thee, Well-Beloved. Where wert thou? I have not seen thee since day before yesterday. If I had not met thee, I would presently be dead of sorrow. All alone in this great litter, I was so bored. Passing over the bridge of the Hermes, I threw all my jewels into the water to make circles. Thou seest, I have no more rings or necklaces. I look like a little poor girl at thy feet."

She turned toward him and kissed him on the mouth. The two fan-bearers crouched a little farther away and when Queen Berenice began to speak very low, put their fingers to their ears to make a pretense of not hearing. Demetrios did not reply, scarcely listened, remained abstracted. He saw, of the young queen, only the scarlet smile of her mouth and the black cushion of her hair which she always dressed loosely as a rest for her languid head.

She said:

"Well-Beloved, I have wept in the night. My bed was cold. When I awakened I stretched out my bare arms at both sides of my body and I felt thee not and my hand found nowhere thy hand which

I kiss today. I waited for thee in the morning, but since the full moon thou hast not come. I sent slaves into all parts of the town and killed them myself when they returned without thee. Where wert thou? wert thou at the temple? Thou wert not in the gardens with those foreign women? No, I see by thine eyes thou hast not loved. Then what wert thou doing, so far from me? Thou wert before the statue? Yes, I am sure of it, thou wert there. Thou lovest it more than me, now. It is quite like me, it has my eyes, my mouth, my breasts; but thou seekest it. I am a poor abandoned creature. Thou art tired of me, I perceive it well. Thou thinkest of thy marbles and thine ugly statues as though I were not more beautiful than them all and, at least, living and loving and kind, ready for what thou wilt accept, resigned to what thou refusest. But thou wishest nothing of me. Thou hast not desired to be a king, thou hast not wished to be a god and adored in a temple of thine own. Thou art scarcely willing to love me, any more."

She drew up her feet under her and leaned on her hand.

"I would do anything to see thee at the palace, Well-Beloved. If thou seekest me no longer, tell me who attracts thee; she shall be my friend. The . . . the women of my court . . . are beautiful. I have twelve who, since their birth, have been kept in my gynæceum and do not even know that men exist . . . They shall all be thy mistresses if thou wilt come to see me after them . . . And I have others with me who have had more lovers than the sacred courtesans and are expert in love. Say a word; I have also a thousand foreign slaves; those whom thou wishest shall be delivered. I will dress them like myself in yellow silk and gold and silver.

"But no, thou art the handsomest and coldest of men. Thou lovest no one, thou allowest thyself to be loved, thou lendest thyself, in charity, for those in whom thine eyes kindle love. Thou permittest me to take my pleasure of thee, but as an animal allows itself to be milked: looking elsewhere. Thou art full of condescension. Ah, Gods! Ah, Gods! I shall finish by doing without thee, young coxcomb whom all the town adores and whom no one can make weep. I have not only women at the palace, I have vigorous Ethiopians who have breasts of bronze and arms knotted with muscles. In their embraces, I will quickly forget thy girlish legs and thy pretty beard. The spectacle of their passion will, without doubt, be new for me, and I will rest from being in love. But the day when I shall be certain that thine absent eyes disturb me no more and that I can replace thy lips, I shall send thee from the height of the bridge of the Hermes to join my

necklaces and rings like a jewel worn too long. Ah! it is well to be a queen!"

She straightened up and seemed to wait. But Demetrios still remained impassive and no more moved than if he had not heard her. She continued angrily:

"Thou hast not understood?"

He leaned nonchalantly on his elbow and said, in a very natural voice:

"The idea of a tale has come to me."

"Once upon a time, long before Thrace had been conquered by thy father's ancestors, it was inhabited by wild animals and a few terrified men.

"The animals were very beautiful; there were lions ruddy as the sun, tigers striped like the evening and bears black as night.

"The men were small and flat-nosed, covered with old shabby skins, armed with clumsy lances and ungraceful bows. They dwelt in holes in the mountains closed with monstrous blocks which they rolled with difficulty. Their lives were passed in hunting. There was blood in the forests.

"The country was so dismal that the gods had deserted it. When, in the whiteness of the morning, Artemis left Olympus, her way was never that which would have led toward the north. The wars which took place there never interested Ares. The absence of flutes and citheri turned Apollo aside. The triple Hecate shone there alone, like a Medusa face over a petrified land.

"Now a man came to dwell there, who was of a happier race and went not clad in skins like the mountain savages.

"He wore a long white robe which dragged a little behind him. He loved to wander at night in the moonlight, through the soft clearings of the woods, holding in his hand a little tortoise-shell in which were planted two auroch's horns between which three silver cords were stretched.

"When his fingers touched the cords, a delicious music passed from them, much softer than the sound of springs or the phrases of the wind in the trees or the movement of wheat. The first time he played, three sleeping tigers awoke, so prodigiously charmed that they did him no harm, but approached as near as they could and withdrew when he ceased. The next day there were yet more of them, and wolves, and hyenas, and serpents erect upon their tails.

"So that, after a very short time, the animals came themselves to beg him to play for them. It often happened that a single bear

came to him and went away contented with three marvelous chords. In return for his complaisances, the wild beasts gave him food and protected him from the men.

"But he tired of this fastidious life. He beeame so sure of his genius and of the pleasure he gave the beasts that he no longer tried to play well. The animals were always satisfied provided it were he. Soon he refused to give them even this satisfaction, and indifferently, ceased to play. All the forest mourned; nevertheless, the bits of meat and the savory fruits were not wanting before the threshold of the musician. They continued to nourish him and loved him even more. The heart of animals is made so.

"Now one day as, leaning against his open door, he watched the sun descend behind the motionless trees, a lioness passed nearby. He made a movement to reenter as though he feared embarrassing solicitations. But the lioness paid no attention to him and passed, simply.

"Then he asked her, astonished: 'Why dost thou not ask me to play?' She replied that she did not care about it. He said to her: 'Thou dost not know me?' She replied: 'Thou art Orpheos.' He continued: 'And thou dost not wish to hear me?' She repeated: 'I do not wish to.'—'Oh!' he cried. 'Oh! how I am to be pitied! It is just for thee I would have liked to play. Thou art much more beautiful than the others and thou shouldst understand so much better. If thou wilt listen to me only an hour, I will give thee all thou canst dream of!' She replied: 'I demand that thou steal the fresh meats that belong to the men of the plain. I demand that thou murder the first man whom thou meetest. I demand that thou take the victims they have offered to thy gods and that thou lay all at my feet!' He thanked her for demanding no more, and did as she exacted.

"For an hour he played before her; but afterward he broke his lyre and lived as though he were dead."

The queen sighed:

"I can never understand allegories. Explain it to me, Well-Beloved. What does it mean?"

He arose.

"I have not told it for thee to understand. I have told thee a story to calm thee a little. Now it is late. Farewell, Berenice."

She began to weep.

"I was sure of it! I was sure of it!"

He laid her like a child upon her yielding bed of soft stuffs, smilingly placed a kiss upon her unhappy eyes, and descended calmly from the great moving litter.

BOOK THREE

CHAPTER ONE

The Arrival

BACCHIS had been a courtesan for more than twenty-five years. That is to say, she approached her fourth decade and the character of her beauty had changed several times.

Her mother, who, for a long time, had been the director of her house and the counselor of her life, had given her principles of conduct and economy which had enabled her to gradually acquire a considerable fortune upon which she could draw without reckoning at the age where the magnificence of the bed compensated for the lessening splendor of the body. Thus, in place of buying adult slaves at a high price in the market expense which so many others considered necessary and which ruined young courtesans—she had contented herself for ten years with a single negress, and had prepared for the future by forcing pregnancy upon her every year, in order to create for herself, free of cost, a numerous household which would later become an asset.

As she had chosen the father with care, seven very beautiful mulattresses were born of her slave, and also three boys whom she had ordered killed because male servants give needless suspicions to jealous lovers. She had named the seven girls after the seven planets, and had chosen for them different occupations corresponding as nearly as possible to the names they bore. Heliope was the slave of the day, Selemis the slave of the night, Arete guarded the door, Aphrodisia attended to the bed, Hermione made the purchases and Cronomagira presided in the kitchen. Finally, Diomede, the stewardess, attended to the accounts and responsibilities.

Aphrodisia was the favorite slave, the prettiest, the best loved. She

often shared of her mistress' bed at the demand of lovers who fancied her. Therefore she was excused from all servile work in order to keep her arms delicate and her hands soft. By an exceptional favor her hair was not covered, so that she was often taken for a free woman; and this very evening she was to be freed, at the enormous price of thirty-five minæ.

The seven slaves of Bacchis, all well grown and admirably disciplined, were such a source of pride for her that she never went out without having them in her train, at the risk of leaving her house empty. It was through this imprudence that Demetrios entered the house so easily; but she was still ignorant of her misfortune when she gave the festival to which Chrysis was invited.

This evening, Chrysis was the first to arrive.

She was dressed in a green robe, embroidered with enormous rose branches which flowered upon her breasts.

Arete opened the door for her before she had time to knock and, following the Greek custom, conducted her into a little room, took off her red shoes and gently washed her bare feet. Then, raising her robe or putting it aside, according to the place, she perfumed her wherever it was necessary; for the guests were spared every trouble, even that of making their toilette before going in to dinner. Then she presented her a comb and pins to order her headdress, as well as fat and dry tints for her lips and cheeks.

When Chrysis was finally ready:

"Who are the shades?" she asked the slave.

Thus were called all the guests save one alone who was the Invited. This one, in whose honor the repast was given, brought with him whom he pleased, and the "shades" had no care other than to bring their couch-cushion and to be well behaved.

To Chrysis' question, Arete replied:

"Naucrates has asked Philodemos with his mistress Faustina whom he brought from Italy. He has also asked Phrasilas and Timon, and thy friend Seso of Knidos."

At that very moment Seso entered.

"Chrysis!"

"My dear!"

The two women embraced and overflowed with exclamations at the happy chance which reunited them.

"I feared I would be late," said Seso. "Poor Archytas delayed me . . ."

"What, still he?"

"It is always the same thing. Whenever I go to dine in the town he imagines that all the world is going to slide over my body. Then he wants to revenge himself beforehand, and that takes time! ah! my dear! if he only knew me better! I scarcely wish to deceive my lovers. I have enough of them, as it is."

"And the child? Nobody can see it yet, thou knowest."

"I should hope not! I am in the third month. It is growing, the little wretch. But it does not annoy me yet. In six weeks I shall begin to dance; I hope that will disagree with it and that it will leave quickly."

"Thou art right," said Chrysis. "Do not let thy body become disfigured. Yesterday I saw Philemation, our little friend of former times who has lived for three years at Bubastis with a grain merchant. Dost thou know what she said to me, the first thing? 'Ah! if thou couldst see my breasts!' and she had tears in her eyes. I told her that she was still pretty, but she repeated: 'If thou couldst see my breasts! ah! if thou couldst see my breasts!' weeping like a Byblis. Then I saw she almost wanted to show them and I asked to see them. My dear! Two empty bags! And thou knowest how beautiful they were. One could not see the points, they were so white. Do not ruin thine, my Seso. Keep them young and firm as they are. The two breasts of a courtesan are worth more than her necklace."

While speaking thus, the two women finished their toilettes. Then they entered, together, the banquet hall where Bacchis stood waiting, her waist clasped by apodesmes and her neck laden with golden necklaces which graduated up to her chin.

"Ah! pretty dears, what a good idea of Naucrates' it was to reunite you this evening."

"We congratulate ourselves that it occurs here," replied Chrysis, without appearing to understand the allusion. And, in order to say something spiteful at once, she added:

"How is Doryclos?"

That was a very rich young lover who had just left Bacchis to marry a Sicilian.

"... I have sent him away," said Bacchis, brazenly.

"Is it possible?"

"Yes. They say that he is going to marry out of spite. But I expect him the morrow of his wedding. He is mad about me."

While asking: "Where is Doryclos?" Chrysis had thought: "Where is thy mirror?" but Bacchis' eyes did not look at her directly and she could read nothing in them except vague and meaningless trouble. However, Chrysis had time to clear up this question and, in spite of her impatience, she could resign herself to await a more favorable occasion.

She was about to continue the conversation when she was prevented by the arrival of Philodemos, Faustina and Naucrates who constrained Bacchis to fresh politenesses. They fell into ecstasies over the poet's embroidered garment and over the diaphanous robe of his Roman mistress. This young girl, little conversant with Alexandrian customs, had thought to Hellenize herself thus, not knowing that such a costume was incorrect at a feast where hired dancers, similarly half clothed, were to appear. Bacchis gave no sign of noticing this error, and she found amiable phrases to compliment Faustina upon her heavy, blue-black hair drowned in shining perfumes. This she wore held up with a golden pin over the nape of her neck, to avoid spots of myrrh upon her light silken garment.

They were about to take places at the table when the seventh guest entered: it was Timon, a young man whose absence of principle was a natural gift, but who had found, in the teachings of the philosophers of his time, some superior reasons approving his character.

"I have brought someone," he said, laughing.

"Who is it?" demanded Bacchis.

"A certain Demo, who is from Mendes."

"Demo! you don't mean it, my friend; she is a girl of the streets. One can have her for an almond."

"Oh, very well. I will not insist on it," said the young man. "I just made her acquaintance at the corner of the Canopic way. She asked me to give her a dinner and I brought her to thee. If thou wilt not . . ."

"This Timon is incredible," declared Bacchis.

She called a slave.

"Heliope, go tell thy sister that she will find a woman at the door and that she is to drive her away with a beating. Go."

She turned, looking for someone:

"Phrasilas has not come?"

CHAPTER TWO

The Dinner

AT THESE words an insignificant little man, with a gray forehead, gray eyes and a small gray beard, advanced with little steps and said, smiling:

"I was here."

Phrasilas was an esteemed writer on various subjects, yet one

could not say exactly whether he was a philosopher, a grammarian, an historian or a mythologist, so much did he touch upon the gravest studies with a timid ardor and a fickle curiosity. He dared not write a treatise, he could not construct a drama. His style had something hypocritical, meticulous and vain. For thinkers he was a poet; for poets a sage; for society a great man.

"Well, let us go to the table," said Bacchis. And she laid herself with her lover upon the couch which presided over the feast. At her right lay Philodemos with Faustina and Phrasilas. At the left of Naucrates, Seso, then Chrysis and young Timon. Each of the guests reclined diagonally, resting the elbow on a silken cushion, their heads wreathed with flowers. A slave brought the crowns of red roses and blue lotus. Then the repast commenced.

Timon felt that his prank had thrown a slight coolness over the women. Therefore, not speaking to them at first, but addressing himself to Philodemos, he said gravely:

"They say that thou art a very devoted friend of Cicero. What dost thou think of him, Philodemos? Is he an enlightened philosopher or merely a compiler without discernment or taste? for I have heard both opinions sustained."

"Precisely because I am his friend, I cannot answer thee," said Philodemos. "I have known him too well; therefore I know him ill. Question Phrasilas who, having read him but little, will judge him correctly."

"Well, what does Phrasilas think of him?"

"He is an admirable writer," said the little man.

"How dost thou mean that?"

"In the sense that all writers, Timon, are admirable in something, like all countries and all souls. Yet, to me, the spectacle of the sea is no more preferable than the dullest plain. And so I could not class a treatise of Cicero, an ode of Pindar and a letter of Chrysis in the order of my sympathies even if I knew the style of our excellent friend at thy side. When I close a book I am satisfied if I carry away the memory of one line which has made me think. Until now, all those I have opened contained this line. But not one has given me a second. Perhaps we each have but a single thing to say in our life, and those who attempt to speak at greater length are too ambitious. How much more I regret the irreparable silence of the millions of souls who have not spoken."

"I do not agree with thee," said Naucrates, without raising his eyes. "The universe was created that three truths might be said and it is our misfortune that their certainty should have been proved five centuries before this evening. Heraclitos has comprehended the world;

Parmenides has unmasked the soul; Pythagoras has measured God; nothing is left us but to be silent. I find the chick-pea very impudent."

Seso tapped the table with the handle of her fan.

"Timon," said she, "my friend."

"What is it?"

"Why dost thou ask questions which have no interest either for me, who know no Latin, or for thee who wishes to forget it? Art thou trying to dazzle Faustina with thy cosmopolitan erudition? My poor friend, thou wilt not deceive me with words. I disrobed thy great soul yesterday evening under my coverlets and I know, Timon, the chick-pea about which it is concerned."

"Dost thou think so?" said the young man, simply.

But Phrasilas commenced a second little speech in an ironic and softened voice:

"Seso, when we have the pleasure of hearing thee judge Timon, whether it be to applaud him as he merits or to blame him—which we cannot do—remember that he is an invisible being with a singular soul. It does not exist by itself, or at least we cannot know that it does, but it reflects those which mirror in it and changes in aspect with its changes in place. Last night, it was quite like thee: I am not surprised that it pleased thee. Just now it has taken the image of Philodemos: that is why thou didst just say that it belied itself. But it does not intend to be contradictory since it affirms nothing. Thou seest, my dear, thou must refrain from thoughtless judgments."

Timon cast an irritated look in Phrasilas' direction; but he reserved his reply.

"However that may be," continued Seso, "here we are, four courtesans, and we intend to direct the conversation in order not to resemble pink children who only open their mouths to drink milk. Faustina, as thou art the newcomer, commence."

"Very good," said Naucrates, "choose for us, Faustina. Of what shall we speak?"

The young Roman turned her head, raised her eyes, blushed and, with an undulation of her whole body, sighed:

"Of love."

"A very pretty subject," said Seso, suppressing a laugh.

But no one took up the word.

The table was covered with wreaths, greens, cups and ewers. Slaves brought woven baskets filled with bread light as snow. Fat eels sprinkled with seasonings, waxcolored alphests and sacred callichthys were brought in upon platters of painted earthenware.

Thus too were served a pompilos, a purple fish believed to be born of the same foam as Aphrodite, boops and bedradones, a gray mullet flanked with cuttle-fish, and multicolored scorpœni. In order that they might be eaten burning hot, slices of fat tunnyfish and soft warm pulps with tender arms were presented in their little casseroles. And, at the last, the belly of a white torpedo, round as that of a beautiful woman.

Such was the first course, from which the guests selected the good morsels in little fragments and left the rest for the slaves.

"Love," began Phrasilas, "is a word which has no meaning or which means everything at once, for it designates in turn two irreconcilable sentiments: Voluptuousness and passion. I do not know in what sense Faustina means it."

"I wish," interrupted Chrysis, "voluptuousness for my part and passion for my lover's. Thou must speak of both or thou wilt but half interest me."

"Love," murmured Philodemos, "is neither passion nor voluptuousness. Love is quite another thing . . ."

"Oh! for pity's sake," cried Timon, "let us have, this evening, as an exception, a banquet without philosophies. We know, Phrasilas, that thou canst sustain the superiority of multiple Pleasure over exclusive Passion with a sweet eloquence and a honeyed persuasion. We know too that, after having spoken a full hour over so difficult a matter, thou wouldst be ready, during the following hour, to sustain the reasons of thine opponent with the same sweet eloquence and the same honeyed persuasion. I . . ."

"Permit . . ." said Phrasilas.

"I do not deny," continued Timon, "the charm of this little game nor even the wit thou employest in it. But I question its difficulty and, more than that, its interest. The 'Banquet' which thou didst publish some time ago in the course of a less serious tale and also the reflections borrowed by thee from a mythical personage who resembles thine ideal, seemed new and rare under the reign of Ptolemy Auletes; but we have lived for three years under the young queen Berenice, and I fail to understand by what complete change the smiling and harmonious method of thought has suddenly aged an hundred years under thy pen like the fashion of closed sleeves and yellow tinted hair. Excellent master, I deplore it, for though thy tales may need a little fire, though thine experience of the feminine heart is only superficial, on the other hand thou art at least gifted with the comic spirit and I love thee for having made me smile."

"Timon!" cried Bacchis, indignantly. But Phrasilas stopped her with a gesture.

"Let it pass, my dear. Unlike most men, I retain, of the judgment whose subject I am, only that part of the praises which pleases me. Timon has given me his; others will praise me on other points. I could not live in the midst of an unanimous approbation, and the variety of sentiments which I call forth is, to me, a charming garden where I wish to breathe the roses without touching spurge."

Chrysis moved her lips in a way that indicated clearly how little she made of this man who was so clever at terminating discussions. She turned toward Timon who was her neighbor on the couch and laid her hand upon his neck.

"What is the object of life?" she asked.

It was the question she asked when she did not know what to say to a philosopher; but this time she put such a tenderness into her voice that Timon almost fancied he heard a declaration of love.

However, he replied with a certain calmness:

"Each has his own, my Chrysis. There is no universal object to the existence of beings. As for me, I am the son of a banker among whose patrons are all the great courtesans of Egypt, and, my father having amassed a considerable fortune by ingenious means, I restore it nobly to the victims of his benefits by sleeping with them as often as the strength the gods have given me permits. I consider my energy capable of fulfilling but a single duty in life. Such is the one I have chosen since it reconciles the demands of the rarest virtue with contrary satisfaction which another ideal would not support so well."

While speaking thus, he had slipped his right leg behind those of Chrysis who lay on her side, and he tried to separate the closed knees of the courtesan as though to give a precise object to his existence for that evening. But Chrysis would not allow it.

There were a few moments of silence; then Seso took up the word.

"Timon, thou art very annoying to interrupt, at the beginning, the only serious conversation whose subject is interesting to us. At least let Naucrates speak, since thou hast such a bad character."

"What shall I say of love?" replied the Invited. "It is the name given to sorrow to console those who suffer. There are but two ways of being unhappy: to desire what one has not or to possess what one desires. Love commences by the first and finishes by the second, in the most lamentable state—that is to say: as soon as it succeeds. May the gods save us from loving!"

"But to possess unexpectedly," said Philodemos, smiling, "is not that real happiness?"

"What a rarity!"

"Not at all—if one looks for it. Hear this, Naucrates: not to desire, but to take advantage of the occasion which presents itself; not to love, but to cherish from afar some very select persons for whom one feels a liking which the disposition of chance and circumstance might warm into desire; never to adorn a woman with the qualities one would wish in her, nor with the beauties of which she makes a mystery, but to presuppose the insipid in order to be astonished at the exquisite—is not that the best advice a sage could give to lovers? Only those have lived happily who have sometimes known how to arrange in their luxurious existence the inappreciable purity of some unforeseen enjoyment."

The second course was coming to an end. Pheasants had been served, sand-grouse, a magnificent red and blue porphura and a swan with all its feathers which had been cooked for forty-eight hours in order not to scorch its wings. Upon upcurved platters lay water-plants, pelicans and a white peacock which seemed to brood eighteen roasted and larded balls of sperm—in short, food enough to nourish an hundred persons with the fragments which were left, when the choice morsels had been set aside. But all this was nothing beside the last dish.

This masterpiece (for nothing such had been seen at Alexandria for a long time) was a young pig, half of which had been roasted and the other half stewed in bouillon. It was impossible to distinguish where it had been killed or how they had filled its belly with all it contained. It was stuffed with round quails, the breasts of fowls, larks, succulent sauces, slices of vulva and minced meat, the presence of which, in the intact animal, seemed inexplicable.

There was a general cry of admiration and Faustina resolved to ask for the recipe. Phrasilas smilingly uttered metaphorical sentences: Philodemos improvised a distich where the word «χοῖρος» was taken by turns in its two meanings, which made the already drunken Seso laugh until she cried; but as Bacchis had given the order to pour out seven rare wines in seven cups for each banqueter, the conversation degenerated.

Timon turned toward Bacchis:

"Why," he demanded, "wert thou so unkind to that poor girl I wished to bring? She was, at least, a colleague. In thy place, I would respect a poor courtesan more than a rich matron."

"Thou art mad," said Bacchis, without discussing it.

"Yes, I have often remarked that those who occasionally hazard

astounding truths are considered eccentric. Paradoxes find everybody in agreement."

"Come, my friend, ask thy neighbors. Who is the well-born man who would take a girl without jewels for his mistress?"

"I have done it," said Philodemos, simply.

And the women scorned him.

"Last year," he continued, "at the end of spring, as the exile of Cicero gave me reason to fear for my own safety, I made a little journey. I withdrew to the foot of the Alps, to a charming place named Orobia, on the shores of little Lake Clisios. It was a simple village where there were less than three hundred women, and one of them had become a courtesan to protect the virtue of the others. Her house was known by a bouquet of flowers hung over the door, yet she herself could not be distinguished from her sisters or her cousins. She did not know there were such things as paints, perfumes and cosmetics, transparent veils and curling irons. She did not know how to care for her beauty; she depilated herself with sticky resin as one uproots weeds in a white marble court. It makes one shudder to think that she walked without shoes so that one could not kiss her bare feet as one does Faustina's which are softer than hands. Yet I found so many charms in her that, beside her brown body, I forgot for a whole month Rome and happy Tyre and Alexandria."

Naucrates approved with a sign of his head and said, after having drunk:

"The great moment of love is the instant when nakedness reveals itself. Courtesans should know this and spare us surprises. But it seems, on the contrary, that they use all their efforts to disillusionize us. Is there anything more painful than flowing hair on which one sees the traces of hot irons? anything more disagreeable than painted cheeks whose color clings to the kiss? anything more piteous than a penciled eye whose darkness smears? Strictly speaking, I might understand how honest women might use these illusory devices; every woman loves to surround herself with a circle of admiring men and such, at least, do not expose themselves to familiarities which would reveal their true appearance. It is inconceivable that courtesans, who have the bed for object and resource, should not fear to show themselves there less beautiful than in the street."

"Thou knowest nothing about it, Naucrates," said Chrysis, with a smile. "I know that one cannot hold one lover out of twenty; yet one does not seduce one man out of five hundred, and before pleasing him in the bed, he must be pleased in the street. No one would see us pass if we neither rouged nor penciled. The little peasant of whom Philodemos

spoke attracted him without difficulty because she was alone in her village; there are fifteen thousand courtesans here, it is quite another competition."

"Dost thou not know that pure beauty has no need of adornment and is sufficient unto itself?"

"Yes. Very well, make a pure beauty compete, as thou sayest, with Gnathene who is ugly and old. Put the first in a torn tunic in the last rows of the theatre and the second in her robe of stars in a place reserved by her slaves and note their prices when they go out: eight oboli would be given to the pure beauty and two minæ to Gnathene."

"Men are stupid," concluded Seso.

"No, but simply lazy. They give themselves no trouble in choosing their mistresses. The most loved are the most deceitful."

"What if," insinuated Phrasilas, "what if, on the one side, I would willingly praise . . ." and he maintained, with great charm, two theses utterly without interest.

One by one, twelve dancing girls appeared, the first two playing the flute and the last the tambourine, the others clapping crotals. They adjusted their fillets, rubbed their little sandals with white resin, waited with outstretched arms, for the music to commence. . . . One note . . . two notes . . . a Lydian scale . . . and upon a light rhythm the twelve young girls sprang forward.

Their dance was voluptuous, soft and without apparent order although all its figures had been fixed in advance. They maneuvered in a small space; they mingled like waves. Soon, they grouped themselves into couples and, without interrupting their steps, untied their girdles and let their rose-colored tunics fall. An odor of naked women diffused around the men, dominating the perfume of the flowers and the steam of the broken meats. They threw themselves backward with sudden movements, the belly tense, the arms over the eyes. Then they straightened up, hollowing their loins, and their bodies touched in passing the tips of their quivering breasts. Timon's hand was caressed by a fugitive warm thigh.

"What is our friend thinking?" said Phrasilas in his thin voice.

"I am perfectly happy," replied Timon, "I have never understood so clearly as this evening the supreme mission of woman."

"And what is it?"

"To prostitute herself—with or without art."

"That is one opinion."

"Phrasilas, once more, we know that nothing can be proved; furthermore, we know that nothing exists and that even that is not certain.

Remember that, and, to satisfy thy venerable mania, permit me to have a thesis at the same time debatable and vanquished, as they all are, but interesting for me who affirms it and for the majority of men who deny it. In the realm of thought, originality is more of a chimerical ideal than a certainty. Thou must know that."

"Give me some Lesbian wine," said Seso to the slave.

"It is stronger than the other."

"I maintain," continued Timon, "that the married woman, in devoting herself to a man who deceives her; in refusing herself to every other (except for rare adulteries, which is almost the same thing); in bringing to the light children who deform her before their birth and monopolize her after it:—I maintain that, in living thus, the woman called honest loses her life and that upon her marriage day the young girl makes a fool's bargain."

"She believes herself obeying a duty," said Naucrates, without conviction.

"A duty? and toward whom? is she not free to regulate a question which concerns herself alone? She is a woman and, as such she is generally deaf to all intellectual pleasure; and not content with remaining a stranger to this half of human joys, she marries and thus denies herself the other face of voluptuousness! Can a young girl say to herself, at the age when she is all ardor: 'I will know my husband and ten lovers beside, perhaps twelve,' and think that she will die without having regretted anything? As for me: upon the day when I quit life, the memory of three thousand women will not satisfy me."

"Thou art ambitious," said Chrysis.

"But with what incense, with what golden verse," cried the gentle Philodemos, "should we not praise forever the beneficent courtesans. Thanks to them, we escape the complicated precautions, the jealousies, the stratagems, the palpitations of adultery. It is they who spare us vigils in the rain, shaking ladders, secret doors, interrupted assignations, intercepted letters and misunderstood signals. Oh, dear creatures, how I love you! with you, no victory to accomplish: for a few little pieces of money you give us, and more what another would accord us grudgingly, as a grace, after three weeks of harshness. For your enlightened souls, love is not a sacrifice, it is an equal favor which two lovers exchange. The sums confided to you are not enough to compensate your invaluable tendernesses, but pay at a just price for the multiple and charming luxuries with which, through a supreme complaisance, you consent to charge yourselves and among which you lull to sleep, each night, our exacting passions. As you are innumerable, we find always among you the dream of our life and the caprice of our evening, women always

ready, with hair of every tint, eyes of every hue, lips of every savor. There is no love under the sky so pure you cannot feign it, nor so base you would not dare propose it. You are gentle to the graceless, consoling to the afflicted, hospitable to all, and beautiful, so beautiful! That is why I tell you, Chrysis, Bacchis, Seso, Faustina, that it is a just law of the gods which grants to courtesans the eternal desire of lovers and the eternal envy of virtuous wives."

The dancers had finished their steps.

A young acrobat had just entered who juggled with daggers and walked upon her hands among the upright blades.

As the attention of the guests was entirely attracted by the child's dangerous play, Timon looked at Chrysis and, little by little, without being seen, he stretched out behind her until he could touch her with his feet and with his lips.

"No," said Chrysis, in a low voice. "No, my friend."

But he had slipped his arm around her through the wide opening of her robe and was carefully caressing the delicate, burning skin of the reclining courtesan.

"Wait," she supplicated. "They will see us. Bacchis will be angry."

A glance convinced the young man that no one was watching him. He emboldened himself to a caress after which women, having permitted a man to go so far, rarely offer resistance. Then, to crush by a decisive argument the last scruples of expiring modesty, he put his purse into the hand which lay, by chance, open.

Chrysis resisted no longer.

Meanwhile, the young acrobat continued her subtle and perilous tricks. She walked on her hands, her skirt falling back, her feet hanging before her head, between sharp swords and long-pointed blades. Her uncomfortable position and perhaps also the fear of wounds, flooded her cheeks with dark, warm blood which heightened still more the brightness of her wide open eyes. Her waist bent and straightened. Her legs parted like the arms of a dancing-girl. A quick respiration animated her naked breast.

"Enough," said Chrysis, curtly: "thou hast weakened me, nothing more. Let me go. Let me go."

And at the moment when the two Ephesians arose to play, according to the tradition, "The Fable of Hermaphrodite," she let herself slip from the couch and went out feverishly.

CHAPTER THREE

Rhacotis

THE door scarcely closed, Chrysis laid her hand upon the inflamed centre of her desire as one presses a painful spot to lessen the pulsation. Then she leaned her shoulder against a column and wrung her fingers, moaning softly.

Would she, then, never know?

In proportion with the passing hours, the improbability of her success augmented, blazed out before her. To demand the mirror abruptly would be a daring way to learn the truth. But, in case it had been taken, she would draw all suspicions on herself and would be lost. On the other hand, she could no longer remain there without speaking; impatience had driven her from the hall.

Timon's awkwardness had only exasperated her dumb rage into a trembling frenzy which forced her to press her body against the coolness of the great, smooth column.

She feared a nervous attack.

She called the slave Arete.

"Keep my jewels for me; I am going out."

And she descended the seven steps.

Not a breath of air fanned the heavy drops of perspiration on her forehead. This disappointment increased her discomfort and made her stagger.

She walked on, following the street.

Bacchis' house was situated at the extremity of Bruchion, at the border of Rhacotis, the native town, the enormous slum peopled by sailors and Egyptian women. The fishermen, who slept upon their anchored vessels during the overwhelming heat of the day, came there to pass their nights until dawn and to give up, to the girls and the wine-sellers, as payment for a double intoxication, the price of the fish of the day before.

Chrysis plunged into the alleys of this Alexandrian Suburra, full of voices, of movement and of barbarous music. She looked furtively through open doors, into halls reeking with the smoke of lamps, where naked couples united. At the cross-ways, upon low trestles ranged before the houses, many-colored mattresses squeaked and swayed in the shadow, under a double human weight. Chrysis walked along uneasily. A woman without a lover solicited her. An old man fumbled her breast.

A mother offered her daughter. A gaping peasant kissed the nape of her neck. She fled, in a sort of blushing fear.

This foreign town in the Greek city was, for Chrysis, full of darkness and dangers. She was unfamiliar with its strange labyrinths, the complexity of its streets, the secrets of certain houses. When she ventured into it, now and then, she always followed the same direct way toward a little red door, and there she forgot her ordinary lovers in the tireless clasp of a long-muscled young donkey-driver whom she had the joy of paying in her turn.

But this evening, without even having turned her head, she felt herself followed by a double footfall.

She hastened her steps. The double tread hastened also. She began to run; she was pursued; then, frightened, she turned up an alley, then another which doubled back, then a long way which led in an unknown direction.

Her throat dry, her temples throbbing, sustained by Bacchis' wine, she fled, turning from right to left, pale, without knowing her way.

At length a wall barred her course: she was in a blind passage. Hastily she tried to turn back, but two sailors with brown hands barred the narrow way.

"Whither goest thou, little golden arrow?" asked one of them, laughing.

"Let me pass!"

"Eh? art thou lost, young girl? Thou dost not know Rhacotis, eh? We are going to show thee the town. . . ."

And they both grasped her by the girdle. She cried out, struggled, struck out with her fist, but the second sailor seized both her hands in his left hand and said only:

"Be quiet. Thou knowest they love not the Greeks here; no one will come to help thee."

"I am not a Greek!"

"Thou liest, thou hast white skin and a straight nose. Be still, if thou fearest a beating."

Chrysis looked at the speaker and suddenly threw her arms around his neck.

"I love thee, thou, I will follow thee," she said.

"Thou wilt follow us both. My friend shall have his share. Walk with us; thou wilt be amused."

Whither would they lead her? She had no idea; but the second sailor pleased her with his roughness, his brute-like head. She considered

him with the imperturbable gaze of a young dog before meat. She swayed her body toward him, to touch him while walking.

With rapid steps, they traversed strange quarters, without life, without light. Chrysis could not understand how they found their way in this nocturnal maze from which she could not have escaped alone, so fantastically complicated were its alleys. The closed doors, the empty windows, the motionless shadows terrified her. Above her, between the conjoining houses, she saw a ribbon of pale sky flooded with moonlight.

At length they reentered life. At a turn of the street, suddenly, eight, ten, eleven lights appeared, illuminated doorways where young Nabatæan women squatted between two red lamps which lighted their gold-hooded heads from below.

They heard the swell of a distant murmur, then an increasing tumult of wagons, of tossed bales, steps of donkeys and human voices. It was the market-place of Rhacotis where during Alexandria's sleep all the provisions heaped up for the nourishment of nine hundred thousand mouths in one day were brought together.

They skirted the houses of the square, among the green heaps, vegetables, lotus roots, shining beans, panniers of olives. Chrysis took a handful of mulberries from a violet heap and ate them without stopping. Finally they arrived before a low door and the sailors descended with her for whom had been stolen the True Pearls of the Anadyomene.

It was an immense hall. Five hundred men of the people, waiting for dawn, were drinking cups of yellow beer, eating figs, lentils, cakes of sesame and olyra bread. In the midst of them swarmed a rabble of yelping women, a whole field of black hair and many-colored flowers in an atmosphere of fire. They were poor girls, without a shelter, who belonged to everybody. They came there bare-footed, bare-breasted, hardly covered by a red or a blue rag over the belly, to beg for the scraps. Most of them carried upon the left arm a child enveloped in rags. There were also dancing-women, six Egyptians on a platform with an orchestra of three musicians of whom the first two tapped skin-covered tambourines with wands, while a third shook a great clanking sistrum of bronze.

"Oh; bon-bons of myxare!" cried Chrysis, joyfully.

And she bought the worth of two coppers from a little girl vendor.

But suddenly she grew faint, so insupportable was the odor of this foul retreat and the sailors bore her away in their arms.

In the outer air she recovered a little.

"Where are we going?" she begged. "Let us be quick; I can

walk no longer. You see, I do not resist you, I am good. But let us find a bed as soon as possible or I shall fall in the street."

CHAPTER FOUR

Bacchanalia at Bacchis'

WHEN she arrived once more before Bacchis' doorway, she was filled with the delicious sensation given by the assuagement of desire and the silence of the flesh. The clouds were gone from her brow. Her mouth had softened. Only, an intermittent pain wandered still through the hollow of her loins. She mounted the steps and crossed the threshold.

Since Chrysis had left the hall, the orgy had developed like a flame.

Other friends had come in for whom the twelve naked dancers had been an easy prey. Forty crushed wreaths strewed the ground with flowers. In a corner, a leathern bottle of Syracusan wine poured out a golden river which flowed under the table.

Philodemos, beside Faustina, whose robe he was tearing, was singing the verses he had written about her:

"O, feet," he sang, "O, soft thighs, deep loins, round croup, riven fig, hips, shoulders, breasts, swaying neck! O, you that madden me, warm hands, expert movements, active tongue! Thou art Roman, thou art too brown and thou singest not the verse of Sappho; but Perseus himself was the lover of the Indian Andromeda."

Meanwhile, Seso, upon the table, lying on her belly in the midst of the demolished fruit, and completely beclouded by the vapors of the Egyptian wine, dipped the tip of her right breast into a sherbet of snow and repeated with a comic tenderness:

"Drink, little one. Thou art thirsty. Drink, my little one. Drink. Drink. Drink."

Aphrodisia, still a slave, triumphed in a circle of men and celebrated her last night of servitude by an indiscriminate debauch. In obedience to the tradition of all Alexandrian orgies, she had given herself, at first, to three lovers at once; but her task was not confined to that, and until the end of the night, according to the law of slaves who were to become courtesans, she had to prove by incessant zeal that her new dignity was in nowise usurped.

Standing alone behind a column, Naucrates and Phrasilas debated courteously upon the respective worth of Arcesilas and Carneade.

At the other end of the hall, Myrtocleia protected Rhodis against an over-pressing banqueter. As soon as they saw Chrysis enter, the two Ephesians ran to her.

"Let us go, my Chrysé. Theano remains; but we are going."

"I will stay also," said the courtesan. And she stretched out on her back upon a great bed covered with roses.

A noise of voices and falling coins drew her attention; it was Theano who, to parody her sister, had taken the fancy, amidst laughter and cries, to parody the Fable of Danaë, affecting a mad pleasure at each piece of gold which penetrated her. The saucy impiety of the posing child amused all the feasters, for it was long past the time when a thunderbolt would have exterminated mockers of the Immortal. But the play was broken up, as might be expected. An awkward man injured the poor little girl who began to weep noisily.

To console her, a new diversion had to be invented. Two dancing-girls slid an enormous silver-gilt crater, filled to the brim with wine, into the middle of the hall, and someone, seizing Theano by the feet, made her drink, head down, shaken by a burst of laughter which she could no longer control.

This idea met with such success that every one gathered around, and when the flute-player was put upon her feet and they saw her little face inflamed by the congestion and streaming with wine drops, so general a mirth swept over all the assistants that Bacchis said to Selemis:

"A mirror; a mirror! let her see herself so!"

The slave brought a bronze mirror.

"No! not that one. The mirror of Rhodopis. She is worth it."

With a bound, Chrysis sprang up.

A rush of blood mounted to her cheeks, then receded and she remained quite pale, her heart bounding against her ribs, her eyes fixed upon the door through which the slave had gone out.

This instant would decide her whole life. Her last hope was about to vanish or be realized.

Around her the festival continued. A crown of iris, thrown at random, struck her upon the mouth, leaving upon her lips the sharp taste of pollen. A man poured over her head a little vial of perfume which ran off too quickly, wetting her shoulder. The spatters from a brimming cup into which a pomegranate was thrown spotted her silken tunic and penetrated to her skin. She bore magnificently all the stains of the orgy.

The absent slave did not return.

Chrysis held her stony pallor, motionless as a sculptured goddess.

The rhythmic and monotonous plaint of a woman in the act of love not far away measured the passing time. It seemed to her that this woman had groaned thus since the day before. She would have liked to wrench something, break her fingers, cry out.

At last Selemis returned, empty handed.

"The mirror?" demanded Bacchis.

"It is . . . it is not there . . . it is . . . it is . . . stolen," stammered the servant.

Bacchis uttered a cry so piercing that all were still and a horrible silence suddenly suspended the tumult.

From every part of the immense hall, men and women gathered around; there was but a little open space where Bacchis stood in a frenzy before the slave who had fallen upon her knees.

"Thou sayest! . . . thou sayest!" she yelled.

And as Selemis made no reply, she caught her violently by the throat.

"It is thou who hast stolen it, is it not? it is thou! answer! I will have thee whipped into speech, miserable little bitch!"

Then a terrible thing happened. The child, in a frenzy of fear, the fear of suffering, the fear of death, the most present fear she had ever known, cried in a precipitate voice:

"It is Aphrodisia! It is not I! It is not I!"

"Thy sister?"

"Yes, yes!" cried the mulatresses. "It is Aphrodisia who has taken it!"

And they dragged before Bacchis their sister who had just swooned.

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CHAPTER FIVE

The Crucifixion

ALL together they repeated:

"Aphrodisia has taken it! Bitch! Bitch! Filth! Thief!"

Their hatred for the favored sister was supplemented by their personal fears.

Arete kicked her in the breast.

"Where is it?" continued Bacchis. "Where hast thou put it?"

"She has given it to her lover."

"Who is he?"

"An Ophic sailor."

"Where is his ship?"

"It sailed this evening for Rome. Thou wilt never see thy mirror again. She must be crucified, the bitch, the bloody beast!"

"Ah! Gods! Gods!" wept Bacchis.

Then her grief changed into a furious anger.

Aphrodisia had returned to herself but, paralyzed with fright and understanding nothing of what was passing, she remained mute and tearless.

Bacchis grasped her by the hair, dragged her over the soiled floor, over the flowers and pools of wine, and cried:

"To the cross! to the cross! bring the nails! bring the hammer!"

"Oh!" said Seso to her neighbor, "I have never seen that. Let us follow them."

All followed, hurrying. And Chrysis also followed—she who alone knew the criminal and alone was the cause of all.

Bacchis went directly into the slaves' room, a square hall furnished with three mattresses where they slept, two by two, after the nights were over. At the back of the room, as an ever present menace, rose a cross in the form of a T, which, until now, had never been used.

Amid the confused murmur of the young women and the men, four slaves lifted the martyr to the level of the cross-beam.

Still not a sound had issued from her mouth, but when she felt the cold of the rough wood against her naked back, her long eyes opened wide and she was seized with a spasmodic groaning which lasted until the end.

They placed her astride a wooden peg fixed to the middle of the upright which served to support the body and prevent the hands from tearing.

Then they spread out her arms.

Chrysis watched and was silent. What could she say? She could not vindicate the slave except by accusing Demetrios who, she reflected, was above all pursuit and would revenge himself cruelly. Besides, a slave was an item of wealth, and Chrysis' old rancor rejoiced to see her enemy thus about to destroy, with her own hands, the value of three thousand drachmæ as completely as though she had thrown the pieces of money into the Eunostos. And then, was it worth while to bother with the life of a servile being?

Heliope held out to Bacchis the first nail with the hammer and the martyrdom commenced.

Drunkenness, spite, anger, all the passions at once, even that instinct of cruelty which lurks in a woman's heart, shook the soul of

Bacchis as she struck; and she uttered a cry almost as piercing as that of Aphrodisia as the nail tore into the open palm.

She nailed the other hand. She nailed the feet, one upon the other. Then, excited by the springs of blood escaping from the three wounds, she cried:

"It is not enough! Wait! thief! sow! sailor's trollop!"

One after another, she drew out the long pins from her hair and thrust them violently into the flesh of the breasts, the body and the thighs. When she had no more weapons in her hands, she buffeted the poor wretch and spat upon her skin.

For some time she considered her completed work of vengeance, then she returned to the great hall with all the guests.

Phrasilas and Timon, alone, did not follow her.

After an instant of meditation, Phrasilas coughed a little, placed his right hand in his left, raised his head, lifted his eyebrows and approached the crucified girl who was shaken uninterruptedly by a horrible tremor.

"Although I am," he said to her, "in many circumstances opposed to dogmatic theories, I cannot ignore the fact that thou shouldst profit, in the conjuncture which has overtaken thee, by being familiarized in a more serious manner with the Stoic maxims. Zeno, who, it seems, did not have a spirit altogether exempt from error, has left us a few sophisms without much general bearing yet from which thou canst draw benefit for the special purpose of calming thy last moments. 'Pain,' he said, 'is a word empty of meaning, since our will surpasses the imperfections of our perishable body.' It is true that Zeno died at the age of ninety-eight without having had, the biographers say, any illness however slight; yet one cannot argue against him because of this for, from the fact that he knew how to preserve an unchanging health, we cannot logically conclude that he would have failed in character if he had become ill. Besides, it would be an abuse to constrain philosophers to practice personally the rules of life they propose and to cultivate unceasingly the virtues which they judge superior. In short, and in order not to develop beyond measure a discourse which would run the risk of lasting longer than thyself: force thyself to lift thy soul, so far as thou art able, my dear, above thy physical sufferings. However sadly, however cruelly thou mayest feel them, I beg thee be sure that I take a veritable part in them. They approach their end; be patient—forget. Behold the hour when thou canst choose, from among the diverse doctrines which attribute immortality to us, the one which will best soothe thy regret at disappearing. If they speak truly, thou wilt then have

illuminated even the terrors of the transition. If they lie, what will it matter to thee? Thou wilt not even know that thou wert deceived."

Having spoken thus, Phrasilas readjusted the fold of his garment upon the shoulder and stole away with a troubled step.

Timon remained alone in the room with the dying girl upon the cross.

The memory of a night spent upon the breasts of this unfortunate creature haunted his memory, mingled with the atrocious idea of the imminent decay into which the fair body which had burned in his arms was about to crumble.

He pressed his hand upon his eyes to shut out the sight of the torture, but, unceasingly, he heard the trembling of her body upon the cross.

At length he looked. Great meshes of bloody threads intercrossed upon her skin, from the pins in her breast to the contracted toes. Her head turned incessantly. All her hair hung upon the left side, drenched with blood, sweat and perfume.

"Aphrodisia! dost thou hear me? dost thou know me? it is I, Timon; Timon."

A glance, already nearly blind, touched him for an instant. But the head turned always. The body trembled without pause.

Softly, as though he feared that the sound of his steps might give her pain, the young man advanced to the foot of the cross. He stretched out his arms, took the feeble, turning head gently between his two brotherly hands, piously put aside along the cheeks the hair matted down by tears, and placed upon the warm lips an infinitely tender kiss.

Aphrodisia closed her eyes. Did she recognize him who had come to enchant her horrible end by this movement of loving pity? An inexpressible smile lengthened her blue eyelids and with a sigh she gave up her spirit.

*

CHAPTER SIX

Enthusiasm

So THE thing was done. Chrysis had the proof.

If Demetrios had resolved to commit the first crime, the two others must have followed without delay. A man of his rank would consider murder and even sacrilege to be less dishonoring than theft.

He had obeyed, therefore he was captive. This free, impassive,

cold man, he too submitted to slavery, and his mistress, his dominator, was she, Chrysis, Sarah of the land of Gennesaret.

Ah! to think of it, repeat it, cry it aloud, to be alone! Chrysis precipitated herself from the clamor-filled house and ran quickly, straight before her, met full in the face by the morning breeze, cooled at last.

She followed to the Agora the street which led to the sea and at whose end the spars of eight hundred vessels huddled like gigantic reeds. Then she turned to the right, before the immense avenue of the Drome where the dwelling of Demetrios stood. A tremor of pride enveloped her as she passed before the windows of her future lover; but she was too clever to seek him before he sought her. She traversed the long road to the Canopic Gate and threw herself upon the ground between two aloes.

He had done it. He had done all for her, doubtless more than any lover had ever done for any woman. She could not weary of repeating it and affirming her triumph. Demetrios, the Well-Beloved, the impossible and hopeless dream of so many feminine hearts, had exposed himself, for her, to every peril, every shame, every voluntary remorse. He had even denied the ideal of his thoughts, he had despoiled his work of the miraculous necklace, and this day, already dawning, would see the lover of the goddess at the feet of his new idol.

"Take me! take me!" she cried. She adored him now. She called him, she desired him. The three crimes, in her spirit, transformed themselves into heroic actions, for which, in return, she would never have enough tenderness, enough passion, to give. With what an incomparable flame, then, would burn this unique love of two beings equally young, equally fair, equally loved by each other and reunited forever after surmounting so many obstacles!

Together they would depart, they would leave the queen's city, they would set sail for mysterious lands, for Amathus, for Epidauros or even for the unknown Rome which was the second city of the world after immense Alexandria, and which was undertaking the conquest of the earth. What would they not do, wherever they might be? What joy would be foreign to them, what human felicity would not envy theirs and pale before their enchanted passage?

Chrysis arose, dazzled. She stretched out her arms, raised her shoulders, thrust her chest forward. A sensation of languor and of increasing joy swelled her firm breasts. She resumed her homeward journey.

Opening the door of her room, she was surprised to see that noth-

ing, since the day before, had changed beneath her roof. The little objects of her toilette, the table, the shelves, appeared to her insufficient to surround her new life. She broke some which reminded her too directly of old, useless lovers and for which she conceived a sudden hatred. If she spared others, it was not that she cared more for them but because she feared to denude her room in case Demetrios had formed the project of passing the night there.

She undressed slowly. The vestige of the orgy fell from her tunic, crumbs of cake, hairs, rose leaves.

With her hand, she suppled her waist freed from the girdle and plunged her fingers into her hair to loosen its mass. But before lying down on the bed, the desire seized her to repose an instant upon the rugs of the terrace where the coolness of the air was so delicious.

She ascended.

The sun, risen only a few instants before, reposed upon the horizon like a huge, swollen orange.

A great palm tree with a curved trunk dropped its mass of green leaves over the parapet. Chrysis buried her tingling nudity among them and shivered, her breasts in her hands.

Her eyes wandered over the town which whitened, little by little. The violet mists of the dawn arose from the silent streets and fainted in the lucid air.

Suddenly an idea sprang forth in her mind, increased, dominated, made her delirious: Demetrios, he who had already done so much, why should he not kill the queen, he who could be king? And then . . .

And then, this enduring ocean of houses, of palaces, temples, porticoes, colonnades, which floated before her eyes from the Western Necropolis to the Gardens of the Goddess: Bruchion, the Hellenic town, dazzling and regular; Rhacotis, the Egyptian town, before which the light-flooded Paneion arose like an acropolitan mountain; the Great Temple of Serapis with a façade horned by two long rosy obelisks; the Great Temple of Aphrodite, surrounded by the murmurs of three hundred thousand palm trees and of numberless waters; the Temple of Persephone and the Temple of Arsinoe, the two sanctuaries of Poseidon, the three towers of Isis Pharis, the seven columns of Isis Lochias, and the Theatre and the Hippodrome and the Stadion where Psittacos had run against Nicosthene, and the tomb of Stratonice and the tomb of the god Alexander—Alexandria! Alexandria! the sea, the men, the colossal marble Pharos whose mirrors saved men from the sea; Alexandria! the city of Berenice and of the eleven Ptolemaic kings, Physcos, Philometor, Epiphanios, Philadelphos; Alexandria, fulfillment of all dreams, the crown of all glories conquered during three thousand years in

Memphis, Thebes, Athens, Corinth, by the chisel, by the reed, by the compass and by the sword!—farther yet, the Delta, riven by the seven tongues of the Nile, Sais, Bubastis, Heliopolis; then, rising toward the south, the ribbon of fertile earth, the Heptanome where twelve hundred temples to all the gods lay in a vista along the banks of the river; and, farther, the Thebaid, Diospolis, the Elephantine Isle, the impassable cataracts, the Isle of Argo . . . Meroe . . . the Unknown; and even, could one believe the traditions of the Egyptians, the land of fabulous lakes whence escapes the antique Nile, lakes so vast that one loses the horizon while traversing their purple floods and so high in the mountains that the stars, distant no more, reflect in them like golden fruits—all that, all, would be the kingdom, the domain, the property of Chrysis the courtesan.

She raised her arms, suffocating, as though she thought herself able to touch the sky. And as she moved thus she saw, slowly passing at her left, a huge bird with black wings, flying toward the high seas.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Cleopatra

QUEEN BERENICE had a young sister named Cleopatra. Many other princesses of Egypt were called by this name, but this one was later the great Cleopatra who slew her empire and killed herself upon its corpse.

She was then twelve years old and no one could say what her beauty would be. Her long, thin body was disconcerting in a family where all the women were plump. She ripened like a badly-grafted bastard fruit of foreign, obscure origin. Some of her features were violent as those of the Macedonians; others seemed to come to her from the depths of gentle, brown Nubia, for her mother had been a woman of inferior race and her origin was still doubtful. One was astonished to see lips almost thick under the curved, thin nose. Her young breasts, very round, very small and very far apart, were crowned with large rounded aureolas which marked her as a daughter of the Nile.

The little princess dwelt in a spacious chamber open upon the expanse of the sea and connected with that of the queen by a pillared vestibule.

There she passed the hours of the night upon a bed of blue-

tinted silk where the skin of her finely toned young limbs took a still more sombre hue.

Now in the night during which—far from her thoughts—the events just described took place, Cleopatra arose long before the dawn. She had slept but little and ill, uneasy from her recent maturity and the extreme heat of the air.

Without waking her guardian women, she placed her feet gently upon the ground, slipped on her golden anklets, girdled her little brown belly with a strand of enormous pearls and, thus dressed, issued from the room.

In the monumental vestibule, the guards, also, slept, except one who stood sentinel at the queen's door. This one fell upon his knees and whispered, full of terror, as though he had never found himself caught in such a conflict of duties and perils:

"Princess Cleopatra, thy pardon . . . I cannot let thee pass."

The girl drew herself up, frowned violently, struck the soldier's temple with her fist and exclaimed, softly but ferociously:

"Thou, if thou touchest me, I will cry rape and I will have thee quartered."

Then she silently entered the queen's chamber.

Berenice slept, her head upon her arm, her hand hanging down. A lamp, suspended above the great crimson bed, mingled its feeble light with that of the moon which reflected the whiteness of the walls. The supple nudity of the young woman bathed its vague and luminous outlines in a slight shadow between the two lights. Slender and straight, Cleopatra seated herself upon the edge of the bed. She took her sister's face between her little hands and awakened her with gesture and voice, saying:

"Why is thy lover not with thee?"

With a start, Berenice opened her beautiful eyes.

"Cleopatra. . . . What art thou doing here? . . . What dost thou wish?"

The little girl repeated insistently:

"Why is thy lover not with thee?"

"He is not . . ."

"Certainly not, thou knowest."

"It is true. He is never here. . . . Oh Cleopatra, how cruel thou art to waken me and tell me so!"

"And why is he never here?"

Berenice sighed mournfully.

"I see him when he wishes . . . in the daytime . . . an instant."

"Didst thou not see him yesterday?"

"Yes . . . I met him on the road . . . I was in my litter. He entered it."

"Not as far as the Palace."

"No . . . not quite; but almost at the door I still saw him . . ."

"And thou saidst to him . . ."

"Oh, I was furious . . . I said the most evil things. . . . Yes, my dear."

"Really?" said the young girl ironically.

"Too evil, doubtless, for he did not reply. . . . At the moment when I was quite red with anger, he told me a long fable and as I did not quite understand it I did not know how to answer in my turn. . . . He slipped out of the litter although I thought I could keep him."

"Why didst thou not have him ordered back?"

"For fear of displeasing him."

Cleopatra, swelling with indignation, caught her sister by the shoulders and spoke, looking into her eyes:

"What; thou art queen, thou art the goddess of a people, thou possessest a half of the world, all that is not Rome's is thine, thou reignest over the Nile and over all the sea, thou reignest even over the heavens since thou speakest to the gods from nearer than any other, and thou canst not reign over the man thou lovest?"

"Reign . . ." said Berenice, drooping her head, "that is easy to say, but, seest thou, one does not reign over a lover as over a slave."

"And why not?"

"Because . . . but thou canst not understand. . . . To love is to prefer the happiness of another to that which one formerly wished for one's self. . . . If Demetrios is pleased, I will be also, even in tears and far from him . . . I can no longer desire a joy which may not at the same time be his, and I am happy with all that I give him."

"Thou dost not know how to love," said the child.

Berenice smiled sadly at her, then stretched out her stiffened arms to each side of her couch, inflated her breasts and arched her loins.

"Ah! presumptuous little virgin!" she sighed. "When thou wilt have swooned for the first time in the midst of a loving embrace, then thou wilt understand why one is never queen of the man in whose embrace one lies."

"One is when one wishes."

"But one can no longer wish."

"I can! why canst not thou, who art older than I?"

Berenice smiled again.

"And upon whom, little girl, wilt thou exercise thine energy? on which of thy dolls?"

"Upon my lover," said Cleopatra.

Then without waiting for the astonishment of her sister to find words for expression, she continued with increasing exultation:

"Yes, I have a lover! Yes! I have a lover! Why should I not have a lover like everyone, like thee, like my mother and my aunts, like the lowest of the Egyptians! Why should I not have a lover since I have been a woman for six months and thou hast given me no husband? Yes, I have a lover, Berenice, I am a little girl no longer! . . . I know! I know! Be silent; I know better than thyself . . . I too have clasped my arms to the breaking point over the back of a man who believed himself my master. I too have clenched my toes upon the air, feeling as though life were leaving me and I have died an hundred times as thou swoonest, but immediately afterwards, Berenice, I was standing erect. . . . Be silent! I am ashamed to have thee for a sovereign, thou who art someone's slave!"

Little Cleopatra, erect, made herself as tall as possible and put her hands to her head like an Asiatic queen placing a tiara.

Her elder sister who had listened to her, seated upon the bed, her feet drawn up, sank upon her knees to approach her and put her hands upon her delicate shoulders.

"Thou hast a lover, Cleopatra?"

She spoke timidly, now, almost with respect. The little girl responded dryly:

"If thou dost not believe me, look."

Berenice sighed.

"And when dost thou see him?"

"Three times a day."

"Where?"

"Dost thou wish me to say?"

"Yes."

Cleopatra questioned in her turn:

"How is it that thou dost not know?"

"I know nothing, not even what happens in the Palace. Demetrios is the only subject upon which I allow myself to be entertained. I have not watched thee; it is my fault, my child."

"Watch me if thou wilt. The day when I can no longer have my will, I will kill myself. Then it will be all the same to me."

Shaking her head, Berenice replied:

"Thou art free. . . . Beside, it is too late for thee to be confined.

... But ... tell me, dear ... thou hast a lover ... and thou holdest him?"

"I have my way of holding him."

"Who taught thee?"

"Oh! I alone. One knows that instinctively or one never knows it. At six years, I already knew how I would later hold my lover."

"And wilt thou not tell me?"

"Follow me."

Berenice rose slowly, put on a tunic and a mantle, aired her hair, damp from the perspiration of the bed, and the two left the room together.

First the young girl traversed the vestibule and went straight to the bed she had lately left. There, from under the mattress of fresh, dry byssos, she took a new, engraved key. Then, turning:

"Follow me—it is far," she said.

She ascended a staircase in the middle of the vestibule, followed a long colonnade, opened doors, walked over rings, flagstones, pale marble and twenty mosaics of twenty empty and silent halls. She descended a stone stair, crossed dark thresholds, passed echoing doors. Now and again two enormous guards stood upon mats, lance in hand. After a long time, she crossed a court illuminated by the full moon and the shadow of a palm tree caressed her hip. Berenice still followed, enveloped in her blue mantle.

At length they arrived at a thick door banded with iron like a warrior's torso. Cleopatra slipped the key into the lock, turned twice, pushed the door; a man, gigantic in the shadow, rose to his full height at the back of this prison.

Berenice looked, was seized with emotion and drooping her head, said very gently:

"It is thou, my child, who knowest not how to love ... at least, not yet ... I was right in telling thee so."

"Love for love, I like mine better," said the little girl. "This love, at least, gives only joy."

Then erect upon the threshold of the chamber and without taking a step forward, she said to the man standing in the shadow:

"Come kiss my feet, son of a dog."

And when he had done so, she kissed his lips.

BOOK FOUR

CHAPTER ONE

Demetrios' Dream

Now, having returned home with the mirror, the comb and the necklace, Demetrios was visited by a dream, during his sleep; and this was the dream:

He is going toward the jetty, among the crowd, through a strange night without a moon, without stars, without clouds, which shines of itself.

Without his knowing why, nor what draws him, he is in haste to arrive, to be *there* as soon as he can; but he walks with effort and the air opposes an inexplicable resistance to his legs as deep water hinders each step.

He trembles, he thinks that he will never arrive, that he will never know toward whom he walks thus, panting and uneasy, through the luminous obscurity.

At times the crowd disappears entirely, whether it be that it really vanishes or that he ceases to feel its presence. Then it elbows him afresh, more importunately, and all go, go, go, with a rapid and sonorous step, forward, quicker than he . . .

Then the human mass closes in; Demetrios pales; a man pushes him with his shoulder; a woman's brooch tears his tunic; a young girl, pressed by the multitude, is so closely crowded against him that he feels the tips of her breasts touching his chest, and she pushes away his face with her frightened hands. . . .

Suddenly he is alone, the first, upon the jetty. And as he turns to look back, he perceives in the distance a white swarm which is the whole crowd, suddenly drawn back to the Agora.

And he understands that it will advance no farther.

The jetty extends before him with all the fascination of an unfinished road which has undertaken the traverse of the sea.

He wishes to go to the Pharos, and he walks on. His legs have suddenly become light. The wind which breathes over sandy wastes drags him precipitately toward the undulating solitude where the jetty ventures. But according to his advance, the Pharos recedes before him; the jetty stretches out interminably. Soon the high marble tower with its flaming crimson pile touches the livid horizon, palpitates, lowers, diminishes, and sets like another moon.

Demetrios still walks on.

Days and nights seem to have passed since he left in the distance the great quay of Alexandria, and he dares not turn his head for fear of seeing nothing more than the way already passed: a white line to the infinite and the sea.

Nevertheless, he turns.

Behind him lies an island covered with great trees from which enormous flowers droop.

Has he journeyed blindly, or did it rise at that very instant, becoming mysteriously visible? He does not think of asking; he accepts the impossible as a natural occurrence . . .

A woman is on the island. She stands before the door of the only house, her eyes half closed and her face bending over the flower of a huge iris which grows to the height of her lips. She has deep hair the color of dull gold and of a length which one might suppose marvelous by the mass of the swollen knot which lies upon her drooping neck. A black tunic covers this woman and a still blacker robe is draped over the tunic, and the iris whose scent she inhales, closing her eyes, is also tinted like the night.

On this apparel of mourning, Demetrios sees only the hair, like a golden vase upon an ebony column. He recognizes Chrysis.

The memory of the mirror and of the comb and of the necklace returns to him vaguely, but he does not believe in it, and in this singular dream only the reality seems to him a dream . . .

"Come," she says. "Enter behind me."

He follows her. Slowly she ascends a staircase covered with white skins. Her arm rests over the balustrade, her bare heels float under her skirt.

The house has but one story. Chrysis halts upon the last step.

"There are four rooms," she says. "When thou hast seen them, thou wilt never again come forth. Wilt thou follow me? Darest thou?"

But he would follow her anywhere. She opens the first door and closes it behind him.

The room is narrow and long. It is lighted by a single window which frames the whole sea. To the right and to the left, two little tables bear a dozen rolled volumes.

"Here are the books thou lovest," says Chrysis. "There are no others."

Demetrios opens them: they are the "Oeneus" of Chaeremon, the "Return" of Alexis, the "Mirror of Lais" of Aristippos, the "Witch," the "Cyclops" and the "Bucolics" of Theocritos, "Oedipos at Colonos," the "Odes" of Sappho and some other works. In the midst of this ideal library, a naked young girl reclines, silent, upon some cushions.

"Now," murmurs Chrysis, drawing from a long golden case a manuscript of a single leaf, "here is the page of antique verse which thou never readest alone without weeping."

The young man reads at random:

«Οἱ μὲν ἄρ' ἐθρήνεον, ἐπὶ δὲ στενάχοντο γυναῖκες.
Τῆσιν δ' Ἀνδρομάχῃ λευκώλενος ἦρχε γόοιο,
Ἕκτορος ἀνδροφόνοιο καρπ μετά χερσιν ἔχουσα
Ἄνερ, ἀπ' αἰῶνος νέος ὤλεο, καδδέ με χήρην
Λείπεις ἐν μεγάροισι: πάις δ' ἔτι νήπιος αὔτως,
Ὃν τέπομεν σύ τ' ἐγώ τε δυσάμμοροι . . .»

He stops, casting at Chrysis a tender, surprised look:

"Thou?" he says to her, "thou showest me this?"

"Ah! thou hast not seen all. Follow me. Follow me quickly!"

They open another door.

The second room is square. It is lighted by a single window which frames all nature. In the centre, a wooden stand bears a mass of red clay and in a corner, on a curved chair, a naked young girl rests in silence.

"Here thou wilt model Andromeda, Zagreus, and the Horses of the Sun. As thou wilt create them for thyself alone, thou wilt destroy them before thy death."

"It is the House of Happiness," says Demetrios, below his breath.

And he rests his forehead in his hand.

But Chrysis opens another door.

The third chamber is vast and round. It is lighted by a single window which frames the whole blue sky. Its walls are bronze grills, reticulated in regular lozenges, through which steals the music of

flutes and citheri, played on a melancholy mode by invisible musicians. And against the farthest wall, upon a throne of green marble, a naked young girl sits in silence.

"Come! come!" repeats Chrysis. They open another door.

The fourth chamber is low, sombre, hermetically closed and of triangular form. Heavy draperies and furs bedeck it so softly, from floor to ceiling, that nudity does not astonish, so well can lovers imagine they have tossed their vestments in every direction upon the walls. When the door is closed, it is impossible to tell where it was. There is no window. It is a tiny world, out of the world. Here and there, hanging locks of black fir let tears of perfume slip into the air. And this chamber is lighted by seven myrrhine panes which color diversely the incomprehensible light of seven subterranean lamps.

"Thou seest," the young woman explains, in a calm and affectionate voice, "there are three different beds in the three corners of *our* room . . ."

Demetrios makes no reply. And he asks himself:

"Is this indeed the end? Is this truly the limit of human existence? Have I, then, traversed the three other rooms but to stop in this one? And could I, could I leave it if I sleep within it a whole night in the attitude of love which is the outstretched posture of the tomb?"

But Chrysis speaks . . .

"Well-Beloved, thou hast commanded me, I have come. Look at me well . . ."

She raises her arms together, rests her hands upon her hair and, elbows advanced, smiles.

"Well-Beloved, I am thine . . . Oh, not so soon. I promised thee to sing. I will sing first."

And he thinks no more but of her as he lies down at her feet. She wears little black sandals. Four threads of bluish pearls pass between the slender toes whose every nail has been painted with a carmine crescent.

Her head inclined upon her shoulder, she strikes the palm of her left hand with the finger tips of her right, slightly undulating her hips.

"By night upon my bed,
I sought him whom my soul loveth;
I sought him but I found him not . . .
I charge you, O ye daughters of Jerusalem,
If ye find my beloved,
That ye tell him
That I am sick of love."

"Ah! it is the Song of Songs, Demetrios! It is the nuptial canticle of the girls of my country."

"I sleep, but my heart waketh:
It is the voice of my beloved . . .
Who knocketh at my door.
Behold he cometh
Leaping upon the mountains
Like the kid
Or the young hart."

"My beloved speaketh, saying:
Open to me, my sister, my love:
My head is filled with dew,
And my locks with the drops of the night.
Arise, my love, my fair one, and come away:
For lo, the winter is past,
The rain is over and gone,
The flowers appear on the earth,
The time of the singing of birds is come,
And the voice of the turtle is heard in our land.
Arise, my love, my fair one, and come away!"

She throws her veil from her and stands in a narrow garment which clasps her legs and hips.

"I have put off my coat;
How shall I put it on?
I have washed my feet;
How shall I defile them?"

"My beloved put in his hand
By the hole of the door
And my bowels were moved for him."

"I rose up to open to my beloved,
And my hands dripped with myrrh,
And my fingers with sweet-smelling myrrh
Upon the handles of the lock.
Ah! let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth!"

She throws back her head, half closing her eyes.

"Stay me, comfort me,
For I am sick of love.
Let his left hand be under my head,
And his right hand embrace me.
—Thou hast taken me, my sister,

With one of thine eyes,
With one chain of thy neck.
How fair is thy love,
How good are thy caresses!
How much better than wine!
Thine odor pleases me better than all spices;
Thy lips drop as the honeycomb;
Honey and milk are under thy tongue;
And the perfume of thy garments
Is like the smell of Lebanon."

"Thou art, O my sister,
A secret garden,
A spring closed up, a fountain sealed.
Arise, wind of the north!
Hasten, wind of the south!
Breathe upon my garden,
That the perfumes thereof may flow out."

She curves her arms and offers her mouth.

"—Let my beloved come into his garden,
And eat the pleasant fruits.
—I am come into my garden,
O my sister, my beloved,
I gather the myrrh and the spices,
I eat the honey with the honeycomb,
I drink the wine with the milk.
—Set me as a seal upon thine heart,
As a seal upon thine arm,
For love is strong as death!"

Without moving her feet, without bending her closed knees, she slowly turns her torso upon her motionless hips. Her face and her breasts, above the sheath of her legs, seem three great, almost rosy, flowers in a vase of drapery.

She dances gravely, with her shoulders and head and with her beautiful arms entwined. She seems to suffer in her encasements and to reveal always more and more the whiteness of her half-freed body. Her respiration swells her breath. Her mouth cannot close. Her eyelids cannot open. An increasing fire reddens her cheeks.

Sometimes her ten interlaced fingers unite before her face. Sometimes she raises her arms. She stretches deliciously. A long fugitive furrow separates her raised shoulders. Finally, panting, enveloping her face with a single twist of her hair as one rolls the wedding veil, she

detaches trembling, the sculptured brooch which has held the garment at her loins and lets slip to the floor all the mystery of her grace.

Demetrios and Chrysis . . .

Their first embrace before love is immediately so perfect, so harmonious, that they hold it, motionless, to taste fully its multiple delights. One of Chrysis' breasts is crushed under the arm which embraces her so strongly. They remain thus, motionless, bound together but not penetrated, in the growing exultation of an inflexible desire they will not satisfy. At first, their mouths, alone, cling. They intoxicate themselves with each other, affronting, without healing, their aching virginities.

Nothing is observed so intimately as the face of a loved woman. Seen at the excessive approach of the kiss Chrysis' eyes seem enormous. When she closes them, two parallel folds appear upon each lid and a uniformly pallid tint extends from the brilliant eyebrows to the beginning of the cheeks. When she opens them, a green ring, fine as a silken thread, lightens with a corona of color the unfathomable black pupil which enlarges beyond measure under the long, curved lashes. The little red corner whence the tears flow has sudden palpitations.

This kiss will never finish. It seems as though there were, under Chrysis' tongue, not honey and milk as it is said in the Scripture, but a living water, quick, enchanted. And this tongue itself, multiform, which hollows and curls, which retreats and advances, more caressing than the hand, more expressive than the eyes, a flower which rounds itself to a pistil or thins to a petal, a flesh which stiffens to shudder or softens to lap; Chrysis animates it with all her tenderness and all her impassioned fancy. . . . Then there are caresses which she prolongs and which envelop. The ends of her fingers suffice to clasp him in a net-work of convulsive shudders which awaken along the side and never cease entirely. She is only happy, she has said, when shaken by desire or languid from exhaustion: the transition terrifies her as though it were a suffering. As soon as her lover invites her to it, she puts him aside with her outstretched arms, her knees closed, her lips supplicating. Demetrios constrains her by force.

♦

. . . No spectacle of nature, neither the flames of the western sun, nor the tempest among the palms, nor the thunderbolts, nor the mirage, nor the great rising of the waters, seem worthy of astonishment to those who have seen, in their arms, the transfiguration of woman. Chrysis becomes prodigious. Turn by turn, arched or falling back, an elbow resting on the cushions, she seizes the corner of a pillow, clings to it as in the death agony, and suffocates with head thrown back. Her

eyes, illuminated by gratitude, fix in the corner of the lids the vertigo of their gaze. Her cheeks are resplendent. The curve of her hair changes disconcertingly. Two admirable muscular lines, descending from the ear and shoulder, unite under the right breast which they bear like a fruit.

Demetrios contemplates, with a sort of religious fear, this fury of the goddess in the feminine body, this transport of a whole being, this super-human convulsion whose direct cause he is, which he exalts or represses freely and which, for the thousandth time, confounds him. Under his eyes, all the forces of life put forth effort and magnify themselves to create. The breasts have already taken on maternal majesty, even to their exaggerated points. The consecrated womb of the woman accomplishes the conception . . . And these plaints, these lamentable plaints which already bewail the delivery! . . .

CHAPTER TWO

Terror

OVER the sea and the Gardens of the Goddess, the moon erected her mountains of light.

Melitta, the young girl, so delicate and slender, whom Demetrios had taken for an instant and who had offered to lead him to Chimairis the Chiromant, remained alone with the savage, crouching sibyl.

"Do not follow that man," Chimairis said to her.

"Oh! But I have not even asked him if I shall see him again . . . Let me run after him and I will return . . ."

"No, thou wilt not see him again. And that is better, girl. Those who see him once know sorrow. Those who see him twice play with death."

"Why dost thou say that? I, who have just seen him, have played only with pleasure in his arms."

"Thou hast had pleasure with him because thou knowest not what voluptuousness is, my child. Forget him as a comrade and congratulate thyself that thou art not twelve years old."

"Then people are very unhappy when they are grown up?" asked the child. "All the women here speak constantly of their troubles and I, who hardly ever weep, see them weep so much."

Chimairis buried her hands in her hair and groaned. The goat

shook his golden collar, turning his head toward her, but she did not even look at him.

Melitta continued purposely:

"However, I know one happy woman. It is my great friend, it is Chrysis . . . I am sure she does not weep . . ."

"She will weep," said Chimairis.

"Oh! prophetess of ill fortune! take back what thou hast said, old mad-woman, or I will detest thee!"

But before the gesture of the little girl the black goat rose erect with forelegs drawn in and horns advanced.

Melitta fled at random.

Twenty paces farther on, she burst out laughing before a ridiculous couple perceived between two bushes. And that sufficed to change the course of her young thoughts.

She took the longest way to return to her house: then she decided not to return at all. The moonlight was magnificent, the night was warm, the gardens full of voices, laughter and song. Satisfied by what she had gained in receiving Demetrios, she had a sudden desire to trail around like a girl of the paths and bushes, in the depths of the wood, with the poor passers-by. Thus she was taken three or four times against a tree, a stela or a bench; she amused herself as with a new game whose setting sufficed to change the method. A soldier standing in the middle of a path raised her in his robust arms and identified himself with the God of the Gardens who unites himself with the garden-girls without needing to let them touch the ground. At this, she uttered a cry of triumph.

Again free and continuing her way along a colonnade of palm trees, she met a lad named Mikyllos who seemed to be lost in the forest. She offered to serve him as guide but she misled him purposely to keep him all for herself. Mikyllos was not long in ignorance, either of Melitta's designs or of her tiny capabilities. Soon, comrades rather than lovers, they ran side by side into a more and more silent isolation and, suddenly, discovered the sea.

The place they had reached was far from the regions where the courtesans ordinarily fulfilled their religious profession. Why they chose other meeting places than this—the most admirable of all—they could not have said. The wood where the crowd meets is quickly stamped, once for all, with its central vista and its network of paths and squares and star-shaped clearings. On the outskirts, whatever may be the charm and beauty of the spots, an eternal void and the forest growth dominate in peace.

Mikyllos and Melitta arrived thus, hand in hand, at the edge of

the public forest, a short hedge of aloes which defined a needless bound between the gardens of Aphrodite and those of her High-Priest.

Encouraged by the silence and solitude of this flowering desert, both easily crossed the irregular wall of thick, twisted plants. At their feet the Mediterranean lapped softly upon the strand with little waves light as the welling of a river. The two children plunged in waist deep and laughingly pursued each other to attempt, in the water, difficult unions which they quickly interrupted like games only half learned. Then, glistening and streaming, shaking their thin legs in the moonlight, they leaped upon the shadowy shore.

Footprints upon the sand directed them forward. They followed.

The night shone with an extraordinary brilliancy. They walked, ran, struggled with each other's hands, their sharp shadows silhouetting their figures behind them. How far would they go thus? They saw only themselves in the blue immensity of the horizon.

But suddenly Melitta cried:

"Ah . . . Look! . . ."

"What is it?"

"A woman . . ."

"A courtesan. . . . Oh! the shameless! she has gone to sleep upon the spot."

Melitta shook her head.

"No . . . Oh! no; I do not dare go near, Mikyllos . . . she is no courtesan . . ."

"I would have thought so."

"No, Mikyllos, no, no, she is not one of us . . . It is Touni, the wife of the High-Priest . . . And look at her well . . . She is not asleep . . . Oh! I do not dare go near, her eyes are open . . . Let us go . . . I am afraid . . . I am afraid . . ."

Mikyllos took three steps on tiptoe:

"Thou art right. She is not asleep, Melitta, she is dead, the poor woman."

"Dead?"

"A pin in her heart."

He reached forth his hand to draw it out, but Melitta was seized with fright.

"No! No! do not touch her . . . she is a sacred person . . . Stay near her. Guard her, protect her . . . I am going for help . . . I am going to tell the others."

And she ran at top speed into the heavy shadows of the black trees.

Mikyllos wandered about for some time, alone and trembling

before the young corpse. He touched the transpierced breast with his finger. Then, terrified by death or fearing above all to be taken for an accomplice in the murder, he departed suddenly, resolved to tell no one.

The cold nudity of Touni remained as before, abandoned in the moonlight.

Long after, the forest around her filled with a murmur, frightful because it was almost imperceptible.

From all sides, between the tree-trunks, between the bushes, a thousand courtesans, huddled together like frightened sheep, advanced slowly, their immense mass quivering with a single shudder.

With a movement regular as that of sea-waves upon the strand, the first rank constantly gave way to another and it seemed as though no one wished to be first to discover and see the dead woman.

A great cry, uttered at once by a thousand throats far into the distance, saluted the poor body perceived at the foot of a tree.

A thousand arms were raised in the air, another thousand, and tear-choked voices were heard:

"Goddess! not on us! Goddess! not on us! Goddess! if thou vengest thyself, spare our lives!"

A desperate voice rallied:

"To the Temple!"

And all repeated:

"To the Temple! To the Temple!"

Then a new stir swept through the multitude. Without daring another look at the dead woman who lay stretched upon her back, her arms thrown out, her eyes turned backward, the crowd of courtesans, the white and the black, those from the East and those from the West, the sumptuous robes and the vague nudities, disappearing among the trees, gained the clearings, the paths, the roads, filled the open places, mounted the vast rosy stair which blushed in the rising dawn, and, with their frail, closed fists, beat upon the high bronze doors, wailing like children:

"Open to us! Open to us!"

CHAPTER THREE

The Multitude

IN the morning on which the bacchanalia at Bacchis' came to an end, there was an event at Alexandria: rain fell. Immediately, contrary to what usually occurs in countries less African, every one was out of doors to welcome the downpour.

The phenomenon was neither torrential nor tempest-like. Large warm drops, from the height of a violet cloud, traversed the air. The women felt them moistening their breasts and their hastily knotted hair. Men gazed at the sky with interest. Little children burst into laughter, dragging their bare feet in the surface mud.

Then the cloud vanished amidst the light; the sky stood implacably pure and, a little after noon, the mud had again become dust under the sun's rays.

But this momentary shower had sufficed. The town was cheered by it. The men remained together upon the flagstones of the Agora and the women clustered in groups, mingling their bright voices.

Only the courtesans were there, for, the third day of the Aphrodisian Festivals being reserved for the exclusive devotions of the married women, these latter had just assembled in a procession upon the road to the Astarteion, and upon the square there were only flowered robes and eyes black with fard.

As Myrtocleia passed, a young girl named Philotis, who was talking with several others, pulled her by the knot of her sleeve.

"Ah, little one! thou didst play at Bacchis' yesterday? What happened there? What did they do? Has Bacchis put on a new necklace of discs to hide the valleys of her neck? Does she wear breasts of wood or of brass? Did she forget to dye the little white hairs on her temples, before putting on her wig? Come, speak, little stupid!"

"Dost thou think that I looked? I came after the dinner, I played my scene, I received my pay and then left at once."

"Oh! I know thou dost not corrupt thyself!"

"To spot my robe and receive blows? No, Philotis. Only rich women can afford to take part in orgies. Little flute players gain only tears."

"If thou wouldst not spot thy robe, leave it in the ante-chamber. When you receivest buffets, make them pay thee double. That is elementary. Then thou hast nothing to tell us? not an adventure,

not a jest, not a scandal? We are yawning like ibises. If thou knowest nothing, invent something."

"My friend Theano stayed later than I. When I awoke just now, she had not returned. Perhaps the festival still continues."

"It is ended," said another woman. "Theano is down there, by the Ceramic Wall."

The courtesans ran thither, but at some distance they stopped with smiles of pity.

Theano, in the vertigo of the most ingenuous drunkenness, was pulling obstinately at an almost dismantled rose whose thorns clung to her hair. Her yellow tunic was soiled with red and with white as though the whole orgy had passed over her. The bronze brooch which should have held the convergent folds of her garment upon her left shoulder, hung lower than her girdle, uncovering the quivering globe of a young breast, already too ripe, which still bore two crimson stigmata.

As soon as she perceived Myrtocleia, she went off suddenly into the burst of singular laughter, known to everyone in Alexandria, which had given her the nickname of "The Hen." It was the interminable cackling of a laying hen, a cascade of gayety which descended, as her breath failed, recommenced on a sharp cry, and repeated its cadence, rhythmically, like the joy of a triumphant fowl.

"An egg! an egg!" cried Philotis.

But Myrtocleia made a gesture:

"Come, Theano. Thou must go to bed. Thou art not well. Come with me."

"Ah! ha! . . . Ah! ha . . ." laughed the child.

And she took her breast in her little hand, crying in a changed voice:

"Ah! ha! . . . the mirror . . ."

"Come!" repeated Myrto, impatiently.

"The mirror . . . it is stolen, stolen, stolen! Ah! haaaa! I will never laugh so much again if I live longer than Cronos. Stolen, stolen the silver mirror!"

The singer tried to draw her away, but Philotis had understood.

"Oh!" she cried to the others, raising her arms in the air. "Come quickly! here is news! Bacchis' mirror is stolen!"

And all exclaimed:

"Papaie! Bacchis' mirror!"

In an instant, thirty women crowded around the flute-player.

"What are they saying?"

"What?"

"Bacchis' mirror has been stolen. Theano has just said so."

"But when?"

"Who took it?"

The child shrugged her shoulders.

"How should I know?"

"Thou didst pass the night down there. Thou shouldst know. It is not possible. Who has entered her house? Surely they told thee. Try to remember, Theano."

"How should I know? . . . There were more than twenty in the hall . . . They had hired me as a flute-player, but they kept me from playing because they did not like music. They asked me to mimic the dance-figure of Danaë and they threw pieces of gold on me, and Bacchis took them all from me . . . And what more? They were crazy. They made me drink, head down, in a crater much too full where they had poured seven cups because there were seven wines on the table. My face was all wet. Even my hair was soaking and my roses."

"Yes," interrupted Myrto, "thou art a very naughty girl. But the mirror? Who took it?"

"Exactly! When they put me back on my feet, the blood had run to my head and the wine to my ears. Ha! ha! they all began to laugh . . . Bacchis sent for the mirror . . . Ha! ha! It wasn't there. Someone had taken it."

"Who? I am asking thee, who?"

"It wasn't I, that is all I know. They could not search me, I was quite naked. I could not hide a mirror, like a drachma, under my eyelid. It wasn't I, that is all I know. She crucified a slave, perhaps for that . . . When I saw they were not looking at me any more, I picked up the Danaë pieces. See, Myrto, I have five of them. Thou shalt buy robes for us three."

The report of the robbery had spread, little by little, over the whole square. The courtesans did not conceal their envious satisfaction. A noisy curiosity animated the shifting groups.

"It is a woman," said Philotis, "it is a woman who turned the trick."

"Yes, the mirror was well hidden. A robber could have carried off everything in the house and turned everything upside down without finding the stone."

"Bacchis has enemies, her former women-friends above all. They know all her secrets. One of them could have drawn her off some-

where and entered her house at the hour when the sun is hot and the streets almost deserted."

"Oh! perhaps she has had her mirror sold to pay her debts."

"Could it have been one of her lovers? They say she takes porters, now."

"No, it is a woman. I am sure of it."

"By the two goddesses! It is well done."

Suddenly a still more tempestuous crowd pushed toward a point of the Agora, followed by an increasing murmur which attracted all passers.

"What is it? What is it?"

And a shrill voice, dominating the tumult, cried over the anxious heads:

"Someone has slain the wife of the High-Priest!"

A violent emotion seized all the crowd. No one believed it. No one could imagine that, in the midst of the Aphrodisian Festivals, such a murder had come to draw the wrath of the gods upon the town. But in all directions the same words passed from mouth to mouth:

"The wife of the High-Priest has been slain! the Temple festival is suspended!"

The news arrived rapidly. The body had been found, lying upon a bench of rose-marble, in a solitary place at the summit of the gardens. A long golden pin pierced the left breast; the wound had not bled but the assassin had cut off all the young woman's hair and carried away the antique comb of the queen Nitocris.

After the first cries of anguish, a profound stupor spread. The multitude increased each moment. The entire town was there, a sea of bare heads and women's headgear, an immense troop which debouched simultaneously from streets full of blue shadow into the dazzling light of the Agora of Alexandria. No such gathering had been seen since the day when Ptolemy Auletes was overthrown by the partisans of Berenice. And yet, political revolutions appeared less terrible than this crime of sacrilege upon which the welfare of the city might depend. The men thronged around the witnesses. New details were demanded. New conjectures were offered. Women imparted to late arrivals the theft of the celebrated mirror. The best informed affirmed that the two simultaneous crimes had been committed by the same hand. But whose hand? Girls who, the day before, had presented their offerings for the following year, feared lest the goddess withhold her consideration and sobbed, crouching, their heads in their robes.

An ancient superstition would have it that two such events would

be followed by a more serious third. The crowd awaited this. After the mirror and the comb, what had the mysterious thief taken? A stifling atmosphere, inflamed by the south wind and full of dusty sand, weighed upon the motionless crowd.

Imperceptibly, as though this human mass were a single being, it was seized by a shudder which increased by degrees to panic, and all eyes became fixed on the same point of the horizon.

This was the distant extremity of the great rectilinear avenue which traversed Alexandria from the Canopic Gate, and led from the Temple to the Agora. There, at the highest point of the gentle slope, where the way opened upon the sky, a second terrified multitude had just appeared and descended, running, toward the first.

"The courtesans! the sacred courtesans!"

No one stirred. No one dared go to meet them for fear of learning of a new disaster. They arrived like a living inundation, preceded by the dull sound of their course upon the ground. They raised their arms, they elbowed each other. They seemed to flee an army. They could be recognized, now. Their robes could be distinguished, their girdles, their hair. Rays of light struck the golden jewels. They were quite near. They opened their mouths . . . The silence was absolute.

"The necklace of the goddess has been stolen, the True Pearls of the Anadyomene!"

A clamor of despair greeted the fatal words. The crowd recoiled at first like a wave, then surged forward, beating against the walls, filling the road, engulfing the terrified women, into the long avenue of the Drome toward the undone Holy Immortal.

CHAPTER FOUR

The Response

AND the Agora stood empty like a beach after the tide.

Not entirely empty; a man and a woman remained, those who alone knew the secret of the great public emotion and who, one through the other, had caused it: Chrysis and Demetrios.

The young man was seated on a block of marble near the gate. The young woman was standing at the other extremity of the square. They could not recognize each other, but they divined one another mutually. Chrysis ran through the glare of the sun, drunken with pride and, at last, with desire.

"Thou hast done it!" she cried. "Thou hast done it!"

"Yes," said the young man, simply. "Thou art obeyed."

She threw herself upon his knees and clasped him in a delirious embrace.

"I love thee! I love thee! I have never felt what I feel now. Gods! Now I know what it is to be in love! Thou seest it, my beloved, I give thee more than I promised thee day before yesterday. I who never desired anyone—I did not dream I would change so quickly. I would have sold thee but my body upon the bed, now I give thee all that I have of good, all that I have of innocence, sincere and impassioned, all my soul, which is virgin, Demetrios, believe it! Come with me, let us leave this town for a time, let us go to a hidden place, where there will be but thee and me. There we will have days such as the world has never known. Never has a lover done what thou hast done for me. Never has a woman loved as I love; it is not possible! it is not possible! I can hardly speak, my throat is so choked. Thou seest, I weep. I know also, now, why one weeps: it is from too much happiness . . . But thou dost not reply! thou sayest nothing! Kiss me . . ."

Demetrios stretched out his right leg, to lower his knee which was becoming a little tired. Then he made the young woman rise, arose himself, shook his garment to aerate the folds, and said softly, with a rather enigmatic little smile:

"No . . . Farewell!"

And he walked away with a tranquil step.

Chrysis, dumbfounded, stood with open mouth and dangling hands.

"What? . . . what . . . what sayest thou?"

"I say farewell," he articulated without raising his voice.

"But . . . But then it was thou who . . ."

"Yes. I had promised thee."

"Then . . . I do not understand."

"My dear, that thou understandest or not is of no importance to me. I leave this little mystery to thy meditations. If what thou hast told me is true, they threaten to be prolonged. Here is something that comes handy to occupy them. Farewell."

"Demetrios! what do I hear? . . . Whence has this tone come to thee? Is it indeed thou who speakest? Explain to me! I conjure thee! What has happened between us? I could dash my head against the walls . . ."

"Must I repeat, an hundred times, the same thing to thee? Yes, I have taken the mirror; yes, I have killed the priestess Touni to

have the antique comb; yes, I have taken from the neck of the goddess the great sevenfold necklace of pearls. I was to deliver the three gifts to thee in exchange for a single sacrifice on thy part. That would be to value it highly, would it not? Now I have ceased to attribute this considerable value to it and I ask nothing more of thee. Act the same in thy turn and let us part. I wonder that thou dost not yet understand in the least a situation of such striking simplicity."

"Then keep thy presents! Am I thinking of them! it is thou whom I wish, thou alone . . ."

"Yes, I know it. But once more, I no longer wish on my side; and as the consent of both lovers is required for an assignation, our union is in danger of not being realized if I persist in my views. I am trying to make thee understand, with all the verbal clearness of which I am capable. I see that it is insufficient; but as it is not in my power to make it more perfect, I beg thee to accept with a good grace the fact as it is without penetrating any obscurity it has for thee, since thou dost not admit its possibility. I earnestly desire to close this interview which can have no result and which may perhaps lead me into being disagreeable."

"They have spoken to thee of me!"

"No."

"Oh! I divine it! They have spoken to thee of me; do not say no! They have told thee evil of me! I have terrible enemies, Demetrios! Thou must not listen to them. I swear to thee by the gods, those women lie!"

"I do not know them."

"Believe me! Believe me, Well-Beloved! What interest would I have in deceiving thee since I expect nothing of thee but thyself? Thou art the first to whom I have spoken thus . . ."

Demetrios looked her in the eyes.

"It is too late," he said. "I have had thee."

"Thou ravest . . . When was that? Where? How?"

"I speak the truth. I have had thee in spite of thyself. What I expected of thy favors, thou hast given me, unknown to thyself. Thou didst lead me in dreams, last night, to the country whither thou wouldst go, and thou wert fair . . . Ah! how fair thou wert, Chrysis! I have returned from that country. No human will can force me to see it again. One never finds happiness twice in the same way. I am not mad to the point of spoiling a happy memory. I owe thee this, wouldst thou say? but as I have loved only thy shadow, thou wilt dispense me, my dear, from thanking thy reality."

Chrysis put her hands to her temples.

"It is abominable! It is abominable! And he dares say it! He is content with it!"

"Thou becomest quickly precise. I told thee I had dreamed; art thou sure I was sleeping? I told thee I had been happy; does happiness, for thee, consist exclusively in this coarse physical emotion which thou provokest so well, thou hast told me, and which thou hast no power to diversify, since it is perceptibly the same with all women who give themselves? No, it is thyself whom thou belittlest in taking on this unseemly behavior. I think thou knowest not all the joys which are born of thy steps. The reason that mistresses differ, is that each has personal ways of preparing and concluding an occasion which, after all, is as monotonous as it is necessary and whose research, considered by itself, would not be worth all the trouble we take to find a perfect mistress. In this preparation and in this conclusion, among all women, thou excellest. At least, I have had pleasure in imagining so, and perhaps thou wilt grant me that, after having dreamed the Aphrodite of the Temple, my imagination has not had great trouble in representing the woman thou art. Once more, I will not tell thee if it were a nocturnal dream or a waking fancy. Let it suffice thee to know that, dreamed or conceived, thine image has appeared to me in an extraordinary setting. Illusion: but, above all, I will prevent thee, Chrysis, from undeceiving me."

"And I, in all that, what dost thou make of me, me who loveth thee still in spite of the horrors I hear from thy mouth? Was I conscious of thine odious dream? Have I shared in this happiness of which thou speakest and which thou hast stolen from me, stolen! Did one ever hear of a lover with egoism enough to take his pleasure of the woman who loved him without letting her share it? . . . That confounds thought. I shall go mad."

Here Demetrios dropped his tone of raillery and said, in a slightly trembling voice:

"Wert thou troubled about me when thou didst profit by my sudden passion to exact, in an instant of madness, three acts which might have shattered my existence and which will leave in me forever the memory of a triple shame?"

"If I have done that, it was to attach thee. I would never have had thee if I had given myself to thee."

"Good. Thou hast been satisfied. Thou hast held me, not for long, but thou hast held me nevertheless, in the slavery thou didst wish. Suffer me to free myself this day!"

"I am the only slave, Demetrios."

"Yes, thou or I, merely the one of us two who loves the other.

Slavery! Slavery! that is the true name of passion. You all have but a single dream, but a single idea in the brain: to make your weakness break the strength of man and your futility govern his intelligence! What you wish, as soon as your breasts begin to grow, is not to love or be loved, but to bind a man to your ankles, to debase him, to bow his head and put your sandals upon it. Then you can, according to your ambition, tear from us sword, chisel or compass, break all which surpasses you, emasculate all which frightens you, take Herakles by the nose and make him spin flax! But when you cannot bow either his forehead or his character, you adore the hand which strikes you, the knee which bears you down, even the mouth which insults you! The man who has refused to kiss your bare feet, if he violates you, caps your desires. He who has not wept when you left his house can drag you to it by the hair: our love is reborn of our tears. For a single thing consoles you for not imposing slavery, love-smitten women! it is to submit to it."

"Ah! beat me if thou wilt! but love me afterward!"

And she embraced him so suddenly that he had no time to turn aside his lips. He disengaged himself from her two arms at once.

"I detest thee. Farewell," he said.

But Chrysis clung to his mantle.

"Do not lie. Thou adorest me. Thy soul is all full of me; but thou art ashamed at having yielded. Listen, Well-Beloved! If only that is wanting to console thy pride, I am ready to give, to have thee, more yet than I demanded of thee. Let me make some sacrifice for thee; after our union I will not complain of life."

Demetrois gazed at her curiously; and like her three nights before upon the jetty, he said:

"What oath makest thou?"

"By the Aphrodite, also."

"Thou dost not believe in the Aphrodite. Swear by Iahveh Sabaoth."

The Galilæan paled.

"One does not swear by Iahveh."

"Thou refusest?"

"It is a terrible oath."

"It is the one I will have."

She hesitated some time, then said in a low voice:

"I make the oath by Iahveh. What demandst thou of me, Demetrios?"

The young man was silent.

"Speak, Well-Beloved," said Chrysis. "Tell me quickly. I am afraid."

"Oh! it is very little."

"But what?"

"I do not wish to tell thee to give me, in thy turn, three gifts, were they as simple as the first were rare. That would be against custom. But I can ask thee to receive gifts, can I not?"

"Surely," said Chrysis, joyfully.

"This mirror, this comb, this necklace, which thou hast made me take for thee—thou didst not hope to use them, didst thou? A stolen mirror, the comb of a victim, and the necklace of the goddess; those were not jewels which one could display."

"What an idea!"

"No. Indeed I did not think so. Then it was in pure cruelty that thou didst impel me to ravish them at the price of the three crimes by which the entire town is overwhelmed today. Well, thou wilt wear them."

"What!"

"Thou wilt go into the little closed garden where the statue of Stygian Hermes stands. This place is always deserted and thou wilt not risk being disturbed there. Thou wilt remove the left heel of the god. The stone is broken, thou wilt see. There, in the interior of the pedestal, thou wilt find the mirror of Bacchis and thou wilt take it in thy hand; thou wilt find the great comb of Nitocris and thou wilt plunge it into thy hair; thou wilt find the seven pearl necklace of the goddess Aphrodite and thou wilt put them about thy neck. Thus bedecked, fair Chrysis, thou wilt go through the town. The crowd will deliver thee to the queen's soldiers; but thou wilt have what thou didst wish and I will come to see thee in thy prison before sunrise."

CHAPTER FIVE

The Garden of Hermanubis

CHRYSIS' first movement was to shrug. She would not be so naïve as to keep her oath!

The second was to go and see.

A growing curiosity impelled her toward the mysterious place where Demetrios had hidden the three criminal spoils. She wished to take them, touch them with her hand, make them shine in the sun,

possess them an instant. It seemed to her that her victory would not be quite complete until she had grasped the objects of her ambitions.

As for Demetrios, she would find a way to recapture him by some ulterior maneuver. How could it be that he had detached himself from her forever? The passion which she supposed in him was not of those which flicker out without return in the heart of man. The women who have been much loved form an elective household in the memory and a meeting with a former mistress, even hated, even forgotten, awakens an insurmountable unquiet whence a new love may spring. Chrysis knew this. However ardent she herself might be, however anxious to conquer this first man she had ever loved, she was not mad enough to buy him at the price of her life when she saw so many other ways of seducing him more simply.

And yet . . . what a sublime end he had proposed for her!

Under the eyes of an innumerable crowd, to bear the antique mirror in which Sappho had gazed, the comb which had gathered up the royal hair of Nitocris, the necklace of sea pearls which had rolled in the shell of the goddess Anadyomene . . . Then from the evening until the morning to know desperately all that the most fiery love can make a woman feel . . . and, toward the middle of the day, to die without effort . . . what an incomparable destiny!

She closed her eyes . . .

But no; she would not let herself be tempted.

She ascended the street which led in a straight line across Rhacotis to the Great Serapeion. This road, pierced by the Greeks, seemed somehow incongruous in this quarter of angular alleys. The two populations mingled grotesquely there, in a promiscuity still a little tinged with hate. Among the Egyptians dressed in blue skirts, the unbleached tunics of the Hellenes made splashes of white. Chrysis ascended rapidly, without listening to the conversations where the people entertained each other with the crimes committed for her.

Before the steps of the monument, she turned to the right, entered a dark street, then another where the terraces of the houses nearly touched, traversed a small star-shaped place where, near a spot of sunlight, two very brown little girls were playing in a fountain, and finally she stopped.

The garden of Hermes-Anubis was a little necropolis, abandoned long since, a sort of forgotten territory where relatives no longer came bringing libations to the dead, and which passers-by turned aside to avoid. In the midst of the crumbling tombs, Chrysis advanced in the greatest silence, frightened by each stone which crackled beneath her

feet. The wind, always laden with fine sand, shook the hair upon her temples and swelled out her veil of scarlet silk toward the white leaves of the sycamores.

She discovered the statue between three funereal monuments which hid it from all sides and enclosed it in a triangle. The place was well chosen to bury a mortal secret.

Chrysis slipped as best she could into the narrow, stony passage. Seeing the statue, she paled slightly.

The jackal-headed god was standing, the right leg advanced, the head-dress falling and pierced with two holes whence issued the arms. The head was bent from the height of the rigid body, following the movement of the hands which made the gesture of the embalmer. The left foot was detached.

With a slow and fearful look, Chrysis assured herself that she was quite alone. A little sound behind her made her shudder; but it was only a green lizard which disappeared into a fissure of the marble.

Then, at last, she dared lay hand upon the broken foot of the statue. She raised it obliquely and not without some trouble, for it drew with it a part of the hollowed socle which lay upon the pedestal. And underneath the stone she beheld, suddenly, the gleam of the enormous pearls.

She drew out the whole necklace. How heavy it was! she would not have thought that pearls almost without settings would lie with such a weight in the hand. The globes were all marvelously round and of an almost lunar orience. The seven strands succeeded each other, increasing like ripples upon star-lit water.

She laid it about her neck.

With one hand she arranged it, closing her eyes to better feel the cold of the pearls upon her skin. She placed the seven rows with regularity along her naked breast and let the last fall into the warm interval between her breasts.

Next she took the ivory comb, considered it for some time, caressed the little white figure which was sculptured in the thin crown, and plunged the jewel into her hair several times before fixing it as she wished.

Then she drew the silver mirror from the socle, looked into it and saw there her triumph, her eyes illumined with pride, her shoulders adorned with the spoils of the gods . . .

And, enveloping herself even to the hair in her great scarlet cyclas, she went out from the necropolis without putting off the terrible jewels.

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CHAPTER SIX

The Walls of Crimson

WHEN, from the mouth of the hierodules, the mob had learned for the second time the certainty of the sacrilege, it flowed out slowly across the gardens. The Temple courtesans thronged by hundreds along the paths of black olives. Some strewed ashes upon their heads. Others bowed their foreheads into the dust or tore their hair or clutched their breasts, in token of calamity. Many sobbed, their eyes hidden in their arms.

The crowd descended silently into the town, through the Drome and out upon the quays. A universal mourning filled the streets with consternation. The terrified shop-keepers had precipitately withdrawn their many-colored wares, and wooden shutters fastened by bars succeeded each other like a monotonous palisade along the ground floors of the blind houses.

The life of the port was arrested. The sailors sat motionless upon the stone parapets, their cheeks resting in their hands. The vessels ready to depart had lifted their long oars and furled their pointed sails along the masts which swayed in the wind. Those who wished to enter the roadstead waited for signals in the offing and some of their passengers who had relatives in the queen's palace, fearing a bloody revolution, sacrificed to the gods of the underworld.

At the corner of the island of the Pharos and of the jetty, Rhodis, in the multitude, recognized Chrysis near her.

"Ah! Chrysé! Protect me, I am afraid. Myrto is here, but the crowd is so great . . . I am afraid they will separate us. Take our hands."

"Thou knowest," said Myrtocleia, "thou knowest what has happened? Do they know the guilty one? Is he being tortured? Since Herostratos, no one has seen anything like this. The Olympians abandon us. What will become of us?"

Chrysis did not reply.

"We gave doves," said the little flute player. "Will the goddess remember that? The goddess is surely angry. And thou, and thou, my poor Chrysé! thou who wert to be, today, either very happy or very powerful. . . ."

"All is done," said the courtesan.

"What savest thou!"

Chrysis took two steps backward and raised her right hand to her mouth.

"Look well, my Rhodis; look, Myrtocleia. What you will see, today, human eyes have never seen since the day the goddess descended upon Ida. And until the end of the world, it will never be seen again upon the earth."

The two friends recoiled in astonishment, believing her mad. But Chrysis, lost in her dream, walked to the monstrous Pharos, the flaming mountain of marble in eight hexagonal tiers. She pushed the bronze door and, profiting by the public inattention, she closed it from the inside by lowering the clanging bars.

Some moments passed.

The crowd muttered continuously. The living surge added its rumble to the regular beat of the waters.

Suddenly a cry arose, repeated by an hundred thousand throats.

"Aphrodite! !

—Aphrodite! ! !"

A thunder of cries burst out. The joy, the enthusiasm of a whole people sang in an indescribable tumult of gladness at the foot of the walls of the Pharos.

The throng which covered the jetty swarmed violently into the island, swept over the rocks, mounted upon the houses, on the signal masts, on the fortified towers. The island was full, more than full, and the crowd arrived, still more compact, like the sweep of a flooded river, throwing back to the sea long human ranks from the height of the abrupt cliff.

The end of this inundation of men could not be seen. From the Palace of the Ptolemies to the wall of the Canal, the banks of the Royal Gate, from the Great Gate and from the Eunostos, vomited a serried mass fed indefinitely by the tributary streets. Above this ocean, stirred by immense eddies, foaming with arms and faces, the yellow-veiled litter of the queen Berenice tossed like a bark in peril. And from moment to moment. augmented by new mouths, the noise became formidable.

Neither Helen on the Skaian Gates, nor Phryne in the waters of Eleusis, nor Thais inspiring the burning of Persepolis have known what triumph is.

Chrysis had appeared through the door of the occident, upon the first terrace of the red monument.

She was naked like the goddess, she held in each hand a corner

of her scarlet veil which the wind tossed out against the evening sky, and with her right hand the mirror reflecting the evening sun.

Slowly, with bowed head, moving with infinite grace and majesty, she ascended the exterior slope which girdled like a spiral the tall scarlet tower. Her veil flickered like a flame. The flaring twilight reddened the pearl necklace like a rubescent river. She mounted, and in this glory her dazzling skin bloomed forth in all the magnificence of flesh, blood, fire, bluish carmine, velvety red, vivid rose, as, turning with the great crimson walls, she ascended toward the heavens.

BOOK FIVE

CHAPTER ONE

The Supreme Night

"THOU art loved of the gods," said the old gaoler. "If I, a poor slave, had done the hundredth part of thy crimes, I would have seen myself tied on a wooden horse, hung by the feet, torn by blows, flayed by pinchers. They would have poured vinegar in my nostrils, they would have laden me with bricks until I stifled, and, if I were dead of pain, my body would already feed the jackals of the burned plains. But for thee who hast stolen everything, killed everything, profaned everything, they reserve the gentle hemlock and they lend thee a good room in the meantime. Zeus blast me if I know why! Thou must know someone at the palace."

"Give me some figs," said Chrysis. "My mouth is dry."

The old slave brought her, in a green basket, a dozen figs at the point of perfect ripeness.

Chrysis remained alone.

She sat down and rose again, she made a circuit of her room, she struck the walls with the palm of her hand without thinking of what she was doing. She unrolled her hair to refresh it, then knotted it up almost immediately.

They had made her put on a long vestment of white wool. The stuff was warm. Chrysis was quite bathed in perspiration. She stretched her arms, yawned and leaned her elbows on the ledge of the high window.

Outside, the dazzling moon shone in a sky of limpid purity, a sky so pale and so light that not a star was to be seen.

It was in such a night that, seven years before, Chrysis had left the land of Gennesaret.

She remembered . . . There were five of them. They were merchants of ivory. They had decked out their long-tailed horses with many-colored tufts. They had met her at the edge of a round well . . .

And before that, the bluish lake, the transparent sky, the light air of the country of Galilee . . .

The house was surrounded by pink flax and tamarisks. Thorny caper bushes pricked the fingers about to seize the moths . . . One could believe one saw the color of the wind in the undulations of the delicate grasses . . .

The little girls bathed in a limpid brook where one found red shells under the bushes of flowering laurel, and there were flowers on the water, flowers in all the meadow and great lilies on the mountains. And the line of the mountains was that of a young breast . . .

Chrysis closed her eyes with a faint smile which was suddenly extinguished. The idea of death had just seized her. And she felt that, until the end, she could never cease her thoughts.

"Ah!" she said to herself, "what have I done! Why did I meet that man? Why did he listen to me? Why did I let myself be caught, in my turn? Why must it be that, even now, I regret nothing?—Not to love or not to live: that is the choice God offered me. And what have I done to be punished?"

And there returned to her memory, fragments of sacred verses she had heard quoted in her childhood. For seven years she had not thought of them. But they returned, one after another, with an implacable precision to apply themselves to her life and to predict her torment.

She murmured:

"It is written:

I remember thy love when thou wert young.
Thou hast long since broken thy yoke,
Burst thy bonds,
And thou hast said: I will no longer be a slave;
But under every high hill
And under every green tree
Thou hast lowered thyself like a prostitute.

"It is written:

I will go after my lovers
Who give me my bread and my water
And my wool and my flax,
My oil and my wine.

"It is written:

How shouldst thou say: I am not soiled?
Look upon thy steps in the valley,
Know what thou hast done,
Straying camel, wild ass,
Panting and always in heat,
Who could have prevented thee from satisfying thy desire?

"It is written:

She has been a courtesan in Egypt,
She was inflamed for shameless ones
Whose member is like that of asses
And their issue like that of horses.
Thou hast remembered the crimes of thy youth in Egypt,
When thy breasts were pressed because they were young."

"Oh!" she cried. "It is I! It is I!—And it is written again":

"Thou hast prostituted thyself to many lovers
Yet thou wilt return again to me, saith the Eternal."

"But my chastisement is written also."

"Behold I stir up thy lovers against thee.
They will judge thee according to their laws.
They will slit thy nose and thine ears,
And what remaineth of thee will fall by the sword.

"And again:

It is done: she is stripped naked, she is led away.
Her servants mourn like doves
And strike their breasts."

"But one knows what the Scripture says," she added, to console herself. "Is it not written elsewhere":

"I will not punish thy daughters because they prostitute themselves."

"And elsewhere does not the Scripture counsel":

"Go, eat, drink, for since long God has given thee success. Let thy vestments be white at all times and let the perfumed oils be not wanting upon thy head. Enjoy thy life with the wife whom thou lovest, during all the days of the life of thy vanity which God has given thee under the sun; for there is neither work, nor thought, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the dwelling of the dead whither thou goest."

She shuddered and repeated in a low voice:

"For there is neither work, nor thought, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the dwelling of the dead whither thou goest."

"The light is sweet. Ah! how pleasant it is to behold the sun."

"Young man, rejoice in thy youth, give over thy heart unto joy, walk in the ways of thine heart and according to the visions of thine eyes, ere thou goest toward thine eternal dwelling and the mourners go about the streets; before the silver cord is broken, the golden lamp is shattered, the pitcher broken at the fountain and the wheel broken at the well; before the dust returns to the earth whence it has been taken."

With a new tremor she repeated more slowly:

"... Before the dust returns to the earth whence it has been taken."

And as she clutched her head in her hands, to repress her thought, she felt suddenly, without having foreseen it, the mortuary form of her skull through the living skin: the hollow temples, the enormous orbis, the shortened nose under the cartilage and the projecting jaws.

Horror! then it was that she was to become! With a terrifying lucidity she had the vision of her corpse and she drew her hands over her body to go to the depths of this idea which, although so simple, had but just come to her—that she bore her skeleton in her, that it was not a result of death, a metamorphosis, a culmination, but a thing which one carries about always, an inseparable spectre of the human form—and that the scaffolding of life is already the symbol of the tomb.

A furious desire to live, to see all again, to recommence everything, seized her suddenly. It was a revolt in the face of death; the impossibility of admitting that she would not see the evening of this day now being born; the impossibility of understanding how this beauty, this body, the active thought, this luxurious life of her flesh were, in full ardor, to cease their being and fall into decay.

The door opened quietly.

Demetrios entered.

*

CHAPTER TWO

The Dust Returns to the Earth

"DEMETRIOS!" she cried.

And she sprang forward....

But after having carefully closed the wooden latch, the young man had not moved, and he maintained in his look so profound a tranquillity that Chrysis was suddenly frozen.

She had hoped for a transport, a movement of his arms, his lips, something, an outstretched hand . . .

Demetrios did not move.

He waited an instant in silence, with a perfect correctness, as though he wished to clearly establish his disengagement.

Then, seeing that nothing was demanded of him, he made four steps to the window and leaned back in the opening, watching the day appear.

Chrysis had seated herself on the low bed, her look fixed and almost stupid.

Then Demetrios spoke to himself.

"It is better," he said, "that it should be thus. Such plays in the moment of death would, after all, be dismal enough. I wonder only that she should not have had a presentiment from the beginning and that she should have welcomed me with this enthusiasm. For me, it is a finished adventure. I regret a little that it should have ended thus for, after all, Chrysis has done no other wrong than to express very frankly an ambition which, without doubt, might have been that of most women; and had it not been necessary to throw a victim to the public indignation, I would have contented myself in having this too ardent girl banished, in order to deliver myself of her and yet leave her the joys of life. But there has been a scandal and nothing else can avail. Such are the effects of passion. Voluptuousness without thought or the contrary, the idea without enjoyment, have no such sad result. One must have many mistresses but keep himself, with the help of the gods, from forgetting that all lips are alike."

Having thus summed up one of his moral theories by an audacious aphorism, he resumed, easily, the normal current of his ideas.

He recalled vaguely an invitation to dine which he had accepted for the evening before, then forgotten in the whirlwind of events, and he promised to send an apology.

He reflected whether he should offer his tailor-slave for sale—an old man who remained attached to the cutting traditions of the preceding reign and was but imperfectly successful with the cup-shaped folds of the new tunics.

His mind was so free that he even drew, upon the wall, with the point of his modeling tool, a hasty study for his group of "Zagreus and the Titans," a variant which modified the movement of the right arm of the principal personage.

Hardly was it finished when someone knocked gently upon the door. Demetrios opened it without haste. The old executioner entered, followed by two helmeted hoplites.

"I bring the little cup," he said with an obsequious smile, to the address of the royal lover.

Demetrios kept silence.

Chrysis raised her head frantically.

"Come, my girl," continued the gaoler. "The moment has come. The hemlock is all crushed. There is truly nothing to do but take it. Do not be afraid. One does not suffer at all."

Chrysis looked at Demetrios, who did not turn aside his eyes.

Holding ever upon him her large black eyes surrounded by green light, she held out her right hand, took the cup and slowly carried it to her mouth.

She touched it with her lips. The bitterness of the poison and also the pains of the poisoning had been tempered by a honeyed narcotic.

She drank half of the cup, then, with a gesture she might have seen at the theatre, in the Thyestes of Agathan, or which really issued from a spontaneous sentiment, she offered the rest to Demetrios . . . But with raised hand, the young man declined this indiscreet proposition.

Then the Galilæan swallowed the remainder of the brew, down to the green dregs, which remained at the bottom. And there came to her lips a heart-rending smile which contained, indeed, a little scorn.

"What must I do?" she asked the gaoler.

"Walk around in the room, my girl, until thy legs feel heavy. Then thou wilt lie down upon thy back and the poison will act by itself."

Chrysis walked to the window, leaned her hand upon the wall, her temple on her hand, and cast toward the violet dawn the final look of lost youth.

The east was drowned in a lake of color. A long, livid band, like a strip of water, enveloped the horizon in an olive girdle. Above, many tints were born, one from the other, liquid pools of iridescent sky, sea-green or lilac, which melted imperceptibly into the leaden azure of the heavens. Then these degrees of shade lifted slowly, a golden line appeared, ascended, enlarged: a slender thread of crimson lighted this morose dawn and, in a deluge of blood, the sun was born.

"It is written:

—The light is sweet . . ."

She remained thus, standing as long as her legs could sustain here. The hoplites were obliged to carry her to the bed when she made a sign that she staggered.

There the old man disposed the white folds of her robe along

her outstretched limbs. Then he touched her feet and asked her:

"Dost thou feel?"

She replied:

"No."

He touched her knees and asked her:

"Dost thou feel?"

She made a negative sign and, suddenly, with a movement of her mouth and of her shoulders (for even her hands were dead), seized again by a supreme ardor and perhaps by regret for this sterile hour, she lifted herself toward Demetrios . . . But before he could have replied, she fell back lifeless, her eyes darkened forever.

Then the executioner drew the upper folds of her garment over her face; and one of the assistant soldiers, supposing that a more tender past has once united this young man and woman, cut off, with the end of his sword, the extreme ringlet of her hair upon the stones.

Demetrios touched it with his hand and, in truth, it was Chrysis herself, the surviving gold of her beauty, itself the pretext for her name . . .

He took the warm lock between thumb and fingers, separated it slowly, little by little, and under the sole of his shoe he ground it into the dust.

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CHAPTER THREE

Chrysis Immortal

WHEN Demetrios found himself alone in his red workshop encumbered with marbles, with stands and scaffoldings, he desired to set himself at work.

The chisel in his left hand and the mallet in his right, he took up, listlessly, an interrupted sketch. It was the neck and shoulders of a gigantic horse designed for the temple of Poseidon. Beneath the cropped mane, the skin of the neck, wrinkled by a movement of the head, incurved geometrically like an undulous hollow of the sea.

Three days before, the detail of this regular development of muscles concentrated in Demetrios' spirit all the interest of daily life; but on the morning of Chrysis' death the aspect of things seemed changed. Less calm than he wished to be, Demetrios could not fix his occupied thought. A sort of veil he could not lift interposed between him and the marble. He threw aside his mallet and began to walk up and down past the dusty pedestals.

Suddenly he crossed the court, called a slave and said to him:

"Prepare the basin and the aromatics. Thou wilt perfume me after having bathed me, thou wilt give me my white vestments and thou wilt light the round perfume-burners."

When he had finished his toilette, he summoned two other slaves.

"Go," he said, "to the queen's prison; deliver this lump of clay to the gaoler and have him carry it into the room where the courtesan Chrysis lies dead. If the body is not already thrown into the pit, you will say that they shall abstain from executing anything until I have given the order. Run quickly. Go."

He put a modeling tool into the fold of his girdle and opened the principal door upon the deserted avenue of the Drome . . .

Upon the threshold, he stopped suddenly, stupefied by the immense light of the African noon.

The street should have been white and the houses white also, but the flame of the meridian sun flooded the dazzling surfaces with such a fury of reflections, that the walls of lime and the paving stones threw back, simultaneously, prodigious incandescences of shadow blue, of red and of green, of raw ochre and of hyacinth. Full quivering colors seemed to displace each other in the air and to cover only through transparence the waving of the uneven façades of the houses. The lines themselves were deformed behind this brilliance; the right wall of the street rounded into space, floated like a veil, and in certain places became invisible. A dog lying near a curb was actually crimson.

Enthusiastic with admiration, Demetrios saw in this spectacle the symbol of his new existence. Long enough he had lived in solitary night, in silence and in peace. Long enough he had taken for light the moonbeams and for ideal the nonchalant line of a too delicate movement. His work was not virile. Over the skin of his statues there was an icy tremor.

During the tragic adventure which had just overthrown his intelligence, he had felt, for the first time, the full breath of life filling his breast. If he feared a second test, if, issuing victorious from the struggle, he had sworn to himself, before all things, to expose himself no more to a departure from his fine attitude taken before others, at least he had just comprehended that that alone is worth the trouble of being imagined which attains, by means of marble, color or phrase, one of the profundities of human emotion—and that formal beauty is but a vague matter, susceptible of being always transfigured through the expression of sorrow or of joy.

As he finished thus the course of his thoughts he arrived before the door of the criminal prison.

His two slaves awaited him there.

"We have brought the lump of red clay," they said. "The body is on the bed. They have not touched it. The gaoler salutes thee and recommends himself to thee."

The young man entered in silence, followed the long corridor, ascended a few steps, entered the chamber of the dead, and carefully closed himself in.

The cadaver was extended, the head low and covered with a veil, the hands stretched out, the feet together. The fingers were laden with rings, two silver anklets encircled the pale ankles and the nails of each toe were still red with powder.

Demetrios put his hand to the veil to lift it; but hardly had he seized it when a dozen flies escaped quickly from the opening.

He shuddered to his very feet . . . However, he drew aside the tissue of white wool and folded it around the hair.

Chrysis' face had become illuminated, little by little, with the eternal expression which death lends to the eyelids and to the hair of the dead. Some azure veinlets in the bluish whiteness of the cheeks gave to the motionless head an appearance of cold marble. The diaphanous nostrils opened above the fine lips. The fragility of the ears was almost immaterial. Never, in any light, not even that of his dreams, had Demetrios seen such more than human beauty and such dazzling radiance of skin.

And then he recalled the words spoken by Chrysis during their first meeting: "Thou hast seen only my face. Thou knowest not how beautiful I am!" An intense emotion suddenly chokes him. He wishes to know. He can do so.

Of his three days of passion, he wishes to keep a souvenir which will last longer than himself—to bare this admirable body, to pose it like a model in the violent attitude he saw in his dream, and to create, from the dead body, the statue of Immortal Life.

He detaches the buckle and the knot. He opens the drapery. The body lies heavy. He raises it. The head falls back. The breasts tremble. The arms hang down. He draws off the whole robe and throws it into the middle of the room. The body falls back heavily.

With his hands under the cool armpits, Demetrios slides the dead to the head of the couch. He turns the head upon the left cheek, gathers and spreads the hair splendidly under the recumbent back. Then he raises the right arm, bends the fore-arm above the forehead, clenches the still flexible fingers upon the stuff of a cushion! two admirable muscular lines, descending from the ear and the elbow, unite themselves under the right breast which they bear like a fruit.

Next he disposes the legs, one extended stiffly aside and the other with raised knee, the heel almost touching the crop. He rectifies some details, bends the waist to the left, stretches out the right foot and takes away the bracelets, the necklace and the rings, in order not to trouble, by a single dissonance, the pure and complete harmony of feminine nakedness.

The model has taken the pose.

Demetrios throws upon the table the lump of damp clay which he has had brought there. He presses it, he kneads it, he draws it out according to the human form; a sort of barbarous monster is born of his ardent fingers, he looks.

The motionless corpse holds its impassioned position. But a slender thread of blood issues from the right nostril, flows over the lip and falls, drop by drop, under the half opened mouth.

Demetrios continues. The sketch becomes animated, precise, life-like. A prodigious left arm curves over the body as though it clasped someone. The muscles of the thigh accentuate themselves violently. The toes curl back. . . . When the night ascended from the earth and darkened the low chamber, Demetrios had finished the statue.

He made four slaves carry the sketch into his work-shop. That very evening, by lamplight, he had a block of Parian marble rough hewn, and, a year after that day, he was still working upon the marble.

CHAPTER FOUR

Pity

"GAOLER, open to us! Gaoler, open to us!"

Rhodis and Myrtocleia were knocking at the closed door.

The door partly opened. "What do you want?"

"To see our friend," said Myrto. "To see Chrysis, poor Chrysis who died this morning."

"It is not permitted; go away!"

"Oh! let us, let us come in. No one will know it. We will not tell of it. She was our friend. Let us see her again. We will come out soon. We will make no noise."

"And if I am caught, my little girls? If I am punished because of you? It is not you who will pay the penalty."

"Thou wilt not be caught. Thou art alone here. There are no

other condemned. Thou hast sent away the soldiers. We know all that. Let us in."

"Well! Do not stay long. Here is the key. It is the third door. Tell me when you go. It is late, and I want to go to bed."

The good old man handed them the key of beaten iron which hung at his girdle and the two little virgins ran at once, on their silent sandals, through the dark corridors.

Then the gaoler reentered his office and discontinued his useless surveillance. The punishment of imprisonment was not applied in Greek Egypt and the little white house which the gentle old man had the mission to keep served only to lodge those condemned to death. In the intervals between executions it remained almost abandoned.

At the moment the great key entered the lock, Rhodis arrested her friend's hand.

"I do not know if I dare see her," she said. "I loved her well, Myrto . . . I am afraid . . . Enter first, wilt thou?"

Myrtocleia pushed the door; but as soon as she had cast her eyes into the room she cried:

"Do not come in, Rhodis! Wait for me here."

"Oh! what is it? Thou art afraid also . . . What is on the couch? Is she not dead?"

"Yes. Wait for me . . . I will tell thee . . . Stay in the corridor and do not look."

The body had remained in the frantic attitude which Demetrios had composed to make from it the Statue of Immortal Life. But the transports of extreme joy border upon the convulsions of extreme anguish, and Myrtocleia asked herself what atrocious sufferings, what martyrdom, what rending agonies, had thus writhed the body.

On tiptoe she approached the bed.

The thread of blood continued to flow from the diaphanous nostril. The skin of the body was perfectly white; the pale tips of the breasts had retreated like delicate navels; not a rosy reflection vivified the ephemeral reclining statue, but some emerald colored spots which softly tinted the relaxed belly signified that millions of new lives were springing from the hardly cold flesh and demanding their turn.

Myrtocleia took the dead arm and lowered it along the hip. She tried also to stretch out the left leg, but the knee was almost stiff and she was not able to extend it completely.

"Rhodis," she said in a troubled voice. "Come. Thou canst enter now."

The trembling child entered the room, her features contracted, her eyes opened.

As soon as they felt themselves together, they burst into long sobs, in each other's arms.

"Poor Chrysis! Poor Chrysis!" repeated the child.

They kissed each other on the cheek with a desperate tenderness which had no sensuality at all, and the taste of the tears spread upon their lips all the bitterness of their numbed little souls.

They wept, they wept, they gazed at each other sorrowfully and sometimes they spoke both together, in hoarse, rending voices where the words finished with sobs.

"We loved her so much! She was not a friend to us, she was like a very young mother, a little mother between us two . . ."

Rhodis repeated:

"Like a little mother . . ."

And Myrto, drawing her near the dead, said in a low voice:

"Kiss her."

They both leaned over and placed their hands upon the bed, and with fresh sobs, touched the icy forehead with their lips.

And Myrto took the head between her hands which plunged into the hair and she spoke to it thus:

"Chrysis, my Chrysis, thou wert the fairest and most adored of women, thou so like the goddess that the people took thee for her. Where art thou now, what have they done with thee? Thou didst live to give good joy. There has never been fruit more sweet than thy mouth, nor light more clear than thine eyes. Thy skin was a glorious robe which thou didst not veil; pleasure floated about thee like a perpetual fragrance; when thou didst loose thine hair all the desires escaped from it and when thou didst close thy naked arm, men prayed the gods to give them death."

Crouched on the floor, Rhodis sobbed.

"Chrysis, my Chrysis," continued Myrtocleia, "yesterday thou wert still living and young, hoping for long days, and now, behold, thou art dead and nothing in the world can make thee say a word to us. Thou hast closed thine eyes, we were not by thee. Thou hast suffered and thou hast not known that we wept for thee behind the walls. With thy dying look thou hast sought someone and thine eyes have not met our eyes heavy with mourning and with pity."

The flute player still wept. The singer took her by the hand.

"Chrysis, my Chrysis, thou didst say to us that one day, by thy grace, we should marry. Our union is made in tears and this wedding of Rhodis and Myrtocleia is very sad. But sorrow more than love unites two clasped hands. They who have once wept together will never

part. We will bear thy dear body to earth, Chrysidion, and we will both cut our hair over thy tomb."

She enveloped the beautiful body in a coverlet of the bed; then said to Rhodis:

"Help me."

They lifted her gently; but the burden was heavy for the little musicians and they laid it for the first time upon the ground.

"Let us do off our sandals," said Myrto. "Let us walk barefoot in the corridors. The gaoler must have fallen asleep . . . If we do not waken him we can pass, but if he sees us he will stop us . . . As for tomorrow, that does not matter; when he sees the bed empty he will say to the queen's soldiers that he has thrown the body into the pit as the law requires. Fear nothing, Rhodé . . . Put thy sandals in thy girdle, as I do. And come. Take the body under the knees. Let the feet pass behind. Walk without sound, slowly, slowly . . ."

CHAPTER FIVE

Piety

AFTER the turning of the second street, they put down the body a second time to do on their sandals. Rhodis' feet, too delicate to walk bare, were raw and bleeding.

The night was very brilliant. All the town was silent. The iron-colored shadows were outlined sharply in the middle of the street according to the profile of the houses.

The little virgins took up their burden.

"Where are we going?" asked the child. "Where shall we lay her in the earth?"

"In the cemetery of Hermanubis. It is always deserted. She will be in peace there."

"Poor Chrysis! would I have thought that on the day of her end I would carry her body, without torches and without a funereal car, secretly, like a stolen thing."

Then both began to speak volubly as though they were afraid of the silence, side by side with the corpse. The last day of Chrysis' life overwhelmed them with astonishment. Whence had she the mirror, the comb and the necklace? She herself could not have taken the pearls of the goddess: the temple was so well guarded that a courtesan could not have entered there. Then someone had acted for her? But who?

She was not known to have a lover among the stolistes charged with the care of the divine statue. And then, if someone had acted in her place, why had she not denounced him? And, of all things, why these three crimes? To what had they served her, except to deliver her to punishment? A woman does not commit such follies without object, unless she be in love. Was Chrysis, then, in love? and with whom?

"We shall never know," concluded the flute player. "She has taken her secret with her and even if she has an accomplice it is not he who will tell us of it."

Here, Rhodis who had already staggered for some moments, sighed:

"I can do no more, Myrto, I can carry her no longer. I should fall on my knees. I am broken with weariness and sorrow."

Myrtocleia put her arm about her neck.

"Try again, my dear. We must carry her. It is for her life in the underworld. If she has no sepulchre and no obolos in her hand, she will wander forever on the brink of the river of hell and when, in our turn, Rhodis, we descend to the dead, she will reproach us for our impiety and we will not know how to answer her."

But the child, in her weakness, burst into tears in her embrace.

"Quick, quick," continued Myrtocleia. "Here comes someone from the end of the street. Place thyself with me before the body. Hide it behind our tunics. If they see it, all will be lost . . ."

She interrupted herself.

"It is Timon, I recognize him. Timon with four women . . . Ah! Gods! what will happen! He who laughs at everything will make fun of us . . . But no, stay here, Rhodis, I am going to speak to him."

And, seized by a sudden idea, she ran into the street before the little group.

"Timon," she said (and her voice was full of pleading), "Timon, stop. I beg thee to hear me. I have grave words in my mouth. I must speak them to thee alone."

"My poor little girl," said the young man, "how thou art moved! Hast thou lost thy shoulder knot, or has thy doll broken her nose in falling? That would be a quite irreparable event."

The young girl threw him a sorrowful look; but already the four women, Philotis, Seso of Knidos, Callistion and Tryphera, fidgeted about her.

"Come, little idiot!" said Tryphera, "if thou hast sucked thy nurse dry, we cannot help thee, we have no milk. It is almost day, thou shouldst be in bed; since when do children wander in the moonlight?"

"Her nurse?" said Philotis. "It is Timon she wants to take from us."

"The whip! she deserves the whip!"

And Callistion, an arm around Myrto's waist, lifted her from the ground, raising her little blue tunic.

But Seso interposed.

"You are mad," she cried. "Myrto has never known a man. If she calls Timon it is not to sleep with him. Leave her in peace and let them make an end of it!"

"Well," said Timon, "what wilt thou of me? Come over here. Speak in my ear. Is it really serious?"

"Chrysis' body is there, in the street," said the still trembling young girl. "We are carrying it to the cemetery, my little friend and I, but it is heavy and we ask if thou art willing to aid us . . . It will not take long . . . Immediately after, thou canst rejoin thy women . . ."

Timon looked at her sincerely.

"Poor girls! And I who laughed! You are better than we . . . Certainly I will help you. Go rejoin thy friend and wait for me— I will come."

Turning toward the four women:

"Go to my house," he said, "by the Street of the Potters. I will be there in a little while. Do not follow me."

Rhodis was still seated by the head of the corpse. When she saw Timon coming, she besought:

"Do not tell this! We have stolen her to save her shade. Keep our secret, we will love thee well, Timon."

"Be reassured," said the young man.

He took the body under the shoulders and Myrto took it under the knees. They walked in silence and Rhodis followed, with short and tottering steps.

Timon did not speak. For the second time in two days, human passion had taken from him one of the transients of his bed; and he asked himself what extravagance thus swept spirits aside from the enchanted road which leads to unclouded happiness.

"Ataraxia!" he thought, "indifference, repose, O voluptuous serenity! who among men will appreciate you? Man agitates himself, struggles, hopes, when but one thing is precious: to know how to draw from the passing moments all the joys they can give and to leave one's bed as seldom as possible."

They arrived at the gate of the ruined necropolis.

"Where shall we put her?" asked Myrto.

"Near the god."

"Where is the statue? I have never entered here. I was afraid of the tombs and of the steles. I do not know the Hermanubis."

"*It must be in the centre of the little garden. Let us seek it. I came here once when I was a child, while pursuing a lost gazelle. Let us start through the avenue of the white sycamores. We cannot fail to discover it.*"

They came to it, in fact.

The violet tints of the first dawn mingled with the moonlight on the marbles. Vague and distant harmony floated among the cypress branches. The rhythmic rustle of the palms, so like to drops of falling rain, shed an illusion of coolness.

Timon opened with effort a pink stone buried in the earth. The sepulchre was hollowed out beneath the hands of the funerary god who made the gesture of the embalmer. It must have contained a cadaver, formerly, but nothing more was found in the cavity save a heap of brownish dust.

The young man descended waist-deep and held out his arms:

"Give her to me," he said to Myrto. "I will lay her well within and we will close the tomb . . ."

But Rhodis threw herself upon the body.

"No! do not bury her so quickly! I want to see her again! A last time! A last time! Chrysis! my poor Chrysis! Ah! horror . . . what has she become! . . ."

Myrtocleia had put aside the covering rolled about the dead and the face had appeared, so rapidly altered that the two young girls recoiled. The cheeks had taken on a square shape, the eyelids and lips were swollen like six white cushions. Already nothing remained of the more than human beauty. They closed the thick shroud. But Myrto slipped her hand under the stuff to place the obolos destined for Charon in Chrysis' fingers.

Then both, shaken by interminable sobs, placed the laxed, inert body in Timon's arms.

And when Chrysis was placed in the depths of the sandy tomb, Timon reopened the winding sheet. He secured the silver obolos in the relaxed fingers, he supported the head with a flat stone; over the body, from the forehead to the knees, he spread the long mass of shadowy golden hair.

Then he came forth from the pit and the musicians, kneeling before the gaping opening, cut off each other's young hair, bound it in a single sheaf and buried it with the dead.

ΤΟΙΟΝΔΕ ΠΕΡΑΣ ΕΣΧΕ ΤΟ ΣΥΝΤΑΓΜΑ
ΤΩΝ ΠΕΡΙ ΧΡΥΣΙΔΑ ΚΑΙ ΔΗΜΗΤΡΙΟΝ

NOTES

TO APHRODITE

THE REFERENCES ARE TO BOOK AND CHAPTER

I – I *hierodules*—courtesans who served in the temples of Aphrodite.

I – 3 *Berenice* the daughter of Ptolemy Auletes. Reigned about 57-55 B.C.

I – 3 *porneion*—a house where prostitutes and slaves were bought and sold.

I – 7 *paranymph*—a bridesmaid.

II – I *eighty stadia long*—that is, the wall was eighty stadia (about nine miles) in circumference.

II – I The Author gives the initials of a Greek phrase, but no clue as to what the completed phrase might be.

II – I *Baptes*—the elect.

II – I *hamadryad*—a tree nymph.

II – I *cteis*—interfemineum.

II – 2 *satyrion*—an aphrodisiac beverage.

II – 2 *a Thracian*—By this, Melitta may have meant a very cold person, as Thrace was considered by the Greeks as the home of the North Wind. Or, possibly, a woman devoted to only one man. (Herodotos v-5.)

II – 2 The Greek writing in Melitta's room reads:

"Melitta—Chrysis
Chrysis—Melitta"

II – 5 *auletrides*—members of the flute players' guild.

II – 5 *Bathyllos*—a pantomime actor who was said to enchant crowds merely by suggestive movement and gesture.

III – I *apodesmes*—a kind of serpent-like girdle with loose ends, probably made of curiously interfitting parts.

III – 2 *for an almond*—literally, *for a date.*

III – 2 *Pythagoras has measured God*—In a city like Alexandria, where a very broad form of polytheism was the general religion, remarks of this nature could not have been often heard except in the schools. Naucrates must have been familiar with the ancient "secret doctrine" which offered polytheism to the multitude and monotheism to the elect. To the latter, each of the many gods represented only one attribute of the True.

III – 2 *chick-pea.* Seso puns on Naucrates' use of the word, which, in Greek,

had a double meaning—in Seso's remark, a membrum virile. The word is used in the *Acharnians* of Aristophanes.

III – 2 «χοῖρος»—a young sacrificial pig (Latin, *porcus*). Also, the secret parts of a woman.

III – 2 *alphests, scorpæni, torpedoes, purphura, callichthys, boöps*—these are various kinds of fish. The list of the *delicacies* served at Bacchis' dinner is most interesting, but not at all likely to make one wish one had been there to partake.

III – 3 *Suburra*—a slum district in ancient Rome.

III – 3 *myxare*—candied plums, possibly.

III – 3 *sesame*—an oily grain.

III – 4 The enthusiastic speech of Philodemos is translated from his epigram in the Palatine Anthology, v-132.

III – 5 *the Eunoste*—the bay formed by Cape Eunostos at the west of the city.

III – 6 *the Agora*—the market-place.

III – 6 *rugs, of the terrace*—that is, *of the roof*, which was, of course, flat.

IV – 1 The *manuscript of a single leaf* contained nothing more startling than the lamentations of Andromache over the body of Hector, from the twenty-fourth book of the Illiad of Homer. Demetrios begins to read:

"*who wailed while the women groaned with them. And among the women, white-armed Andromache led the lamentation, while in her hands she held the head of Hector, slayer of men: 'Husband, thou art gone young from life and leavest me a widow in thine halls. And the child is yet but a little one, child of ill-fated parents, thee and me. . . .'*"

IV – 5 *Neither Helen upon the Skaian Gates*, etc.—The story of Helen, supposed to be the daughter of Zeus and Leda, and the most beautiful woman in Greece, is too well known to need mention here. The Author refers to the incident described in the third book of the Iliad, where Helen, upon the tower of the Skaian Gates, watches the combat between Menelaos, her husband, and Paris, her lover. If the words put into her mouth by Homer can be accepted as indicating her state of mind, it is hardly probable that Helen felt triumph at that time.

The story of Phryne, a courtesan who lived four centuries before our era, is mentioned at the end of the Author's Preface.

Thaïs was a Greek, born at Athens, who accompanied Alexander the Great on his expedition in Asia. It is said that she persuaded him to fire the citadel of Persepolis, the palace of the Persian kings, in revenge for the injuries inflicted upon Athens by Xerxes. After the death of Alexander, she became the mistress of Ptolemy Lagi.

V – 1 The quotations from the Prophets are, in the order given:—Jeremiah II, 2, 20. Hosea II, 7. Jeremiah II, 23, 24. Ezekiel XXIII, 20, 21.

Jeremiah III, 1. Ezekiel XXIII, 22, 25. Nahum III, 8. Hosea, IV, 14. Ecclesiastes IX, 7, 10; XI, 7; XII, 1, 8, 9.

v – 3 *hoplites*—heavily armed foot-soldiers.

v – 5 *stolistes*—priests who cared for the images and the offerings in the temple.

v – 5 *Ataraxia*—perfect peace of mind. Calmness. Used as an exclamation.

v – 5 *steles*—gravestones.

v – 5 The Greek writing which ends the story reads, freely rendered:

"*Thus ended the bargain between*
Chrysis and Demetrios."

Greek money: The ancient Attic drachma was worth about twenty-four cents in our money; the Cistophoric drachma (Asia Minor) about seventeen cents. An obolos was one sixth of a drachma; a mina one hundred drachmæ.

WOMAN AND PUPPET

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INTRODUCTION

DURING a brief period of less than ten years—a period followed by over twenty years of silence which endured until the day of his death—Pierre Louÿs published, in addition to a number of short stories, four books of major importance. These were "Aphrodite," "Woman and Puppet," "The Songs of Bilitis" and "The Adventures of King Pausole."

"Woman and Puppet" is not a scintillating romance of Greek Egypt, painted in the highest key, like "Aphrodite," nor is it a satire such as "King Pausole." It is, simply, a romance in a normal setting: but a romance unmistakably the offspring of Louÿs' great genius, and a romance of which the sordid conclusion rivals the work of the greatest French "Realists."

In "The Tomb of Pierre Louÿs," Kh. Nizam el Moulk, who believes that Louÿs' inspiration came distinctly from Asia, remarks: " 'Woman and Puppet' is a powerful book. Dull Asiatic lights glimmer through its tragic shadow." If one can read below the surface, without being blinded by the brilliance of the narrative itself, this is doubtless true. From any viewpoint, however, the book is a remarkable one and is still fresh and vivid even though its delicate situations and its frankness are less unusual to the English reader of today than they must have been thirty years ago. It is a book which, once read, is never forgotten.

CHAPTER ONE

How One Word Written on an Eggshell Served for Two Successive Notes

THE Carnival in Spain does not end, like ours, at eight o'clock on the morning of Ash Wednesday. On the marvelous gayety of Seville, the *memento quia pulvis es*, scatters its sepulchral odor on only four days; and on the first Sunday in Lent, the whole Carnival comes back to life.

This is the *Domingo de Pinatas*, the Sunday of the Kettles, the Great Festival. All the rabble in the city has changed costumes and one sees red, blue, green, yellow or pink rags, which were once mosquito nettings, curtains or women's skirts, running on the streets and fluttering in the sun on the small brown bodies of a yelling and multi-colored crowd of brats. The children gather from all parts in noisy battalions, waving bits of cloth at the end of a stick, and with loud cries invade the streets under the incognito of masks, their joyous sparkling eyes shining through the two holes. *"Anda! Hombre! Que no me conoce!"* they exclaim and the crowd of grown-ups make way before this terrible masked invasion.

The windows, the *miradores*, are thronged with innumerable brown heads. All the young girls from the country have come to Seville for that day, and they incline, under the light, their heads heavily laden with hair. The confetti falls like snow. The fans cast a pale-bluish shade on the small powdered cheeks. Cries, shouts and laughter sing and scream in the narrow streets. A few thousand inhabitants, on this day of carnival, make more noise than all Paris.

Thus, on the 23rd of February, 1896, the Sunday of the *Pinatas*, André Stévenol saw the end of the Carnival of Seville with a slight feeling of vexation, for this essentially amorous week had not brought him a single new adventure.

Several visits to Spain had taught him how quickly and open-heartedly the knots were formed and untied in this still primitive land, and he saddened at the thought that chance and opportunity had

not been favorable. At the most, a young girl, with whom he had engaged in a long battle of serpentines from the street to the window, had descended running, after beckoning to him, to offer a small red bouquet, with a *"Muchisima' grasia', caballero"* in a strong Andalusian accent. But she had gone back so quickly and, moreover, seen at close range, she had so disillusioned him, that André had limited himself to sticking the bouquet in his button-hole without fixing the woman in his memory. And his day appeared even more empty.

Four o'clock struck at twenty different churches. He left Las Sierpes, walked past the Giralda and the ancient Alcazar, and along the Calle Rodrigo, a Champs-Elysées of shadowy trees beside the immense Guadalquivir which was crowded with vessels. There the elegant Carnival unfolded itself.

In Seville, the well-to-do class is not always rich enough to procure three meals a day: but it would rather fast than deprive itself of that exterior luxury which consists entirely in the possession of a landau and of two perfect horses. The small provincial city numbers fifteen hundred private carriages, often demoded, but appearing younger for the beauty of the animals, and moreover occupied by such noble countenances, that no one would dream of ridiculing the frame.

André Stévenol was hardly able to make a way for himself through the mob which bordered both sides of the large dusty avenue. The cry of the youthful vendors dominated everything. *"Huevo'! Huevo'!"* It was the Battle of Eggs.

"Huevo'! Quiere quiere huevo'? A do' perra' gorda' la docena!" In yellow wicker baskets were heaped hundreds of eggshells which had been emptied, filled again with confetti and then stuck together with a tiny band. They were thrown with full force, like play balls, at the risk of the faces which passed in the slow carriages; and, standing on blue seats, the *caballeros* and the *señoritas* replied to the dense crowds, sheltering themselves behind small plaited fans. At the beginning, André had filled his pocket with these inoffensive projectiles, and he fought with spirit.

It was a real battle, for the eggs, while never wounding, nevertheless struck with some force before bursting into colored snows; and André caught himself throwing them with more vigor than was necessary. Once he even broke in two a fan with a brittle shell. But how out of place it was to appear in such a scuffle with a ball-room fan! He continued, unmoved.

The carriages rolled by, filled with women, lovers, families, children or friends. André looked at this happy multitude, defiling

in a roaring of laughter under the first sun of spring. Several times his eyes had lingered on other admirable eyes. The young girls of Seville did not lower their eyelids and they accepted the homage of such glances and retained them.

As the game had lasted an hour, André thought it was time for him to retire and, with a hesitating hand, he was rolling the last egg in his pocket when he suddenly saw again the young woman whose fan he had broken.

She was indeed marvelous.

Deprived of the shelter which had for a time protected her laughing face, now entirely open to attacks from the crowd and from those in the carriages, she had resolved to fight, and standing erect, panting, with disheveled hair, flushed with the heat and frank joy, she counter-attacked.

She appeared about twenty-two years old. But she must have been eighteen.

There was no doubt about her being an Andalusian. She was that type, admirable among all, which is born of the mixture of Arabs with the Vandals, the Semites and the Germans, and which unites in an exceptional manner, in a small valley of Europe, all the opposing perfections of the two races.

Her tall and supple body was full of expression. One felt that even with her face veiled one could guess her thoughts, and that she smiled with her legs as she spoke with her torso. Only women whom the long Northern winters do not immobilize near the fire have that grace and that freedom. Her hair was dark chestnut; but, at a distance, it seemed almost black, lying like a heavy shell over the nape of her neck. Her soft, rounded cheeks seemed powdered with that delicate bloom which tints the skin of creoles. The thin border of her eyelids was naturally dark.

André, pushed by the crowd almost to the steps of her carriage, gazed at her for a long time. He smiled, became agitated, and the rapid beating of his heart informed him that this woman was one of those who would play a part in his life.

Without losing time, for, at any moment, the flow of carriages, which had momentarily stopped, might start again, he stepped back as far as possible. Out of his pocket he took the last egg, wrote in pencil on the white shell the six letters of the word "*Quiero*" and, choosing an instant when the eyes of the unknown girl were fixed on his, he gently threw the egg, in an upward sweep, like a rose.

The young woman caught it in her hand.

Quiero is an astonishing verb, which could mean anything. It

could mean *wanting, desiring, loving,* it could mean *inviting* and also *cherishing.* According to the tone given it, it expresses the most compelling passion or the slightest whim. It is a command or a prayer, a declaration or a condescension. At times it is only an irony. The look which followed the throw signified simply: "I would love to love you."

As though she had guessed that the shell contained a message, the young girl slipped it into a small leather bag which hung from the front of her carriage. No doubt she would have turned around, but the current of the procession took her rapidly towards the right and, other carriages intervening, André lost sight of her before he could follow her through the crowd.

He left the sidewalk, freed himself as best he could, ran towards a cross alley . . . but the multitude which crowded the avenue did not allow him to act quickly enough and when he succeeded in climbing on a bench where he could see over the battle, the young head he was looking for had disappeared. He returned sadly through the streets and, for him, the whole Carnival seemed suddenly covered by a shadow.

He accused himself of the awkward fatality which had cut his adventure short. Perhaps if he had been more determined, he would have been able to find a path among the wheels in the first ranks of the crowd. . . . And now, where could he find the woman? Was he certain that she lived in Seville? If that, unfortunately, was not the case, how could he search for her, in Cordova, in Jerez, in Malaga? That was an impossibility.

And slowly, by a deplorable illusion, the image became more charming for him. Certain features which might have merited only a passing curiosity, became, in his memory, the principal motive for his broken-hearted tenderness. Thus he had observed, that instead of allowing two curls to lie flat on her temples, she had fashioned them with the curling iron in two rounded shells. It was not a very original fashion, and many girls of Seville did likewise, but evidently their hair did not lend itself so well to the perfection of those rounded curls, for André did not remember having seen any, even at a distance, comparable to these. Beside, the corners of her lips were of surprising mobility. They changed each instant in form and expression; sometimes almost invisible and sometimes almost curled up, round or thin, pale or dark, animated with a restless flame. One could certainly criticize all the rest, declaring that the nose was not Greek and that the chin was not Roman, but it would have been impossible not to blush with pleasure before the two little corners of this mouth.

His thoughts were at this stage when a *"Cuidao!"* shouted in a rough voice, made him jump into an open doorway; a carriage was passing at a slow trot in the narrow street.

And in this carriage was a young woman, who seeing André, threw very gently, as one throws a rose, an egg which she held in her hand.

Luckily, the egg fell rolling and did not break; as André, quite stupefied at this new meeting, had not made a movement to catch it on the wing. The carriage had already turned the street corner when he stooped to pick up the envoy.

The word *"Quiero"* was still legible on the round, smooth shell and nothing else had been written; but a decided flourish, which seemed engraved by the point of a brooch, continued the last letter as though to answer by the same word.

CHAPTER TWO

Wherein the Reader Learns the Diminutives of the Spanish Given-name "Concepcion"

MEANWHILE the carriage had turned the street corner and only the distant noise of the horses' hoofs was heard resounding on the cobblestones in the direction of the Giralda.

André ran in pursuit, anxious not to lose this second opportunity which might be the last, and arrived just as the horses slowly entered the shadow of a pink house in the Plaza del Triunfo.

The large black grating opened and closed on a quick feminine silhouette.

Undoubtedly it would have been wiser to prepare the way, to make inquiries about her name, family, situation and kind of life, before rushing thus with lowered head into the unknown of an intrigue, where, as he did not know anything, he was master of nothing. Nevertheless, André could not make up his mind to leave the place without at least having made a first effort, and as soon as he had ascertained, with a rapid hand, the correctness of his hat and the position of his necktie, he deliberately rang the bell.

A young steward appeared behind the grating, but did not open it.

"What does your Excellency desire?"

"Give my card to the señora."

"To what señora?" asked the servant, in a quiet voice wherein suspicion did not too much alter the tone of respect.

"To the one who lives in this house, I think."

"But her name?"

André, irritated, did not answer. The servant resumed:

"Will your Excellency do me the favor of informing me to which señora I shall introduce him?"

"I repeat that your mistress is waiting for me."

The steward, bowing slightly, lifted his hands, showing that it was not possible; and he retired without opening and without even taking the card.

Then André, whom anger now rendered quite discourteous, rang a second and a third time, as one does at the door of a shopkeeper. He said to himself, "A woman who is so quick to answer a declaration of this kind, should not be surprised at an insistence on entering her house; she was alone at the Delicias—she must live alone here and the noise I am making is only heard by her." He did not reason that the Spanish Carnival authorizes passing liberties which could not continue in normal life with the same chances of success. The door remained closed and the house full of silence as though it were deserted.

What was he to do? He walked for a while on the spot before the windows and *miradores* where he hoped to see the awaited face appear and even, perhaps, a sign. . . . But nothing appeared: he resigned himself to go back. Nevertheless, before leaving a door which closed on so many mysteries, he noticed, not far away, a peddler of wax matches sitting in a shady corner, and spoke to him.

"Who lives in that house?"

"I don't know," answered the man.

André put ten *reales* in his hand and added:

"Tell me, just the same."

"I should not tell. The señora buys from me, and if she learned that I spoke about her, tomorrow her *mozos* would buy somewhere else; for instance, from Fulano, who sells half empty boxes. At least I shall not speak evil of her, *caballero!* Only her name, as you wish to know it. It is the Señora Doña Concepcion Perez, wife of Don Manuel Garcia."

"Then her husband does not live in Seville?"

"Her husband is in Bolivia."

"Where is that?"

"In Bolivia, a country in America."

Without listening further, André threw another coin on the knees of the vendor and rejoined the crowd to go back to his hotel.

On the whole he was undecided. Even in learning about the absence of the husband, he did not think that all the chances leaned in his favor. This cautious peddler, who seemed to know more than he would say, implied the existence of another lover already chosen, and the attitude of the servant did not belie the suspicion of mental reservations. . . . André figured out that only fifteen days remained before the date fixed for his return to Paris. Would they suffice to enter into the good graces of a young person whose life was in all likelihood already occupied?

Thus, troubled by uncertainty, he was entering the *patio* of his hotel, when the porter stopped him:

"A letter for your Excellency."

The envelope had no address.

"Are you sure this letter is for me?"

"It was handed to me this instant for Don André Stévenol."

André opened it at once.

It contained these simple lines written on blue paper:

"Don André Stévenol is kindly begged not to make so much noise, not to give his name and also not to ask for mine. If, tomorrow, towards three o'clock, he will walk on the road to Empalme, a carriage may pass that way and perhaps may stop."

"How easy life is!" thought André.

And climbing the staircase to the first floor he already had a vision of future intimacies; he searched out tender diminutives for the most charming of given-names: *"Concepcion, Concha, Conchita, Chita."*

CHAPTER THREE

How and Why André Did Not Go to the Rendez-vous of Concha Perez

THE next morning André Stévenol had a radiant awakening. The light entered broadly through the four windows of the *mirador;* and all the city noises, the clamping of horses' hoofs, the peddlers' cries, the mule-bells and the chimes of the convents, mixed their lively uproar in the white square.

He did not remember having had such a happy morning in a long while. He stretched his arms violently. Then he drew them in against his chest, as though he wished to give himself the illusion of the expected embrace.

"How easy life is!" he repeated, smiling. "Yesterday at this time I was alone, without aim, without thought. A walk was enough and this morning there are two of us. Why should we consider refusals, disdain or even delays? We ask and women give themselves. Why should it be otherwise?"

He arose and took a robe, put on his slippers and rang for his bath. While waiting, he pressed his forehead against the window pane, and regarded the light-filled square.

The houses were painted in those light colors which Seville spreads over her walls and which resemble women's dresses. Some were of dazzling cream color with white cornices; others pink but of such delicate rose tints! Others were aquamarine or light orange and others pale violet. Nowhere were the eyes shocked by the horrible brown of the streets of Cadiz, or Madrid; nowhere were they blinded by the crude whites of Jerez.

On the square, the orange trees were loaded with fruit, fountains were running, young girls were laughing, holding their shawls by the edges as Arab women close their *haïck*. And from everywhere, from the corners of the square, from the middle of the carriage way and the depth of the narrow streets, sounded the tinkling mule-bells. André could not imagine how it was possible to live anywhere except in Seville. After dressing, he slowly drank a small cup of Spanish chocolate and then went out at random.

A singular chance made him follow the shortest way, from the steps of his hotel to the Plaza del Triunfo; but once there, André, remembering the cautioning advice, and fearing to displease his "mistress" by passing too close to her door, or not wishing to appear too tormented by the desire to see her sooner, followed the opposite sidewalk without even turning his head to the left. From there he walked over to *Las Delicias*.

The battle of the day before had strewn the ground with papers and eggshells which gave to the splendid park an appearance not unlike the back of a kitchen. In certain spots, the earth had disappeared under crumbling, multi-colored dunes. Otherwise the place was deserted, as Lent had begun. Still, he recognized a stroller who was coming from an alley leading to the country.

"Good day, Don Mateo," he said, offering his hand. "I had no hope of meeting you so soon."

"What can one do, sir, when one is alone, useless and idle? I walk in the morning, I walk in the evening. During the day I read or gamble. That is my life. It is gloomy."

"But you have nights which make up for the days, if I am to believe the gossip of the city."

"If they say that, then they deceive themselves. From today until the day of his death, no woman will be seen again at the house of Don Mateo Diaz. But enough about myself. How long are you going to stay here?"

Don Mateo Diaz was a Spaniard, of some forty years, who had been recommended to André on his first visit to Spain. His gestures and his words were naturally declamatory. Like many of his countrymen, he accorded an extreme importance to observations which had none; but this did not imply vanity or stupidity on his part. The Spanish emphasis is carried like a cape, in large, graceful folds. A man of culture, whose excessive wealth had prevented him from leading an active life, Don Mateo was especially famed for the exploits of his bedroom, which had a reputation of being hospitable. Therefore André was surprised to learn that he had so soon renounced all the pomps of all the satans. But the young man refrained from further inquiries.

They walked for a while along the banks of the river which Don Mateo, as riparian proprietor as well as patriot, never tired of admiring.

"You know," he said, "that joke of a foreign ambassador who preferred the Mazanares to all the other rivers, because it was navigable by carriage and on horseback? Look at the Guadalquivir, the father of the plains and the cities! I have traveled a great deal in the last twenty years, I have seen the Ganges, the Nile and the Atrato, larger rivers under a more vivid light; it is only here that I have seen the majestic beauty of the current and the waters. Its color is incomparable. Is it not gold which flows from the arches of that bridge? The stream swells like a woman with child. It is the wealth of Andalusia which the two quays of Seville lead to the plains."

Then they discussed politics. Don Mateo was a royalist and was indignant at the persistent efforts of the opposition, when all the forces of the country should have concentrated around the weak and courageous queen to assist her in saving the supreme inheritance of an imperishable history.

"What a fall!" he said. "What misery! To have possessed Europe, to have been Charles V, to have doubled the field of action of the world by discovering a new world, to have owned an empire over which the sun never set; and, even better, to have been the first to vanquish your Napoleon,—and then to die under the blows of a handful of mulatto bandits! What a destiny for our Spain!"

It was useless to tell him that those bandits were the brothers of

Washington and of Bolivar. For him, they were shameful brigands who did not even deserve the garrote. He calmed himself.

"I love my country," he resumed. "I love its mountains and plains. I love the language, the costumes and the sentiments of its people. Our race has qualities of a superior essence. She herself is an aristocracy, apart from Europe, ignorant of all that is not herself and enclosed in her lands as within the walls of a park. That is without doubt the reason for her decline to the profit of the Northern nations, according to contemporary law which today everywhere impels the mediocre to assault the best.... You know that in Spain they call *hidalgos* the descendants of families who are free from any mixture of Moorish blood.... They will not admit that during seven centuries Islam took root on Spanish soil. I have always thought it ungracious to deny such ancestors. We owe entirely to the Arabs those exceptional qualities which have drawn in history the great design of our past. They bequeathed to us their scorn for money, their disdain of lies, of death, their inexpressible pride. We inherit from them their rigid attitude against everything that is low, and likewise an unaccountable laziness toward manual labor. In truth we are their sons and it is not without reason that we continue to dance their Oriental dances to the tune of their 'ferocious songs.'"

The sun was rising in a great open and blue sky. The brown masts of the old trees in the park revealed, at intervals, the green of laurels and of supple palms. Sudden puffs of heat enchanted this winter morning in a land where no winter dwells.

"You will lunch with me, I hope?" said Don Mateo. "My *huerta* is near the road to Empalme. We shall be there in half an hour and, if you will permit, I shall retain you until evening to show you my breeding stud and some new animals."

"I shall be very indiscreet," André excused himself. "I accept the luncheon but not the excursion. This afternoon I have a *rendez-vous* which I assure you cannot be missed."

"A woman? Don't fear, I shall ask no questions. You shall be free. I am even grateful for passing with me the time which separates you from the appointed hour. When I was your age, I could not bear to see anyone during my mysterious days. I had my meals served in my room and the woman I was expecting was the first being I spoke to from the time of my awakening."

He was silent for a while, then he said in an admonitory tone:

"Monsieur, beware of women! I shall never advise you to flee from them, for I have wasted my life with them and if it could be

lived again, the hours that I have passed with them are those that I would wish to live again. But beware, beware of them!"

And, as though he had found an expression to his thoughts, Don Mateo added more slowly:

"There are two kinds of women who should be avoided at all costs: the first are those who do not love you, and then those who do love you. Between these two extremes, there are thousands of charming women, but we do not know how to appreciate them."

The luncheon would have been rather dull, if the animation of Don Mateo had not replaced, by a long monologue, the conversation which was lacking; for André, preoccupied with his personal affairs, only half heard what was said. As the moment of his *rendez-vous* neared, the heart beats, which he had felt the day before, started again with a most pressing insistence—it was a deafening call within himself, an absolute impulse which drove from his mind everything but the expected woman. He would have given anything if the large hand of the Empire clock, on which his eyes were fixed, could have been pushed forward fifty minutes. . . . But the hour we look at becomes fixed and time flows no more than an eternally stagnant pool.

At length, forced to remain and unable to keep silent any longer, he proved his youthfulness by speaking to his host as follows:

"Don Mateo, you have always been an excellent adviser to me. Will you permit me to confide a secret and to ask your advice? . . ."

"I am at your disposal," said Mateo in the Spanish manner, getting up from the table to go to the smoking room.

"Well . . . there . . . there is a question . . ." said André in an hesitating way. "Really, to anyone but you, I would not ask it. . . . Do you know a girl of Seville who is called Doña Concepcion Garcia?"

Mateo started.

"Concepcion Garcia! Concepcion Garcia! But which one? Explain yourself! There are twenty thousand Concepcion Garcias in Spain! The name is as common as Jeanne Duval or Marie Lambert, in your country. For the love of God, tell me her maiden name. Is it P . . . Perez, tell me? it Perez? Concha Perez? But why don't you speak?"

André, quite overcome by this sudden emotion, had for a moment the presentiment that it was preferable not to tell the truth; but he spoke sooner than he had intended; and exclaimed:

"Yes."

Then Mateo, accenting each detail as one tortures a wound, continued: "Concepcion Perez de Garcia, 22 Plaza del Triunfo, of eighteen years, black hair, and a mouth . . . a mouth . . ."

"Yes," . . . said André.

"You have done well to ask me about her; you have done well, monsieur. If I can stop you at her door, it will be a good action on my part and a rare happiness for you."

"But who is she?"

"What? You do not know her?"

"I met her yesterday for the first time; I have never even heard her voice."

"Then, it is not too late."

"Is she a woman of the town?"

"No, no. She is even, in fact, an honest woman. She has not had more than four or five lovers. In our day that is chastity."

"And . . ."

"Besides, believe me, she is remarkably intelligent. Remarkably. I judge her superior in her wit, which is of the subtlest, and in her knowledge of life. I would not deny her any praise. She dances with an eloquence which is irresistible. She speaks as she dances and she sings as she speaks. I suppose you have no doubt that she has a pretty face; and if you saw what she hides, you would say that even her mouth . . . But that is enough. Have I said everything?"

André, irritated, did not answer.

Don Mateo seized the two sleeves of his coat and emphasizing each word with a jerk, he added:

"And she is the *worst* of women, monsieur, monsieur, do you hear? She is the *worst* woman in the world. I have only one hope, a consolation to my heart, that on the day of her death, God will not forgive her."

André arose.

"Nevertheless, Don Mateo, I, who am not authorized to speak of this woman as you do, have no right to withdraw from the *rendez-vous* which she has given me. Is it necessary to repeat that I have confided in you and that I regret to interrupt your confidences by a premature departure?"

And he offered his hand.

Mateo placed himself against the door:

"Listen to me, I beseech you. Listen to me. A minute ago you said that I was a man of excellent counsel. I do not accept this judgment. I do not need it in order to speak to you in this manner. I also forget the affection I bear towards you and which, nevertheless, would be sufficient to explain my insistence."

"But then?" . . .

"I speak to you as man to man, as the first comer would stop a passer-by to warn him of a grave danger and shout, 'Don't go any

further; go back, forget whom you have seen, who has spoken to you, who has written to you!' If you now have peace, calm nights, a careless life, all that we call happiness, do not go near Concha Perez! If you do not want this day to divide your past from your future as two halves of joy and suffering, do not go near Concha Perez! If you have not yet felt to the utmost the madness which she can cause and hold in a human heart, do not go near that woman; flee from her as from death; let me save you from her; have pity on yourself, at least!"

"Don Mateo, do you love her?"

The Spaniard rubbed his hand over his brow and murmured:

"Oh, no, everything is finished. I do not love nor do I hate her. The thing is past. Everything wears away. . . ."

"But, would I not be hurting you personally if I abstained from following your advice? I would gladly offer you a sacrifice of this kind: but I have none to offer myself. . . . What is your answer?"

Mateo looked at André; then, at once changing the expression of his features, he said in a whimsical tone:

"Monsieur, one should never go to the first *rendez-vous* a woman gives."

"And why not?"

"Because she will not come."

André, who remembered a particular incident, could not help smiling:

"That is sometimes true," he said.

"Very often. And if, perchance, she is waiting for you at this moment, be sure that your absence would only confirm her inclination for you."

André reflected and smiled again.

"What does it mean?". . .

". . . That without going into any personalities and if your young woman's name was Lola Vasquez or Rosario Lucena, I would advise you to resume your seat and not leave it without a serious reason. We are going to smoke cigars while drinking iced syrups. It is a mixture which is not well known in the restaurants of Paris, but which is used from one end to the other of Spanish America. You will tell me later if you relish the smoke of an Havana mingled with cool sugar."

A short silence followed. Both were sitting at a table which held *puros* and round ash trays.

"And now, what shall we talk about?" said Don Mateo.

André made a gesture signifying: You know well.

"I will begin, then," said Mateo in a low voice, and the assumed

gayety, which he had shown for a moment, disappeared under a settled cloud.

*

CHAPTER FOUR

The Apparition of a Black Imp in a Polar Landscape

THREE years ago, monsieur, I did not have the white hair which you see now. I was thirty-seven years old, I thought I was twenty-two; at no moment of my life had I felt my youth pass and no one, as yet, had made me feel that it was nearing its end.

You have been told that I was a libertine; it is false. I respected love too much to frequent the back-shops and I have very seldom possessed a woman whom I did not love passionately. If I named them, you would be astonished at their small number. Lately, making a mental inventory, I discovered that I had never had a blonde mistress. I shall always ignore those pale objects of desire.

What is true is that love has never been, for me, a distraction, a pleasure or a pastime, as it has been for some. It has been my whole life. If I suppressed from my remembrance those thoughts and actions whose object was woman, there would be nothing left but a void.

This said, I can now tell you what I know of Concha Perez.

It was three years ago, three years and a half, this winter. I was returning from France one 26th of December, during a terrible cold snap, in the express which, toward noon, passes over the bridge of La Bidassoa. The snow, already thick in Biarritz and Saint Sebastian, rendered almost impassable the passage of the Guipuzcoa. The train stopped two hours at Zumarraga, while workmen hastily swept the tracks; then it started, only to stop again among the mountains, and it took three hours to repair the damages of an avalanche. This repeated itself all through the night. The window panes were heavily lined with snow which smothered the noise of the train while we rode in the midst of a silence which gave a character of dignity to the danger.

The next morning there was a stop at Avila. We were eight hours late, and had not eaten for a whole day. I asked an employee if we could descend; he shouted, "Four days' stoppage. The trains cannot pass."

Do you know Avila? People should be sent there who believe

that old Spain is dead. My trunks were carried to a *fonda* where Don Quixote might have lodged; men in fringed trousers sat around fountains; and, in the evening, when calls in the streets informed us that the train was going to start at once, the coach, drawn by black mules which carried us at a gallop through the snow and almost turned over a score of times, must assuredly have been the same one which drove the subjects of King Philip V from Burgos to the Escurial.

What I am telling you in a few minutes, monsieur, lasted forty hours. Also when, towards eight o'clock in the evening, I sat down in my corner, still without my dinner, I felt myself engulfed in an immeasurable boredom. It was beyond my strength to pass a third night in the compartment with four sleeping Englishmen who had followed me all the way from Paris. I left my grip in the upper section and, carrying my blanket along, I sat down the best way I could in an inferior compartment which was filled with Spanish women.

I should have said four compartments, for all communicated at breast height. There were women of the lower class, some sailors, two nuns, three students, a gypsy and a civil guard. It was, as you see, a general mixture. All these people spoke at once and in high pitched voices. I had not been sitting there more than fifteen minutes before I knew the lives of all my neighbors. Some laugh at people who are so unreserved. But on my part, I can never watch, without a feeling of pity, this need of simple souls to voice their pains in the desert.

All of a sudden the train stopped. We were passing through the Sierra de Guardarrama, at a height of fourteen hundred meters. Another avalanche barred our way. The train tried to back out; another slide prevented its return. And the snow continued slowly burying the cars.

This seems like a story from Norway, does it not? If we had been in a Protestant country, the people would have knelt down to recommend their souls to God; but except on the days of thunder storms, our Spaniards do not fear sudden vengeances from heaven. When they heard that the train was definitely blocked, they asked the gypsy to dance for them.

She danced. She was at least thirty years old, very ugly, like the women of her race, but who seemed to have fire between her waist and her calves. In an instant we forgot the cold, the snow and the night. Those of the other compartments were on their knees on the wooden benches, their chins on the barrier, looking at the gypsy. Those nearest to her, clapped their palms in cadence according to the ever varying rhythm of the *baile flamenco*.

It was then that I noticed, in the opposite corner, a little girl

who was singing. She had a pink skirt which made me guess that she belonged to the Andalusian race, for the Castilian women prefer dark colors, the French black and the German brown. Her shoulders and her budding breasts disappeared in a cream shawl and, to protect herself against the cold, she had wound about her head a white foulard which ended behind in long horns. The whole wagon knew already that she was a pupil of the convent of San José d'Avila, that she was going to Madrid to her mother, that she was innocent and that her name was Concha Perez. Her voice was singularly penetrating. She sang without moving, her hands under the shawl; almost prone, her eyes closed, but the songs which she sang I imagined she had not learned from the nuns. She chose well among the *coplas* of four verses wherein the people pour out their whole passion. I can still hear her sing, with a caress in her voice:

Dime, nina, si me quieres;
Por Dios, descubre tu pecho . . .[1]

or:

Tes matelas sont des jasmine,
Tes draps des roses blanches,
Des lis tes oreillers,
Et toi, une rose qui te couches.[2]

I only repeat the less lively ones.

But suddenly as though she felt how ridiculous it was to address such hyperboles to that wild woman, she changed the tone of her repertory and soon accompanied the dance with ironic songs like this one, which I remember:

Petite aux vingt novios
(Et avec moi ving et un)
Si tous sont comme je suis,
Tu resteras toute seule.[3]

At first the gypsy did not know whether to laugh or get angry. The laughter was with the adversary and it was obvious that this daughter

[1] Little one, if you love me
Then, for God's sake, let me see
Your breast.

[2] Your coverlets are jasmins,
Your sheets are roses white,
Your pillows lilies, and yourself
A rose asleep at night.

[3] Little one with twenty lovers
(And the twenty-first am I)
If of my mind are the others,
All alone I think you'll lie.

of Egypt did not count among her qualities the wit of repartee which, in our modern society, replaces fisted arguments.

She ground her teeth in silence. The little girl, now quite reassured as to the consequences of her affray, redoubled in gayety and audacity. An explosion of wrath interrupted her. The Egyptian lifted her twitching hands:

"I will tear out your eyes! I will tear out . . ."

"I must be very careful," answered Concha as coolly as possible and without even lifting her eyelid. Then amidst a torrent of insults, she said in the same quiet voice:

"Guards, bring me two *chulos*," [1] as though she had been in front of a bull.

The whole compartment was overjoyed. The men shouted *Olé*, and the women looked at her with tender eyes. She only faltered once under a more stinging injury; the gypsy called her "little bitch!"

"I am a woman," said the little one, beating her budding breasts.

And the two combatants threw themselves at each other with real tears of rage. I interfered; battles among women are spectacles which I have never been able to watch with the detachment shown by mobs. Women fight badly and dangerously. They do not know knockdown blows, but only the scratches which disfigure or the needle thrusts which blind. They frighten me.

I separated them with difficulty. Foolish is he who interferes between two enemies! I did my best; after which they threw themselves again into corners, stamping their heels in restrained anger.

When all was quiet, a lanky lout dressed in the uniform of the civil guards made his appearance from a nearby compartment. With his tall boots, he climbed over the wooden barriers, looked around in a protective manner over the battlefield where there was peace and, with that unfailing sense of the police which ever strikes at the weakest, he gave poor little Conchita's cheek a stupid and brutal blow.

Without condescending to explain this summary sentence, he carried the girl to another section, returned to his own, climbing back in his ridiculous boots, and then crossed his hands over his sword, with the satisfaction of having re-established the public order.

The train had started again. We passed Santa Maria de las Nieves in an enchanting landscape. An enormous white plain, below a thousand foot precipice, terminated at the horizon in a line of pale mountains. The dazzling and frozen moon was the very soul of the snowy Sierras and nowhere have I seen her more divine than on that

[1] Bullfighter's assistants.

winter night. She shone alone, with the snow. At times I imagined myself riding in a silent and fantastic train, to the discovery of a pole.

I was the only one to see this mirage. My neighbors were already asleep. Have you observed, dear friend, that people never look at anything interesting? Last year on the bridge of Triana, I had stopped to watch the most beautiful sunset of the year. Nothing can give an idea of the splendor of Seville at such a moment. Well, the passers-by were going about their business in a bored manner; not one turned his head, not a single person noticed that magnificent evening.... As I contemplated the moonlight night and the snow, my eyes already tiring of its dazzling whiteness, the image of the little singer crossed my thought and I smiled at the comparison. That little imp in a Scandinavian landscape was like a mandarin on an iceberg, a banana at the feet of a white bear, something incoherent and droll.

Where was she? I leaned over the barrier and saw her close to me, so near that I could have touched her. She slept, her mouth open, her hands crossed under her shawl, and in her sleep her head had slipped down on the arm of the nun. I could believe she was a woman as she herself had said; but, monsieur, she slept like a six-months-old child. Most of her face was wrapped in her foulard which clung about her cheeks. I saw nothing more than a round and dark wisp of hair, an eyelid closed on very long lashes, a small nose in the light and two lips marked by shadows; nevertheless I gazed at this singular mouth until dawn, for it was so childish and sensual, that I doubted sometimes whether, in her dreams, the movements of her lips sought a nurse's breasts or the lips of a lover.

Daylight appeared as we passed the Escurial. The dry and dull winter of the *alrededores* had replaced, in the horizon of the window panes, the marvels of the Sierras. Soon we entered the station and, as I carried my grip on the platform, I heard a young voice shouting:

"Mira! Mira!"

She was pointing with her finger to the masses of snow which covered the roofs of the train, from one end to the other, stuck to the windows, the buffers, the springs, the ironwork; and, compared to the clean trains which were leaving the city, the mournful appearance of ours made her burst out laughing. I helped her with her parcels. I wanted someone to carry them for her, but she refused. She had six of them which she rapidly slipped, one to her shoulders, another to her elbow, and the other four in her hands.

She departed, running. I lost sight of her.

You see, monsieur, how vague and insignificant was this first meeting. This is not the beginning for a novel; the settings take more

room than the heroine, and I might not have noticed her; but what is more unusual than an adventure in real life? That was really the way it began.

I could swear today that, if anyone had asked me, on that morning to name the principal event of the night, the memory for those forty hours among a hundred thousand others which would remain with me, I would have named the landscape and not Concha Perez.

She had amused me for twenty minutes. Her tiny image returned once or twice more, then the current of events swept me somewhere else and I ceased to think about her.

CHAPTER FIVE

Wherein the Same Person Re-appears in a More Familiar Setting

THE following summer I met her suddenly. I had come back to Seville some time before, soon enough to resume an already ancient *liaison* and to break it. I shall not tell you about this. You are not here to listen to the recital of my memoirs, and, beside, I do not relish confessions of intimate remembrances. Without the strange coincidence which unites us around a woman, I would not have revealed to you this fragment of my past. This confidence should at least remain the only one, even among us.

In the month of August, I found myself alone in my house which for years had been filled by a feminine presence. The second place at the table had been removed, the wardrobes were without gowns, the beds empty and everywhere silence; if you have been a lover, you will understand me; it was horrible. To escape from this mourning, the worst of mournings, I was out from morning until evening, no matter where, on horseback or on foot, carrying a gun, a stick or a book. Sometimes I even slept at an inn, to avoid returning to my house. One afternoon, for want of something to do, I entered the Fabrica.[1]

It was an overpowering summer's day. I had lunched at the Hotel de Paris and, going from Las Sierpes to the street of San Fernando, "at the hour when only dogs and Frenchmen are found in the streets," I thought I would perish from the sun.

I entered alone, which was a favor, for you know that visitors

[1] Tobacco factory in Seville.

are guided by a female superintendent through that immense harem of four thousand eight hundred women, so free in their actions and speech. On this day, which was torrid, as I have said, they took full advantage of the rule which allows them to undress as much as they please in the intolerable atmosphere in which they live from June to September. Such a rule is simple humanity, for the temperature in these long rooms is like the desert, and it is only charitable to permit those poor girls the same liberty given to firemen on steamships. But the result is not less interesting. Those who were most covered had only their chemise around their body, (these were the prudes), almost all of them worked with the torso nude, a simple cotton skirt loose around the waist and sometimes pushed half-way down the thighs. The spectacle was diverse. There were women of all ages, childish and old, young or less young, obese, stout, lean or emaciated. Some were pregnant. Others nursed their babies. Some were not even nubile. There was everything in that naked crowd, except virgins, probably. There were even pretty girls.

I passed between the serried ranks looking from right to left, sometimes solicited for alms, sometimes insulted with the most cynical jests. For the entrance of a man alone in this prodigious harem, awakens many emotions. I beg you to believe that they do not spare their words when they have dropped their chemise, and to their speech they add gestures of a shamelessness or rather of a simplicity which is somewhat disconcerting, even to a man of my age. These girls are as immodest as respectable women. I did not answer them at all. Who can flatter himself for having had the last word with a *cigarrera*? But I looked at them curiously and their nakedness did not agree with the idea of painful work. I fancied that I saw all those active hands hastily manufacturing innumerable little lovers out of tobacco leaves. They acted, moreover, in a manner to suggest this to me.

The contrast was strange, between the poverty of their linen and the extreme care they had given the thick hair which weighted their heads. They had prepared their hair with curling irons as though preparing for a ball and had powdered to the tips of their breasts, even over their holy medals. There was not one who had not forty pins and a red flower in the knot of her hair. Not one who did not have, folded in her handkerchief, a small mirror and a white powder puff. They could be mistaken for actresses dressed as beggars.

I considered them, one by one, and it seemed to me that even the quietest revealed some vanity at being examined. I saw some young ones who placed themselves at ease, as if by chance, as I approached them. I gave some *perras* to those who had children; to others bouquets

of pinks with which I had filled my pockets and which they immediately suspended at their breast by the little chain of their cross. There were, I assure you, some very poor anatomies in that anomalous herd, but all were interesting and I stopped more than once in front of an admirable feminine body, for truly, only in Spain can be found the warm torso, full of flesh, velvety as a fruit and quite sufficiently covered by sparkling skin uniformly dark, from which springs vigorously the curly astrakan of the armpits and the dark crowns of the breasts. I saw fifteen who were beautiful. That is a great many among five thousand women.

Almost deafened and a little tired, I was on the point of leaving the third room, when among the shouts and explosions, of words, I heard, near me, a high pitched voice saying:

"Caballero, if you will give me a *perra Chica*[1] I will sing you a little song."

In perfect amazement I recognized Concha. She had—I can still see her—a long chemise, somewhat worn, but which hung well to her shoulders and which covered her only with difficulty. She regarded me while her hand adjusted a sprig of pomegranate flowers in the first roll of her black hair.

"How did you get here?"

"God knows, I don't remember."

"But your convent in Avila?"

"When the girls return there by the door, they go out by the window."

"Is that the way you came out?"

"Caballero, I am honest; I did not go back at all for fear of committing a sin. Give me a *real*[2] and I will sing you a *soledad* while the superintendent is at the other end of the room."

You can imagine how the other girls stared at us during this dialogue. I was somewhat embarrassed, but Conchita was undismayed. I continued:

"Who are you staying with in Seville?"

"With Mamma."

I shuddered. For a young girl, a lover is still a guarantee, but a mother; what perdition!

"Mother and we others, we keep busy. She goes to church and I come here. That is the difference of age."

"You come here every day?"

"Almost."

[1] One cent. [2] Two cents.

"Only?"

"Yes, when it does not rain, when I am not sleepy, when it does not tire me to walk. One comes here as one wishes; ask my neighbors, but one must be here at noon, as otherwise one cannot enter."

"Not later?"

"Don't laugh. Noon! *Dios mio!* How early that is! I know some who, two days out of four, cannot get up early enough to reach here while the grating is open. And, you know, as for what one earns here, one might as well remain at home."

"How much do you earn?"

"Seventy-five *centimes* for a thousand cigars and a thousand packages of cigarettes. As for me, as I work fast, I can earn a little piece, but that is not the wealth of Peru. . . . Give me a little piece, caballero, and I shall sing you a *seguedilla* that you do not know."

I threw a napoleon in her box and, after pulling her ear, left her.

Monsieur, there is, in the youth of happy people, a precise moment when chance turns and the ascent becomes a descent, when the misfortune season begins. That was my moment. That golden coin thrown to that child was the fatal moment of my play. From then I date my present life, my moral ruin, my downfall and all the changes that you see on my brow. You shall hear, the story is very simple, really almost banal, except in one point; but that one killed me.

I had gone out and was walking slowly in the shadowless street, when I heard little running steps behind me. I turned; she had joined me.

"Thank you, sir," she said.

And I noticed that her voice had changed. I had not considered the effect of my little gift on her; but I saw at once that it was considerable. A napoleon is equal to twenty-four *pesetas*, the price of a bouquet, for a *cigarrera* it represents the work of a month. Besides, it was a gold coin, and gold in Spain is only seen in the front windows of money changers. . . .

Without intending to, I had evoked all the emotion of wealth. She had, of course, quickly left the packages of cigarettes which she had been filling since morning. She had put on her skirt, her stockings, her yellow shawl, her fan; and, after hastily powdering her cheeks, she had quickly found me.

"Come," she continued, "you are my friend. Take me back to my mother, as I am free, thanks to you."

"Where does your mother live?"

"Calle Monteros, quite near. You have been nice to me, but you

did not want to hear my song. That is bad. To punish you, you shall tell me one."

"Anything but that."

"Yes, I will prompt you."

She leaned to my ear.

"You shall recite this one:

"Hay quien nos escuche?—No.
Quiers que te diga?—Di.
Tienes otro amante?—No.
Quieres que lo sea?—Si." [1]

"But, you know, this is a song, and the answers are not mine."

"Is that true?"

"Absolutely."

"And why?"

"Guess."

"Because you do not love me."

"But I find you very charming."

"But you have a lover?"

"No, I have none."

"Because of piety?"

"I am very pious, but I have made no vows, caballero—"

"Then it is because of coldness, no doubt?"

"No, sir."

"There are many questions which I cannot ask, my dear little girl. If you have a reason, tell me."

"I knew that you would not be able to guess. It is impossible to guess."

"But what is it after all?"

"I am *mozita.*" [2]

[1] Do any others hear us?—No.
Then shall I tell you?—Tell.
You have another lover?—No.
You wish to have me?—Yes.

[2] *Mozita* is a more familiar word than "virgin" and is used freely by girls to express the fact that they have remained pure.

CHAPTER SIX

Wherein Conchita Manifests Herself, Reserves Herself and Disappears

SHE said those words with such assurance that I stopped, out of countenance for her sake. What went on in that rebellious and provoking child's head? What signified this decided attitude, this frank and perhaps honest look, this sensual mouth which appeared unapproachable as though to tempt all boldness? I did not know what to think, but I understood perfectly that she pleased me greatly, that I was delighted to have found her again and that no doubt I was going to accept every opportunity to observe her life.

We had reached the house door where a merchant of fruit unloaded her baskets.

"Buy me some mandarins?" she said. "We shall eat them upstairs."

We climbed the stairs. The house was puzzling. A card of a woman without profession was nailed at the first door. Above, there was a flower-maker. On the side was a closed apartment from which issued a sound of laughter. I was asking myself if this little girl was not leading me simply to a most commonplace *rendez-vous*. But, in fact, the surroundings proved nothing; the poor *cigarreras* did not pick out their habitations and I do not like to judge people from the name of their street.

At the last floor, she stopped on a landing bordered by a wooden balustrade and gave three little knocks with her hand on a brown door which opened readily.

"Mother, let him enter," said the girl. "He is a friend."

The mother, a wasted, dark woman with still some traces of beauty, looked me over without displaying much confidence. But, by the manner in which her daughter pushed the door and invited me to follow her, it seemed to me that there was only one mistress in that hovel and that the queen-mother had abdicated her regency.

"Look, mother, twelve mandarins; and look again: a napoleon."

"Jesus!" said the old woman crossing her hands. "And how have you earned all that?"

I quickly explained our double meeting, in the train and at the Fabrica, and brought the conversation upon the ground of intimate confidences. They were endless. The woman was, or said that she was, the widow of an engineer who had died in Huelva. She had returned

without a pension, without resources, and in four years of modest living had spent the savings of her husband. It was a story real or false, which I had heard twenty times and which terminated with a cry of misery.

"What could I do? I had no profession, I could only attend to the housekeeping and pray to the Sainted Mother of God. I had been offered the place of a door-keeper, but I was too proud to be a servant. I pass my days in church. I prefer to kiss the stones of the choir rather than to sweep those of the door, and I wait for the Lord to sustain me at the last moment. Two women alone are so exposed! Ah! caballero, temptations never miss those who will listen. We could be rich, my daughter and myself, if we had followed evil ways! But sin has never passed the night here. Our souls are straighter than the finger of Saint John and we confide in God, who knows his own among a thousand."

Conchita, during this speech, had accomplished, in front of a mirror nailed to the wall, with two fingers and some powder, a work in pastels over all her little, too brown face. She turned around, brightened by a smile of satisfaction, and it seemed to me that her mouth had been transfigured.

"What worry for me," resumed the mother, "to see her start in the morning for the Fabrica! What bad examples they set her! What evil words they teach her! Those girls have no carmine on their cheeks, caballero. One never knows where they come from when they enter in the morning; and if my daughter had listened to them, she would have left me long ago."

"But why do you make her work there?"

"It is everywhere the same. You know how it is, monsieur; when two working women are twelve hours together, they speak of things they should not speak of for eleven hours and three-quarters and the rest of the time they are silent."

"If they only speak, then there is not much harm done."

"Who gives the bill-of-fare incites hunger. Believe me, what ruins these girls is the advice of women more than the eyes of men. I do not trust the best of them. Many a one with her rosary in her hand has the devil in her skirts. I would wish, for my daughter, neither a young nor an old friend. And there she has five thousand of them."

"Well, then," I interrupted, "don't let her go back any more."

I took two bank notes from my pockets and placed them on a table. There were exclamations, folded hands and tears. I will pass over what you can guess. But, when the exclamations had ceased, the mother confessed, shaking her head, that the girl would nevertheless have to resume her work, as the sum and more was owed to the landlord, the grocer, the drug store, the clothing store. In short, I doubled my offer-

ing and left at once, allowing a modesty and a calculation, equally natural to me, to suppress my sentiments for that day.

I do not deny that I was knocking at the door the next day before ten o'clock.

"Mother has gone out," said Concha. "She is marketing. Come in, my friend." She looked at me and then laughed. "Ah, well! I am discreet before my mamma. What would you say?"

"Quite so."

"Don't believe that it is the result of my bringing up. I have brought myself up; that's fortunate, as my mother would have been incapable. I am good and she brags about it; but should I lean on the window-sill and beckon the passer-by, she would admire me, saying *'Que gracia!'* I do exactly as I please from morning till night. Therefore I am to be praised for not doing everything that passes through my head, as she is not the one who would prevent me, in spite of all her talk."

"Then, young lady, the day a *novio* shall present himself as a candidate, he will have to speak to you?"

"Quite so. Do you know one?"

"No."

I was in front of her, in a wooden arm-chair of which the left arm was broken. I can still see myself, my back to the window, near a ray of the sun which striped the floor. . . .

Suddenly she seated herself on my knees, placed her two hands on my two shoulders and said:

"Is that true?"

I did not answer.

Instinctively, I had closed my arms about her and with one hand pulled toward me her dear face, which had become serious; but she anticipated my gesture and vivaciously placed her burning mouth on mine, looking at me deeply. Changeable and incomprehensible; I have always known her thus. The suddenness of her tenderness went to my head like a drink. I squeezed her still tighter. Her body yielded to my arm. I felt the heat and rounded form of her legs through the skirt. She got up.

"No," she said. "No. No. Go away."

"Yes, but with you. Come."

"I should follow you? And where? To your house? My friend, you do not expect that."

I took her again in my arms, but she freed herself.

"Don't touch me, or I shall call out, and then we won't see each other again."

"Concha, Conchita, my little one, are you crazy? What is this? I came here as a friend, I speak to you as a stranger; all at once you throw yourself in my arms, and now you accuse me?"

"I embraced you because I love you well; but you will not embrace me without loving me."

"And you think I do not love you, child?"

"No, I please you, I amuse you; but am I not the only one, caballero? Black hair grows on many girls and many eyes pass in the streets. There are plenty of them at the Fabrica, as pretty as I am and who are willing to listen. Do what you please with them, I shall give you names if you ask for them. But as for me, I am myself and there is only one like me from San-Roque to Triana. And I do not wish anyone to buy me like a doll at the bazar, for, once carried away, no one will find me again."

Steps mounted the stairs. She went to the door and opened it for her mother.

"Monsieur has come to get news of you," said the girl; "he thought you looked badly and sick."

An hour later, I went out, nervous and quite irritated and doubting whether I should ever return. Alas, I did return, not once but thirty times. I was as amorous as a young man. You have known those follies. What am I saying? You feel them now as I am speaking to you and you understand me. Each time that I left her room I said to myself: "Twenty-two hours, or twenty hours, until tomorrow." And those twelve hundred minutes never hurried.

By and by, I began to remain all day long with them. I paid all their expenses and even their debts, which must have been considerable, if I judge by what they cost me. But that was a recommendation in her favor and, besides, there was no gossip in the district. I was easily convinced that I was the first friend of those poor lonesome women. It was not a great effort to become intimate with them, but is a man ever astonished at the quick favors he obtains? A suspicion would have put me on my guard, but I did not stop to think about it; that is to say, about the lack of mystery and constraint towards me. There never was a moment that I could not enter their rooms. Concha, always affectionate but always reserved, made no difficulties about allowing me to witness her dressing. Often I found her in bed in the morning, as she arose later since becoming idle. Her mother would go out and she, moving her legs over in the bed, would invite me to sit beside her joined knees. We would talk. She was unfathomable. I have seen, in

Tangiers, Moorish women in costume, who, between their two veils bared only their eyes, but through those I saw the depths of their souls. This one hid nothing, neither her life nor her form, yet I always felt a wall between us.

She appeared to love me. Perhaps she did love me. Even today I do not know what to think. To all my supplications she responded with a "later" which I could not break. I threatened to leave, and she answered, "Go away." I threatened her with violence and she said: "You could not." I smothered her with gifts; she accepted them; but with a gratitude always conscious of its limits. Nevertheless, when I entered her rooms, a light which was not entirely artificial, shone in her eyes.

She slept nine hours each night and three hours in the middle of the day. Except this, she did nothing. When she arose, it was to stretch out in her wrapper on a clean mat, with two pillows under her head and a third one under her loins. I could never persuade her to do anything else. Neither needle work, nor a game, nor a book had passed through her hands since the day when, through my own fault, she had left the Fabrica. Even the household work did not interest her: her mother attended to the rooms, the beds and the meals, and every morning passed half an hour putting up the heavy hair of my little friend, still half asleep. During a whole week she refused to leave her bed. Not that she thought herself sick, but she had discovered that if it was useless to walk in the streets without any reason, it was even more absurd to take three steps in her room and to leave the sheets for the matting where stiff clothes interfered with her nonchalance. All our Spanish women are like that to those who see them in public, the fire in their eyes, the brilliance in their voice, the quickness of their movements, seem to issue from a source in perpetual eruption; and yet, when they are alone, their lives flow with that repose which is their great sensuality. They lie down on an easy chair in a room with lowered shades; they dream of the jewelry they could own, of the palaces they could inhabit, the unknown lovers whose dear weight they might feel on their breasts. And thus the hours pass by.

In her idea of her daily duties Concha was very Spanish. But I don't know from which country she had gathered her conception of love. After twelve weeks of assiduous care I found in her smile the same promises and the same resistance.

Finally, one day, unable to suffer any longer this perpetual waiting and this constant preoccupation which troubled my life to the point of rendering it useless and empty during the three months which I lived in this manner, I took the old lady aside, in the absence of the daughter, and spoke to her with an open heart in the most pressing manner.

I told her that I loved her daughter and that my intention was to unite my life to hers; that for reasons easy to understand, I could not accept any open *liaison,* but that I had resolved to offer her an exclusive and deep love which could give her no offense.

"I have reason to believe," I said in conclusion, "that Concepcion would love me, but mistrusts me. If she does not love me I have no intention of forcing her; but if my only misfortune is to have left her in doubt, then persuade her." I added that, in return, I would assure not only her present life, but her personal fortune for the future. And, to leave no doubts as to the sincerity of my promises, I gave the old woman a heavy roll of banknotes, asking her to use her maternal experience to assure the girl that she would not be deceived.

I returned to my house, more excited than ever. That night, I could not sleep. For hours I walked through the patio of my house in a night which was cool and admirable but which did not calm me. I formed unending plans in view of a solution which I hoped would be successful. At sunrise, I ordered cut all the flowers of three bushes and these I scattered on the path, on the stairs, on the *perron,* to make a path of purple and saffron for her to walk to me. I saw her everywhere, against a tree, sitting on a bench, lying on the lawn, leaning behind the balustrades or raising her arms in the sun towards a fruit-laden branch. The soul of the garden and the house had taken the form of her body.

And then, after a whole night of unbearable waiting and after a morning which seemed endless, I received a letter through the mail, towards eleven o'clock, a letter of a few lines. Believe that I know it by heart. This is what she wrote:

"If you had loved me you would have waited for me. I wished to give myself to you, but you have asked that I be sold. You shall never see me again.

CONCHITA."

Ten minutes later, I was on horseback and midday had not struck when I arrived at Seville, almost overcome by the heat and anguish. Quickly I climbed and knocked twenty times. Silence. Finally a door opened behind me on the same landing and a neighbor explained at length that the two women had left that morning in the direction of the station, with their parcels, and that no one knew even what train they had taken.

"They were alone?" I asked.

"Quite alone."

"No man with them? You are sure?"

"Jesus! I have never seen any other man but you in their company."

"Did they leave anything for me?"

"Nothing; if I am not mistaken they were angry with you."

"But will they come back?"

"God knows. They did not tell me."

"They must certainly return to get their furniture."

"No, the house was furnished. They have taken away all they owned. And now, sir, they are far away."

CHAPTER SEVEN

Which Is Terminated, as a Tail-piece, with Black Hair

THE autumn passed. The winter wore away, but without effacing a single detail; and I know few epochs of my life so disastrous and few so barren as that one.

I had thought I could start a new life, I had thought I could establish my loving intimacy for a long while, maybe forever, but everything was overthrown before the wedding. I did not even have the memory of one hour of real union with that girl; no, not one bond, not one accomplished thing, nothing which could console me, even by the vain thought that, if I did not have her any longer, at least I had possessed her, and this could not be taken away from me. . . .

And how I loved her! How I loved her, my God! Then I began to think that she had reason for opposing me and that I had acted like a boor with this legendary virgin. "If I ever see her again," I said to myself, "if I get this favor from Heaven, I shall remain at her feet until she makes me a sign, even if I have to wait for years. I shall not be abrupt. I understand how she feels. She knows herself in a condition from which her kind are taken as the mistresses of a month, and she does not wish a treatment inferior to her character. She wants to put me to a test, to be sure of me and, if she gives herself, it will not be as a loan. So be it; I shall be as she wishes. But shall I see her again?" And at once my distress attacked me again.

I saw her again. It was an evening in spring. I had passed a few hours at the Theatre del Duque, where the perfect Orejon played

several rôles, and, coming out in the stillness of the night, I walked for a long time in the spacious and deserted Alameda. I was returning alone, while smoking, through the Calle Trajano, when I heard my name called softly and a trembling seized me as I recognized the voice.

"Don Mateo!"

I turned; no one was there. Nevertheless I was not still dreaming. . . .

"Concha!" I cried. "Concha! Where are you?"

"*Chito!* Be still! You will wake mamma."

She was speaking to me from a grilled window, the stone of which was at the height of my shoulders. I saw her in her night-dress, her arms covered with a gray shawl, leaning against the marble behind the iron bars.

"Well! My friend, is that the way you would treat me?" she continued in a low voice.

But I was quite incapable of defending myself. . . .

"Lean over," I said to her. "A little lower, dear love. I cannot see you in that shadow. A little more to the left, in the moonlight."

She consented in silence and I looked at her in absolute intoxication for an immeasurable length of time. At last I said:

"Give me your hand."

She offered it to me through the bars and I trailed my lips on the fingers, in the palm, along the naked, warm arm. . . . I was insane. I could not believe it. It was her skin, her flesh, her perfume; it was all of her which I held there under my kiss, after so many sleepless nights! Then I said further:

"Give me your mouth."

But she shook her head and withdrew her hand.

"Later."

Oh, that word! How many times had I already heard it, and it returned, at our first meeting, like a barrier between us!

I plied her with questions. What had she been doing? Why that hurried departure? If she had spoken to me I would have obeyed. But to run away in that cruel fashion after a simple letter! She answered:

"It was your fault."

I admitted it. What would I not have admitted? And I kept silent. Nevertheless I wanted to know. What had become of her during those long months? Where did she come from? Since when did she live in that grilled house?

"We went first to Madrid, then to Carabancel to visit relatives. From there we came here, and here I am."

"Do you occupy the whole house?"

"Yes, it is not large, but it is still too much for us."

"And how were you able to rent it?"

"Thanks to you. Mother economized on everything that you gave her."

"That will not last long . . ."

"We still have enough to live here respectably for another month."

"And then?"

"Then? Do you seriously believe, my friend, that I shall be embarrassed?"

I did not answer, but I could have killed her with all my heart. She resumed:

"You don't understand me. If I wish to remain here I shall know what to do, but who tells you that I am so anxious about it? Last year I slept for three weeks under the walls of La Macarena. I lived there, on the ground, near the corner of the street of San Luz, you know, where the *sereno* keeps himself; he is a good man, he would not have permitted anyone to approach me during my sleep, and nothing ever happened to me, except adventures in words. I could return tomorrow. I know my clump of grass; it is not uncomfortable there, I assure you. During the day I could work in the Fabrica or somewhere else. I could sell bananas, no doubt? I can knit a shawl, weave ornaments for skirts, make up a bouquet, dance the *flamenco* and the *sevillana*. Don't worry, Don Mateo, I shall get along."

She spoke in a low voice and yet I heard each of her words ring like the words of an oracle in the empty, moonlit street. I listened to her less than I watched the moving double line of her lips. Her voice tinkled like a clear murmur of convent chimes. Still leaning on her elbows, her right hand lost in her heavy hair and her head resting on her fingers, she began again with a sigh:

"Mateo, I shall be your mistress after tomorrow."

I was trembling.

"You are not sincere."

"I tell you the truth."

"Then why so late, dear life? If you consent, if you love me . . ."

"I have always loved you."

"Then why not at this hour? See how the bars have been bent from the wall. I could pass between them and the window."

"You will pass Sunday night. Today I am blacker with sin than a gypsy. I do not want to become a woman in this state of damnation: my child would be cursed if I became pregnant from you. Tomorrow I shall tell my father confessor all that I have done in the last eight days and even what I shall do in your arms, so that he may give me the

absolution in advance; it is more certain. On Sunday morning I shall communicate at high mass and when I shall have in my breast the body of Our Lord, I shall ask him to make me happy in the evening and loved for the rest of my life. Amen!"

Yes, I know quite well that it is a peculiar religion, but our Spanish women know no other. They firmly believe that Heaven has inexhaustible indulgences for the lovers who go to mass and, when necessary favors them, watches over their bed, glorifies their flanks, so long as they do not forget to relate their cherished secrets. If they were right, after all, how many chastities would weep, during a life eternal, over an insignificant earthly life?

"Now," said Concha, "leave me, Mateo. You can see that my room is empty. Do not be impatient or jealous on my account. You will find me here, my lover, Sunday night, late at night, but you must promise beforehand, that you will never tell my mother and that you will leave me in the morning before she awakens. I am not afraid to be seen: I am my own mistress, you know. Beside, I have no need of her counsel, either for you or against you. Do you swear it?"

"As it pleases you."

"Very well, be bound by this."

And inclining her head, she let all her hair stream like a fountain of perfumes through the bars. I took it in my hands, I pressed it to my mouth, I bathed my face in its warm, dark waves.... Then it escaped from my fingers and she closed the sonorous window.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Wherein the Reader Begins to Understand Who Is the Puppet of This Story

Two mornings, two days and two nights, interminable, passed. I was happy, suffering, restless. I believe that among the contradictory feelings which agitated me at the same time, joy, a troubled and almost painful joy, dominated.

I can say that, during those forty-eight hours, I imagined, a hundred times, "what was going to happen," the scene, the words and even the silences. In spite of myself, I enacted in thought the imminent rôle which awaited me. I saw myself, and her in my arms. And every fifteen minutes, the identical scene was repeated, with all its long details, in my exhausted imagination.

The hour arrived. I walked through the street, not daring to stop under her window, for fear of compromising her, and yet irritated in imagining that she regarded me from behind the panes, making me wait in a smothering agitation.

"Mateo!"

She called me, at last.

Monsieur, at that minute of my life I felt fifteen years old. Behind me, twenty years of love were dissipated like a single dream. I had the absolute illusion that for the first time I was going to press my lips to the lips of a woman and feel her young, warm body bend and lie heavy upon my arm. Lifting myself, with one foot on a stone and the other upon the bent bars, I entered her room like a stage lover and I embraced her.

She stood against my body, abandoning herself and, at the same time, stiffening. Our two heads, joined at the mouth, inclined together, our nostrils panting, our eyes closed. Never did I understand so clearly as in the vertigo, the frenzy, the half unconscious state in which I found myself, all that is really meant, by the "intoxication of the kiss." I no longer knew who we were, nor what had happened, nor what was going to happen to us. The present was so intense that the future and the past disappeared in it. She moved her lips with mine. She burned in my arms and I felt her small stomach, through her skirt, pressing me in a shameless and fervent caress.

"I don't feel well," she murmured. "I beg of you, wait. . . . I think I am going to fall. . . . Come into the patio with me, I will lie on a fresh mat. . . . Wait. . . . I love you. . . . but I am almost fainting."

I went towards a door.

"Not that one. That's my mother's room. Come this way. I will lead you."

A black square of starry sky with fleecy bluish clouds dominated the patio. The floor shone, illuminated by the moon, and the rest of the court lay in a confidential shadow.

Concha stretched herself like an Oriental on the matting. I sat near her and she took my hand.

"My friend," she said, "will you love me?"

"How can you ask me?"

"How long will you love me?"

I fear these questions which all women ask, for they can be answered only by the worst banalities.

"And when I shall be less beautiful will you still love me? . . . And when I am old, quite old, will you still love me? Tell me, my dear. Even if it is not true. I need to have you to tell me, to give me strength.

You see, I promised you for tonight, but I am not certain that I shall have the courage. . . . I do not even know if you deserve it. O, Holy Mother of God! If I were deceived in you, I think all my life would be lost. I am not one of those girls who go to Juan and Miguel and from them to Antonio. After you, I shall never love another; and, if you leave me, I shall be as one dead."

She bit her lips with a suppressed plaint, fixing her eyes on space; but the movement of her mouth ended in a smile.

"I have grown in the last six months. Already I cannot tighten my last year's corset. Open this one; you shall see how beautiful I am."

If I had requested her permission, she probably would not have permitted it, for I was beginning to doubt whether this night of conversation would ever end in a night of love; but I did not touch her any more; she drew nearer. Alas! The breasts which I uncovered, when I opened the swollen corset, were the Fruits of the Promised Land. If there were others as beautiful, I did not know it. Even these I never saw again equal their form on that evening. Breasts are living things which have their youth, and their decline. I firmly believe that I saw these during their flash of perfection.

She, in the meantime, had taken from between them a scapulary in black cloth and she kissed it piously, watching my emotion from the corner of her half-closed eye.

"Then I please you?"

I took her again in my arms.

"No, later."

"What is it again?"

"I am not disposed, that's all."

She closed her corsage.

Truly, I suffered. Then I supplicated her almost rudely, struggling with her hands which became protective. I could have cherished her and maltreated her at the same moment. Her obstinacy in seducing me and then repulsing me, those maneuvers which had endured for a year and which redoubled at the supreme minute when I expected the accomplishment, exasperated even my tenderest patience.

"My little one," I said to her, "you are playing with me, but take care that I do not become tired."

"Is that so? Well, I shall not love even you today, Don Mateo. Tomorrow."

"I shall not return."

"You will return tomorrow."

Furious, I put on my hat and went out, determined never to see her again.

I kept my resolution up to the time of my sleep, but my awakening was mournful.

And what a day, as I remember it!

In spite of my private oath, I took the road for Seville. I was drawn toward her by an invincible power, I believed that my will had ceased to exist; I could no longer decide the direction of my steps.

During three hours of fever and struggles within myself, I wandered in the Calle Amor de Dios, behind the street where Concha lived, always on the point of running over the twenty steps which separated me from her. . . . Finally I mastered myself and departed, almost running, without knocking at the adored window. But what a miserable victory!

The next day she was at my house.

"Since you would not come to me, it is I who have come to you," she said. "Will you still say I do not love you?"

Monsieur, I would have thrown myself at her feet.

"Quickly, show me your room," she added. "I do not want you to accuse me of nonchalance today. Would you believe that I am impatient, I also? You would be very surprised if you knew what I thought."

But, when she had entered, she recovered herself.

"No, really, not that one. There have been too many women in that wicked bed. This is not the room for a *mozita*. Let us take another one, a guest room which belongs to no one. Will you?"

There was still an hour to wait. The windows had to be opened, the sheets changed, sweeping done. . . .

At last everything was ready and we went upstairs. To say that, this time, I was assured of success, I dared not; but at least I had hopes. In my house, alone, without protection against my feelings which she well knew, it appeared unlikely that she would have risked herself without having, in thought, made the sacrifice which she pretended to offer me. . . .

When we were alone, she loosened her mantilla, which was attached by fourteen pins to her hair and to her corset; then, very simply, she disrobed herself. I admit that, instead of helping her, I rather retarded the long task, and that I interruped her twenty times to rest my lips on her naked arms, her rounded shoulders, her firm breasts, her brown neck. I watched her body appear, part by part, to the edges of the underwear, and I persuaded myself that this young rebel skin was at last about to surrender.

"Well, have I not kept my promise?" she said, drawing her chemise tight to mould her supple body. "Close the blinds; the light is hateful in the room."

I obeyed, and meanwhile she lay silently in the deep bed. I saw her through the mosquito netting, white as a stage apparition behind a curtain of gauze. . . .

What can I say, monsieur? You have guessed that again at this time I was ridiculed and played with. I told you that this girl was the most terrible of women and that her cruel inventions passed all limits, but up to this point you have not realized it. Only now, if you follow my story, scene by scene, will you know what Concha Perez is.

She had come to me, she said, to abandon herself. You have heard her loving words and her promises. Up to the last moment, she acted like an amorous virgin, who wished to know pleasure, almost like a young bride giving herself to her husband, a young married woman, not without knowledge, I must admit, but nevertheless serious and moved.

Well, while dressing at home, this little wretch had put on drawers, made of a kind of canvas, so stiff and so strong, that a bull's horn could not have pierced it, and which were tightened about her waist and between her thighs by laces of an unassailable resistance and intricacy. And that is what I discovered in the midst of my most passionate fire, while the obscene wretch explained to me calmly:

"I shall be as foolish as God desires, but not so far as men would wish."

For an instant, I thought I would strangle her; then—really, I confess it, I am not ashamed of it—my weeping face fell on my hands.

What I wept for, monsieur, was my youth which this girl proved to me was hopelessly crumbling. Between twenty-two and thirty-five years there are outrages which all men avoid. I cannot believe that Concha would have treated me in this manner if I had been ten years younger. It seemed to me that, from then on, I would see those drawers, that barrier between myself and love, on all women, or that, at least, they would wish for them before approaching my embrace.

"Go away," I said. "I understand."

But at once she became alarmed, and, embracing me in her turn, with her two small but vigorous arms which I could hardly push aside, she said, while trying to reach my mouth:

"Dear heart, will you then never be able to love all that I give you of myself? You have my breasts, you have my lips, my hot legs, my scented hair, all my body in your embraces and my tongue in my kiss. Is it not enough, all this? Then is it not I you love, but only that which I refuse you? All women could give you that; why do you ask me for it, I who resist? Is it because you know I am a virgin? There are others, even in Seville. I swear to you, Mateo, I know of

them. *Alma mia! Sangre mio!* Love me as I wish to be loved, a little at a time, and be patient. You know that I am yours, and that I keep myself for you alone. What more would you have, dear heart?"

It was arranged that I would see her at her house or at my home and that all would be as she desired. In exchange for a promise on my part, she agreed to never again wear that horrible canvas armor, but that was all that I could obtain from her; and on the first night when she did not wear it, it seemed to me that my torture was even greater.

That is the degree of slavery to which that child brought me. (I overlook the perpetual demands for money which interrupted her conversation and which I always granted; but even apart from that, the nature of our relations is of a particular interest.) Thus, each night, I held in my arms the naked body of a girl of fifteen, without doubt brought up by the nuns, but of a condition and quality of soul which excluded any idea of bodily virtue—and this girl, otherwise as passionate and fiery as one could wish, behaved toward me as though nature herself prevented her from ever gratifying her lusts.

No excuses could be offered for such a comedy; none existed. You yourself will guess the reason later, and as for me, I permitted her to ridicule me so.

Do not deceive yourself, young Frenchman, reader of novels and perhaps an actor in particular intrigues with the demi-virginities of the watering places: our Andalusian women have neither the taste nor inclination for artificial love. They are admirable lovers but have senses too keen to bear, without frenzy, the thrills of a superfluous treble string. Between Concha and myself nothing happened, absolutely nothing. Understand what I mean by nothing. And this lasted two whole weeks.

The fifteenth day, after she had received from me the day before the sum of a thousand *duros* to pay her mother's debts I found her house deserted.

CHAPTER NINE

Wherein Concha Perez Undergoes Her Third Metamorphosis

THAT was too much. From then on I saw clearly into that crafty little soul. I had been deceived like a collegian and I felt more ashamed than hurt.

Dismissing the perfidious girl from my past life, I endeavored to forget her from one day to the next, by a violent effort of will, one of those paradoxical resolutions, of which the women always discount the inevitable miscarriage.

I departed from Madrid, resolved to take, by chance, for mistress, the first young woman who attracted my eyes.

This is the classic stratagem which the whole world trumps up and which never succeeds.

I searched from drawing room to drawing room, from theatre to theatre, and finally met an Italian dancer, a large girl with muscular legs, who would have been a pretty animal in the confines of a harem, but who did not begin to have all the qualities one would expect in an unique and intimate friend. She did her best. She was affectionate and compliant. She taught me the vices of Naples which were unknown to me and which pleased her more than they did me. I saw that she was anxious to keep me near her, and that anxiety for her material welfare was not the only motive for her tender and ardent zeal.

Alas! Why could I not love her? There was nothing for which I could reproach her. She was neither faithless nor importunate. She did not seem to know my defects. She did not make me quarrel with my friends. Beside, her jealous moods, as frequently as they happened, merely suggested, but did not express themselves. She was a priceless woman.

But I had no feeling for her.

For two months I forced myself to live under the same roof with Giulia, in her atmosphere, in her room in the house I had rented for us at the end of the Street Lope de Vega. She came in, passed, walked before me; I did not follow her with my eyes. Her skirts, her dancing tights, her drawers and her chemises trailed over all the divans; I was not even touched by their influence. For sixty nights, I saw her brown body stretched near mine in a bed too hot, where I imagined another presence as soon as the light was extinguished. . . . Then I ran away, despairing of myself.

I returned to Seville. My house appeared to me like a mortuary. I left for Granada, where I was bored; then Cordova, parched and deserted; then dazzling Jerez filled with the odor of wine cellars; then Cadiz, an oasis of houses in the sea.

During this trip, monsieur, I was guided from city to city, not by my fancy but by an irresistible and distant fascination which I doubt no more than the existence of God. Four times in vast Spain I met Concha Perez. It was not a series of chances; I do not believe in those dice-throws which are supposed to rule destinies. It was necessary that

that woman should take hold of me again, and that I should see in my life all that you shall hear.

And, in fact, everything was accomplished.

It was at Cadiz.

One evening I entered in the *Baile* of that place. She was there. She danced, monsieur, before thirty fishermen, as many sailors and some stupid foreigners. As soon as I saw her I began to tremble. I must have been as pallid as earth; I was breathless and without strength. I sat down on the bench nearest the door, and, elbows on the table, I watched her from afar, like one brought back to life.

She was still dancing, panting, heated, her face red, her breasts shaking, snapping deafening castanets in each hand. I was certain that she saw me, but she did not look at me. She ended her *bolero* in a movement of furious passion, the challenge of her leg and her torso aimed by chance at anyone among the crowd of spectators.

Suddenly she stopped in the midst of great clamor. "*Que guapa!*" yelled the men. "*Ole! Chiquilla! Ole! Ole! Otra vez!*"

And hats flew upon the stage; the whole crowd stood up. She saluted, still out of breath, with a little smile of triumph and of disdain.

According to custom, she descended among the drinkers to sit at a table; while another dancer succeeded her before the footlights. And knowing that there was, in a corner of the hall, a being who worshiped her, who would grovel at her feet before the whole world and who suffered to the point of screaming, she wandered from table to table, from arm to arm, under his eyes.

Everyone knew her by name. I heard "Conchita!" which made me shiver from head to heels. They offered her drinks, someone touched her naked arms, she stuck in her hair a red flower which a German sailor gave her; she pulled the hair braid of a *banderillero* who acted clownishly; she feigned voluptuousness before a young fop sitting with some women, and caressed the cheek of a man whom I could have killed.

Of the gestures she made during this maneuver, which lasted fifty minutes, not one has left my memory. Memories like those people the past of a human existence.

She visited my table after all the others, because I was at the end of the room; but she came to it. Confused? Or feigning surprise? Not a bit! You do not know her. She sat down facing me, clapped her hands to attract the waiter, and cried:

"Tonio! A cup of coffee!"

Then with an exquisite calmness, she sustained my look.

I said to her in a very low voice:

"Then you are afraid of nothing, Concha? You are not afraid to die?"

"No! And beside, it is not you who will kill me."

"You defy me?"

"Right here and where you wish. I know you, Don Mateo, as though I had carried you for nine months. You will never touch a hair of my head, and you are right, for I no longer love you."

"You dare to say that you have loved me?"

"Believe what you please. You alone are to blame."

It was she who reproached me. I should have expected that comedy.

"Twice," I resumed, "twice, you have done that to me! What I gave you from the bottom of my heart, you accepted like a thief and you left me without a word, without a letter, without even directing someone to bring me your farewell. What have I done that you should treat me so?"

And I repeated between my teeth:

"Miserable wretch! Miserable wretch!"

But she had her excuses.

"What have you done? You have deceived me. Did you not swear that I was safe in your arms and that you would let me choose the night and the hour of my sin? Have you already forgotten the last time? You thought that I was asleep, you thought that I could feel nothing. I was awake, Mateo, and I knew that if I passed another night at your side, I would not go to asleep without being delivered to you by surprise. And that is why I ran away."

It was absurd. I shrugged my shoulders.

"So it is that with which you reproach me?" I said. "When I see the kind of life you lead here and the men who pass over your bed?"

She stood up, furious.

"That is not true! I forbid you to say that, Don Mateo! I swear on the grave of my father that I am as virgin as a child—and also that I hate you because you have doubted me."

I remained alone. After a few minutes, I left also.

*

CHAPTER TEN

Wherein Mateo Assists at an Unexpected Spectacle

ALL night I wandered on the ramparts. The endless wind from the sea dampened my fever and my cowardice. Yes, I felt like a coward before that woman. I could only blush, thinking of her and myself. I whispered to myself the worst insults one could address to a man. And I guessed that in the morning I would still deserve them.

After what had happened there were only three things for me to do; leave her, force her or kill her.

I decided on the fourth one, which was to endure her.

Every evening I returned to my place, like a submissive child, to look at her and to wait.

Little by little she had softened. That is to say that she forgave me for all the evil she had done me. Behind the scenes there opened a large white hall where the mothers and sisters of the dancers waited and drowsed. Concha permitted me to stay there, as a particular favor which each of the young girls accorded her lover. A pretty company, as you can see. The hours which I passed there were among the most distressing. You know me; I have never led that life of elbows on the table of low cabarets. I horrified myself.

Señora Perez was there, like the others. She seemed to know nothing of what had happened in Calle Trajano. Was she lying, too? I did not worry about it. I listened to her confidences and paid for her alcohol. . . . Let us say no more about this.

My only moments of joy were during Concha's four dances. Then I stood at the open door through which she entered the scene, and, during the rare movements when she turned her back to the public, I had the fleeting illusion that she danced for me alone.

Her greatest triumph was the *flamenco*. What a dance, monsieur! What a tragedy! It combines all passions in three acts: desire, seduction and enjoyment. No dramatic work expresses feminine love with the intensity, the grace and the fury of the three successive scenes. Concha was incomparable in it. Do you really understand the drama which is played therein? To one who had not seen it I would have to explain it a thousand times. It is said that it takes eight years to make a *flamenca*, which means that, with the precocious maturity of our women, they have lost their beauty by the time they have learned to dance it. But Concha was born a *flamenca;* she had no experience but she had intuition. You know how they dance it in Seville. You have seen our

best *ballerinas;* not one is perfect, for this exhausting dance (twelve minutes! Can you find an Opera dancer who can dance a variation of twelve minutes!) has in it three unrelated rôles: the lover, the ingénue and the tragedian. One must be sixteen years old to act the second part wherein Lola Sanchez now realizes marvels of sinuous gestures and light attitudes. One must be thirty years old to play the end of the drama, wherein the Rubia, in spite of her wrinkles, is still excellent every night.

Concha is the only woman I have seen who is equal to it during all that terrible task.

I can always see her, advancing and retreating in a short balanced step, looking sideways under her lifted sleeve, lowering slowly with a movement of hips and torso, her arm over which emerged her two black eyes. I see her, delicate or ardent, her eyes lively or bathed in languor, striking with her heel the boards of the floor or snapping her fingers at the end of her gesture, as though to give the cry of life to each one of her undulating arms.

I can see her; she stepped from the stage in a state of excitement and lassitude which made her even more beautiful. Her flushed face was covered with perspiration, but her sparkling eyes, her trembling lips, her young agitated breasts, all imparted to her head and shoulders an expression of exuberance and vivacious youth; she was resplendent.

For a month, our relations continued so. She tolerated me in the back shop of her theatrical platform. I was not even allowed to escort her to her door, and I kept my place near her only on the condition of never reproaching her about the past or about the present. As to the future, I didn't know what she thought about it; and, as for me, I had no idea for any solution to the pitiful adventure.

I knew vaguely that she lived with her mother—in the only suburb of the city, near the Plaza de Toros—a great white and green house which harbored also the families of six other *ballerinas.* I dared not imagine what happened in such a city of women. . . . However, our dancers lead a very regular life; from eight o'clock in the evening until five o'clock in the morning they are on the stage; they go home, wearied, at dawn; they sleep, often alone, until the middle of the afternoon. There is left only the end of the day which they might abuse; but the fear of a ruinous pregnancy restrains these poor girls who, moreover, could not be persuaded to add to other fatigues the efforts of a laborious night.

Nevertheless, I never thought about it without uneasiness. Two friends of Concha, two sisters, had a younger brother who lived in

their room or in that of neighbors and created jealousies which I witnessed on several occasions.

He was nicknamed *The Morenito*. I never knew his real name. Concha called him to our table, fed him at my expense and asked me for cigarettes which she stuck between his lips.

To all my movements of impatience, she responded with a shrug or she spoke in a glacial manner which made me suffer even more.

"*The Morenito* belongs to everybody. If I took a lover he would be mine like my ring; you know that, Mateo."

I kept silent. On the other hand, rumors about Concha's private life represented her as impregnable; and my desire to believe it, made me accept, even with confidence, rumors without foundation. No man approached her with that peculiar look of the lover who meets again, in public, his woman of the preceding night. I had quarrels on this subject, with pretenders whom I hindered, no doubt; but never with anyone who bragged of having known her. Several times I tried to make her friends talk. They always answered: "She is *mozita*. She is quite right."

There was not even a question of reconciliation with me. She asked nothing. She granted me nothing. So joyous before, she became serious and seldom spoke. What was she thinking about? What did she expect from me? It was a waste of time to try and fathom her looks. I saw less clearly in that little soul than in the impenetrable eyes of a cat.

One night, at a sign from the director, she left the stage with three other dancers and climbed up to the first floor: for a siesta, she told me. She often left like that for an hour without arousing my suspicions; for, no matter how false and lying she was, I believed her least word.

"When we have danced well," she explained, "they permit us to sleep a little. Otherwise we would be dreaming upon the stage."

This time, also, she had gone upstairs and, in order to breathe purer air, I had left the hall for half an hour.

Returning, I met in the lobby a simple-minded dancer, nicknamed *The Gallega* who, on this night, was a little intoxicated.

"You are returning too soon," she said to me.

"Why so?"

"Conchita is still upstairs."

"I shall wait until she wakes up. Let me pass."

She did not seem to understand.

"Until she wakes up?"

"Well, yes; what about it?"

"But she does not sleep."

"But she told me . . ."

"She told you that she went to sleep? Oh, well!"

She tried to restrain herself. But, in spite of her tightly pinched lips, she burst out laughing.

I grew pale.

"Where is she? Tell me at once!" I exclaimed, taking her by the arm.

"Don't hurt me, caballero. She is showing her navel to the *Ingles*.[1] God knows it is not my fault. If I had known it, I would not have said anything to you. I do not want to quarrel with anybody, caballero, I am a good girl."

Do you believe me? I remained impassive. Only a great cold seized me, as though a breath from a cave had glided between my clothes and myself; but my voice did not tremble.

"Gallega," I said to her, "take me upstairs."

She shook her head.

I continued:

"No one will know that you have told me. Hurry. . . . She is my *novia*, you understand. . . . I have a right to go up. . . . Show me the way."

And I placed a napoleon in her hand.

A moment later, I was alone on the balcony of an interior court and, through the French window, I saw, monsieur, a scene from hell.

There was a second dancing hall, smaller, well lighted, with a platform and two guitar players. In the center was Concha, naked, with three other nude women, dancing a mad *jota* before two Englishmen sitting in the back. . . . I said naked; she was more than naked. Black stockings, as long as dancers' tights, reached up to her thighs, and she wore noisy little shoes which snapped on the floor. I dared not interrupt. I was afraid I would kill her.

Alas! My God! Never had I seen her so beautiful! It was no longer a question of her eyes or her fingers; all her body was as expressive as a face, more than a face; and her head, enveloped in hair, rested on her shoulders like a useless thing. There were smiles in the folds of her hips, blushing cheeks when she turned her flanks; her breasts seemed to look forward through two great eyes, fixed and dark. Never have I seen her so beautiful. The false folds of a dress change the expression of the dancer, deviate absurdly the exterior line of her grace; but there, by a revelation, I saw the gestures, the shivers, the movements of the arms, the legs, of the supple body and the muscular

[1] By *Ingles* (English) they designate all foreigners in Spain.

loins, born indefinitely from a visible source, the very center of her dance, her little brown belly.

I forced in the door.

To look at her for ten seconds and swear to myself that I would not kill her, was the limit of my endurance. And now nothing could restrain me.

Piercing cries greeted my entrance. I walked straight to Concha and said briefly:

"Follow me. Fear nothing. I shall not hurt you. But come at once or beware!"

Ah, no! she feared nothing. She leaned against the wall and there extended her arms on both sides.

"I shall no more leave this place than Christ left the cross," she cried, "and you are not going to touch me, for I defy you to advance farther than that chair. Leave me, madame. You others, go downstairs. I need no one; I will take care of him."

CHAPTER ELEVEN

How Everything Is Apparently Explained

THEY left us. The Englishmen were the first to disappear. Monsieur, until that hour I would have called a man a cowardly wretch, if I had been told that he had beaten a woman. And still I wonder by what power over myself I was able to control myself in front of her. My fingers opened and closed as if to strangle a neck. I was filled with an exhausting struggle between my anger and my will.

Ah! That is really the supreme sign of a woman's power, that immunity with which we armor her. A woman insults you to your face, she outrages you, and you salute her. She strikes you; protect yourself, but take care she does not wound herself. She ruins you; let it be. She deceives you; say nothing about it, for fear of compromising her. She breaks your life; kill yourself if you wish! But never, through your fault, let the slightest suffering injure the skin of those exquisite and ferocious beings in whom the pleasure of injuring almost surpasses that of the flesh.

The Orientals do not pamper them as we do, they who are the great voluptuaries. They cut their claws so that their eyes may be all the sweeter. They master their malevolence to better release their sensuality. I admire them.

But, for me, Concha remained invulnerable.

I did not approach her. I spoke to her from the distance of three paces. She still stood against the wall, her hands crossed behind her back, her chest jutting out and her feet close together, straight in their long black stockings, like a flower in a rare vase.

"Well," I began, "what have you to say to me? Come, invent! Defend yourself! Lie again; you can lie so well!"

"Ah, that is superb!" she exclaimed. "He accuses me. He enters here like a thief through the window, smashing everything; he threatens me, he interrupts my dance, he makes my friends leave. . . ."

"Shut up!"

". . . He may succeed in having me driven away from here and it is my place, then, to answer! It is I who have done wrong, is it not? I am the one who invited this ridiculous scene! Come, leave me; you are too stupid!"

And as, after her strenuous dance, a thousand pearls of perspiration had appeared on her brilliant skin, she took a towel from a drawer and rubbed herself from her belly to her head, as though she had come from her bath.

"Then," I began again, "this is what you are doing in this very house where I see you! This is your profession. This is the woman I love!"

"Is it then you knew nothing, innocent?"

"I?"

"But no. That is good. All the Spaniards repeat it; it is known in Paris and in Buenos Ayres, twelve-year-old children in Madrid tell you that women dance naked in the first ball at Cadiz. But you, you would have me think that no one had told you anything, you who are not married, you who are forty years old?"

"I had forgotten."

"He had forgotten! He has been coming here for two months, he has seen me go up to the small hall four times a week. . . ."

"Shut up, Concha, you make me suffer horribly."

"In your turn then! I shall revenge myself, Mateo, for what you have done to me tonight, for you act wickedly, through a stupid jealousy; and, I ask myself, by what right? Who are you, anyhow, to treat me so? Are you my father? No! Are you my husband? No! Are you my lover? . . ."

"Yes, I am your lover! I am that!"

"Truly! You are satisfied with little."

She burst out laughing.

I paled again.

"Concha, my child, tell me, have you someone else? If you belong to someone, I swear to you that I will leave you. You have only to say the word."

"I belong to myself and I keep myself. There is nothing more precious to me than my own self, Mateo. No one is rich enough to buy me from myself."

"But these men, these two men who were here awhile ago. . . ."

"What, again? Do I know them?"

"Is it really true? You don't know them?"

"But no, I do not know them. Where do you think I would have seen them? They are *Ingles* who have come with a hotel guide. Tomorrow they leave for Tangiers. I am not a bit compromised, my friend."

"And here? Even here?"

"Come, look, is this a bedroom? Look all over the house, is there a bed here? Also, you saw them, Mateo. They were dressed like mannikins, the hat on the head and the chin on the cane. You are crazy, I tell you; you are crazy to create such a scandal when I deserve no reproach from you."

Even if she had defended herself more awkwardly, I believe that I would have justified her. I had such need of forgiveness! I feared only that she would confess.

A last question still tortured me. I asked her, trembling:

"And *The Morenito*? . . . Concha, tell me the truth. This time, I want to know. Swear to me that you hide nothing from me, that you will tell me all if there is anything to tell. I beseech you, my little girl!"

"*The Morenito?* . . . He was in my bed this morning."

For a moment I was senseless, then my arms closed on her, and I embraced her, not knowing, myself, whether I would smother her or snatch her away from some imaginary person.

She understood and, laughing, exclaimed:

"Let me go! Let me go, Mateo. You are dangerous for a minute. You will take me by force in a fit of jealousy. Good, now stay where you are; I shall explain. . . . My poor friend, there is no reason for trembling as you do, I assure you."

"You think so?"

"*The Morenito* lives with his two sisters, Mercedes and La Pipa. They are poor. For them and their brother, there is only one bed which is not large. When it begins to get hot, they prefer to sleep less crowded after their dancing, and they send the boy to their neighbors. This week mother is making the Perpetual Adoration at the church; she is not there when I am in bed; then Mercedes asked me if I had room for

her little brother and I said yes. I do not see why this should disturb you."

I looked at her silently.

"Yes," she resumed, "if that is all, be tranquil. I give him no more than his sisters, you know. You can trust my word. At the most, he kisses me a few times before going to sleep, and then I turn my back on him as though we were married."

She pulled the stocking on her right thigh and added slowly:

"As though I were with you."

The thoughtlessness, the boldness or the rakishness of this woman, —I knew not how to take it—ended by making me lose all feelings, except those of moral suffering. I was more unhappy than irresolute; but unhappy to the point of tears. I took her very gently on my knees. She did not resist.

"Listen to me, little girl,..." I said. "I can live no longer at your caprice, as I have been doing for a year. You must speak to me in all frankness and perhaps for the last time. I suffer abominably. If you remain another day in this dance hall and in this city you will never see me again. Is that your wish, Conchita?"

She answered, and in so new a tone that I thought I heard another woman speak.

"Don Mateo, you have never understood me. You believed that you pursued me and that I refused myself to you, when, on the contrary, it is I who love you and who want you for all my life. Remember the Fabrica. Were you the one who spoke first? Was it you who took me away from there? No. It was I who ran after you in the street, who dragged you to my mother's house and almost kept you by force, so afraid was I of losing you. And the next day.... You recall that also? You came in. I was alone. You did not even kiss me. I can still see you, in the easy chair, your back toward the window.... I threw myself on you, I took your head with my hands, your mouth with my mouth and—I have never told you—but I was quite young then, and it was during that kiss, Mateo, that I felt pleasure melting in me for the first time in my life....I was on your knees, as I am now...."

I clasped her in my arms, overwhelmed with emotion. She had reconquered me with two words. She could play with me as she liked.

"I have never loved anyone but you," she continued, "since that night in December when I saw you in the train, when I was leaving the convent of Avila. I loved you because you are handsome. You have such sparkling and tender eyes that it seems to me that all the women should love you. If you only knew how many nights I thought about these eyes. Later I loved you because you were kind. I would never have

tied my life to that of an egotistical, handsome man, for you know that I love myself too well to accept being only half happy. I wished all happiness and I saw quickly that if I asked you for it, you would give it to me."

"But then, dear heart, why that long silence?"

"Because I am not contented with what satisfies other women. Not only do I wish all happiness, but I want it for all my life. I want to marry you, Mateo, to keep on loving you when you shall love me no more. Oh, fear nothing; we will not go to the church, nor before the *alcalde.* I am a good Christian, but God protects sincere love, and I shall go to Paradise before many married women. I will not ask you to marry me in public for I know that cannot be done. . . . You could never claim Doña Concepcion Perez de Diaz, the woman who danced naked in this horrible den where we are, before all the *Ingles* who passed this way. . . ."

She burst into tears.

"Concepcion, my child," I said, distracted, "calm yourself. I love you. I will do whatever you wish."

"No," she cried with a sob, "no, I don't wish it! It is an impossible thing! I would not have you soil your name through mine. You see, now, it is I who refuse your generosity. Mateo, we will not be married for the world, but you will treat me like your wife and swear to me to protect me always. I do not ask a great thing of you; only a small house somewhere near you. And a dot. The same as you would give to the woman you would marry. In exchange, I have nothing to give you, my soul. Nothing but my eternal love with my virginity which I have kept, through everything, for you."

CHAPTER TWELVE

A Scene Behind a Closed Grill

SHE had never spoken to me in that voice, so simple and full of emotion. I thought that I had finally freed her real soul from the ironic and proud mask which had hidden it from me for so long; and that a new life opened itself for my moral convalescence.

(Have you seen in the Madrid Museum a strange canvas by Goya, the first to the left when one enters the hall on the top floor? Four women in Spanish skirts, on a garden lawn, hold a shawl by its four ends, bouncing in it, laughing, a puppet as large as a man. . . .)

To be brief, we returned to Seville.

She had resumed her peculiar smile and her bantering voice; but I was now no longer uneasy. A Spanish proverb says: "Women, like cats, belong to those who take care of them." I would take such good care of her, and I was so happy that she permitted it!

I had become convinced that her path toward me had never deviated; that she had really spoken to me first and seduced me little by little; that her two flights had been justified, not by the miserable calculations I had suspected, but through my fault, my fault alone, and forgetfulness of my promises. I even excused her for her indecent dance, feeling that she had despaired of ever living her dream with me, and that a virgin girl in Cadiz could not earn her bread without at least giving the impression of being a creature of pleasure. Finally, what can I say to you? I loved her.

On the very day of our return I chose for her a *palacio* [1] in the Calle Lucena, in front of the parish of San-Isidoro. This is a silent quarter, almost deserted in summer, but fresh and full of shade. I saw her happy in this mauve and yellow street, not far from the Calle del Candelejo, where your Carmen received Don José.

The house had to be furnished. I wanted to hurry but she had a thousand caprices. Eight interminable days were passed among furnishers and shopkeepers. To me it was like a wedding week. Concha became almost tender, and, if she still resisted, it seemed to me that it was done gently, as though not to forget the promises she had made herself. I was not abrupt with her.

When I thought about the advance of a dot to her as a mistress-wife, I recalled her reserve when she had asked this pledge of future constancy. She did not request any particular sum. I was afraid of responding badly to her discretion and I turned over to her a hundred thousand *duros* which she accepted as though it had been a mere *peseta*.

The end of the week approached. I was weary with impatience. Never did a fiancé wish more ardently for the wedding day. I no longer feared past coquetries; she belonged to me, I understood her. I had answered her pure desire for a happy life without reproach. The love which she had not been able to hide from me on her last night as a dancer, was going to be expressed freely for long, quiet years; and all joy awaited me in the white nuptial mansion of the Calle Lucena.

You shall soon hear what this joy was to be.

By a whim which I found charming, she had expressed the desire

[1] Private villa.

to be the first to enter her new house, ready for us both; and to receive me as a secret guest, all alone at midnight.

I arrived; the grill[1] was closed by bars.

I rang the bell. After a few minutes, Concha came downstairs, and smiled. She wore a pink skirt, a little cream-colored shawl and two large red flowers in her hair. In the strong light of the night, I could see every one of her features. She approached the grill, always smiling, and without haste:

"Kiss my hands," she said.

The grill remained closed.

"Now kiss the hem of my skirt and the tip of my foot in its slipper."

Her voice seemed radiant.

She said again:

"That is good. Now you may go."

A cold sweat ran over my temples. I felt that I could guess all she was going to say and do.

"Conchita, my girl.... You are laughing.... Tell me that you are laughing."

"Oh, yes, I am laughing. I will tell you that, if that is all you want. I am laughing, I am laughing! Are you satisfied? I am laughing with all my heart! Listen, how well I laugh! Ha! Ha! I laugh as no one has laughed since laughter came to lips! I am smothered, I am shaking, I am bursting with laughter! I have never been so gay! I laugh as though I were drunk. Look at me closely. Mateo, look how satisfied I am!"

She lifted both arms and snapped her fingers in a dancing gesture.

"Free! I am free from you! Free for all my life! Mistress of my body and of my blood! Oh, do not try to enter; the grill is too solid! But stay a little longer. I shall not be happy unless I tell you all that is in my heart."

She came nearer and spoke close to me, her head between her nails, in a ferocious tone:

"Mateo, I have a horror of you. I could never find the proper words to tell you how much I hate you. Were you covered by ulcers, ordure and vermin, I could not be more repulsed when your skin approached my skin. If God wills it, it is ended now. For fourteen months I have hidden myself from you and you have always discovered me and always your hands touch me, your arms embrace me, your

[1] Spanish houses are closed by grills through which one sees, beyond a large passage, the patio, an interior court of an ornamented style with fountains and greenery.

mouth seeks me. *Que asco!* In the night I spat beside the bed after each of your kisses. You will never know what I felt in my flesh when you entered my bed! Oh, how much I have detested you! How I have prayed God against you! Last winter, I took holy communion seven times to have you die the day after I had ruined you. May this be as God wills it! I care no longer, I am free! Go away, Mateo, I have everything."

I remained immobile as a stone.

She repeated:

"Go away! Haven't you understood?"

And then, since I could neither speak nor leave, my tongue dry, my legs frozen, she threw herself towards the staircase and a sort of fury flamed in her eyes.

"You don't want to go?" she shouted. "You don't want to go! Very well! You will see!"

And in a triumphant cry she called:

"Morenito!"

My two arms trembled so that I shook the bars of the grill around which I had clasped my fingers.

He was there, I saw him descend.

She threw back her shawl and opened her two naked arms to him.

"Here he is, my lover! See how pretty he is! And how young, Mateo! Look well, I adore him! . . . My little heart. Give me your mouth! . . . Again. . . . And again. . . . Longer. . . . How sweet my life is! . . . How amorous I feel. . . ."

She said many other things to him. . . .

Finally. . . as though she judged that my torture was not complete . . . she . . . I hardly know how to tell you, monsieur. . . . She united herself with him . . . there . . . under my eyes . . . at my feet.

I have still in my ears, like a humming of agony, the rattle of pleasure which made her mouth tremble while mine stifled,—and the tone of her voice, when she gave me this parting shot, while going upstairs with her love: "The guitar is mine, I play with whom I please."

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

How Mateo Received a Visit and What Followed

IF I did not kill myself when I returned home, it is very likely for the reason that, aside from my mangled life, a more powerful anger sustained and counseled me.

Incapable of sleep, I did not even go to bed. The day found me up and pacing from the door to the window of this room we are now in. Passing a mirror, I noticed, without astonishment, that my hair had turned gray.

In the morning, I was served some kind of a breakfast at a table in the garden. I had been sitting there about ten minutes, without hunger, without suffering and without thought, when I saw, coming towards me from the end of the alley, as though from the depths of a dream, Concha. You need not be surprised. Nothing can be foreseen, where one speaks of her. Each one of her actions is always, for a certainty, stupefying and infamous. While she was approaching me, I asked myself anxiously what covetousness drove her, a desire to again contemplate her triumph or a feeling that she might, perhaps, by an adventurous maneuver, achieve my material ruin to her profit. One or the other explanation seemed equally probable.

She leaned sideways to pass under a branch, closed her umbrella and her fan and sat down facing me, her right hand resting on my table.

I remember that there was a grove behind her and that a thin and shining spade was planted in the earth nearby. During the long silence which ensued, a temptation obsessed me, to take that spade in my hand and to cut her in two, there, like a red worm. . . .

"I came," she said finally, "to learn how you had died. I believed that you loved me more and that you would have killed yourself during the night."

Then she poured chocolate in my empty cup and, wetting her mobile lips in it, added, as though to herself:

"Not cooked enough. It is very bad."

When she had finished, she arose, opened her umbrella and said:

"Let us go in. I have a surprise for you."

And I thought:

"I also—"

But I did not open my mouth. We climbed the staircase leading

to the veranda. She ran ahead, singing a well-known *zarzuela* air, slowly, to insure my understanding the allusion:

"Y si a mi no me diese la gana
De que fueras del brazo con el?
—Pues iria con el de verbena
Y a los toros de Carabanchel!" [1]

Of her own free will she entered a room.... Monsieur, I did not thrust her in here ... what happened afterwards, was not because of my wish ... our destiny was cast ... everything had to happen. The room which she entered, as I will show you later, was a small one covered with rugs, silent and dark as a tomb, without any other furniture than divans. I used to smoke there sometimes. Now, it is never used. I entered after her: I locked the door without her hearing it. Then a wave of blood rushed to my eyes, an anger which had been gathering, day by day, for over fourteen months; and, turning toward her, I knocked her down with a slap in the face.

It was the first time I had ever struck a woman. I was trembling more than she who had thrown herself sideways with a stupefied air, her teeth chattering:

"You.... You.... Mateo.... You do that to me...."

And in a shower of violent insults she cried:

"Don't worry! You will never touch me twice!"

She was searching in her garter, where so many women hide a small weapon, when I crushed her hand and threw the knife on top of a dais which nearly reached the ceiling. Then I made her kneel, holding her two wrists in my left hand.

"Concha," I said, "you are not going to hear any insults or reproaches. But listen carefully; you have made me suffer beyond all human strength. You have invented moral tortures to try them on the only man who loved you passionately. I declare now that I am going to possess you by force, and not once only, you hear me? But as many times as it pleases me to take you before night."

"Never! I shall never be yours!" she cried. "You fill me with horror, I told you. I hate you like death! I hate you more than that. Kill me! You will never have me before that!"

Then I began to beat her silently.... I had really gone crazy....

[1] And what if it should be my whim
To care not if you go with him?
You might go visiting, instead,
The bulls at Carabanchel bred!

I don't quite remember all that happened . . . my eyes saw badly . . . my head no longer thought . . . I remember only that I struck her with the regularity of a peasant pounding a flail . . . and always on the same spots, the top of the head and the left shoulder. . . . I have never heard such horrible cries. . . .

This lasted to perhaps a quarter of an hour. She had not spoken a word, neither to beg for mercy, nor to abandon herself. I stopped when my fist became too painful, and then released her two hands.

She let herself fall sideways, her arms stretched before her, her head back, her hair disheveled; and her cries abruptly changed into sobs. She wept like a little girl, always in the same tone, as long as she could without taking breath. At moments, I feared she was going to choke. I can still see the constant movement of her bruised shoulder, and her hands pulling the pins out from her hair. . . . Then I felt so much pity for her and shame at myself that, for a while, I forgot the atrocious scene of the evening before. . . .

Concha had raised herself a little; she was still kneeling, her hands on her cheeks, her eyes raised towards me. . . . There did not seem to be a shadow of reproach in those eyes, but . . . I don't know how to express it . . . a kind of adoration. . . . At first her lips trembled so that she could not articulate. . . . Then I heard faintly:

"Oh, Mateo! How you must love me!"

She came nearer, always on the knees and murmured:

"Forgive me, Mateo! Forgive me! I love you also. . . ."

For the first time she was sincere. But, as for me, I no longer believed her. She continued:

"How well you have beaten me, my heart! How sweet it was! How good it felt. . . . Forgive me for all I have done to you! I was crazy. . . . I did not know. . . . Have you suffered much for me? . . . Forgive me, forgive me! Forgive me, Mateo!"

She continued in the same soft voice:

"You are not going to take me by force. I await you in my arms. Help me to rise. . . . I told you that I had a surprise for you? Well then, you shall see presently, you shall see. I am still a virgin. The scene of last night was only a comedy, to hurt you . . . because I can say, now, that I did not love you at all until today. But I was far too proud to take a Morenito. . . . I am yours, Mateo. If God wills I shall be your wife this morning. Try to forget the past and understand my poor little soul. I am lost in it. I believe that I am waking up. I can see you as I have never seen you before. Come to me."

And, in truth, monsieur, she was a virgin.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

Wherein Concha Changes Her Life But Not Her Character

THIS should be the end of the romance and everything would be well which ended with such a conclusion. Alas! Why could I not stop there? Perhaps you may know, some day! For misfortune never disappears from human existence; a wound is never healed; never does the feminine hand which has sown the seed of anguish and tears, gather joy in the same torn field.

Eight days after that morning (I say eight days; that is not long), Concha came in on a Sunday evening, a few minutes before dinner, saying:

"Guess who I saw? Someone I love dearly.... Think hard.... I am so glad."

I remained silent.

"I have seen *The Morenito*," she resumed. "He was going through Las Sierpes, in front of the Gasquet shop. We went together to the Cerveceria. You know, I spoke evil of him, but I did not say all I thought. He is pretty, my little friend from Cadiz. You have seen him, you know it well. He has sparkling eyes with long lashes. I love long eyelashes, it deepens the gaze. And then, he has no mustache, his mouth is well-shaped, his teeth are white.... All the women lick their lips when they see him so pretty."

"You are joking, Conchita.... That is not possible.... You have seen no one, tell me?"

"Ah, you do not believe me? As you please.... Then I shall not tell you what happened later...."

"Tell me at once!" I shouted, grasping her arm.

"Oh, don't lose your temper! I will tell you. Why should I hide it? It is my pleasure, I take it. We went together out of the city, *por un caminito, muy clarito, muy clarito, muy clarito,* at the Cruz del Campo. Shall I go on? We visited the whole house to pick the room with the best divan...."

And, as I got up, she ended, between two protecting hands:

"Well, it was quite natural. He has such a soft skin and he is so much better looking than you are!"

What would you? I beat her again. And brutally, with a heavy hand, in a way to revolt myself. She cried, sobbed and knelt in a corner, her head on her knees, wringing her hands.

"My love, it is not true.... I went to the bullfight.... I was there all day... my ticket is in my pocket... take it.... I was there with your friend G... and his wife.... They spoke to me, you can ask them.... I saw six bulls killed and I did not leave my seat, and I returned directly here."

"But why did you tell me?"

"To have you beat me, Mateo. When I feel your strength, I love you, I love you so; you cannot imagine how happy it makes me to weep because of you—come, heal me very quickly—"

And so it was, monsieur, to the end. When she became convinced that her false confessions no longer deceived me, and that I had every reason for believing in her fidelity, she invented new pretexts for exciting a daily anger in me. And at night under circumstances when other women say: "Will you always love me?" I heard these astounding phrases (and real; I do not invent anything): "Mateo, will you beat me again? Promise me that you will beat me hard! You will kill me! Tell me that you will kill me!"

You must not imagine that this singular predilection was the base of her character. No, if she felt the need of chastisement, she had also a passion for sin. She acted perversely, not for the pleasure of sinning, but for the pleasure of doing evil to someone. That was her rôle in life: Sowing suffering and watching it grow. At first, she had jealousy, of which you could have no idea. She quarreled so about my friends and all my acquaintances and behaved in such an insulting manner, that I had to break with everybody and was soon left alone. The sight of a woman, no matter what kind, was sufficient to make her furious. She dismissed all my servants... from the girl in the poultry-yard to the cook, although she knew perfectly well that I never spoke to them. And in the same manner she drove away all those whom she herself engaged. I was forced to change all my shopkeepers, because the wife of the barber was a blonde, because the daughter of the librarian was a brunette and because the tobacconist asked about my health when I entered her shop. After a while I gave up going to the theatre; in truth, if I looked over the orchestra seats, it was to feast on the beauty of a woman, if I looked at the stage it was a decisive proof that I was becoming enamoured of an actress. For the same reasons, I stopped walking with her in public, for the slightest salutation became, in her eyes, a sort of declaration. I could neither turn over some engravings, nor read a novel, nor look at the Virgin Mary, under pain of being accused of tenderness towards the model, the heroine or the Madonna. I gave in always, I loved her so! But after what tiresome struggles!

At the same time as her jealousies exercised themselves against me,

she attempted to excite mine by means which, fictitious as they were at first, became real later on.

She deceived me. By the care she took to inform me of it each time, I guessed that she desired more her own excitement than mine: nevertheless, even morally, it was not a valid excuse, and, at any rate, when she returned from these particular adventures, I was not in a state to apologize for them, as you will readily understand.

Soon she was not satisfied with bringing me proofs of her infidelities. She wished to renew the scene of the grill and this time not as a sham. Yes! She engineered against herself a surprise in *"flagrante delicto"!* It was on a morning. I woke up late and I did not see her at my side. A letter was on the table near me and it read as follows:

"Mateo does not love me any more. I arose during your sleep and have gone to see my lover, Hotel X . . . , Room 6, you can kill me there if you like; the lock will be open. I shall continue my night of love until late in the morning. Come! I may have the luck to see you during an embrace.

"I adore you,
"CONCHA."

I went there. What a time we had. Good God! A duel followed. It was public scandal. You may have heard about it. . . . And when I think that all this was done "to attach me"! Up to what point can the imagination of a woman blind her toward virile love? What I saw in that hotel room survived like a veil between Concha and myself. Instead of whipping up my desire, as she had hoped, this remembrance spread, instead, all over her body, something odious and indelible with which she remained impregnated. Nevertheless, I took her back; but my love for her was wounded forever. Our quarrels grew more frequent, more bitter, and more brutal also. She clung to my life in a sort of frenzy. It was pure egotism and selfish passion. Her fundamentally wicked soul did not even suspect that one could love otherwise. At any cost, by any means, she wanted me locked in the girdle of her arms. But, finally, I escaped. It happened one day, suddenly, after one scene among a thousand, simply because it was inevitable.

A little gypsy girl, selling baskets, had climbed the garden stairs to offer me her poor works of woven rushes and reed leaves. I was going to give her an alms, when I saw Concha rush toward her and, with dire insults, tell her that she had been there the month before, that she certainly intended offering something else besides her baskets; adding that one could see from her eyes what her real profession was, that, if she

went around barefooted, it was for the sake of showing her legs, and that one must be shameless to go thus from door to door, with a torn skirt, hunting for lovers. All this was sprinkled with outrageous abuse and spoken in a most arrogant voice. Then she tore from her all her merchandise, broke it, stamped on it. . . . You can imagine the sobs and tremblings of the unfortunate little girl. Naturally I paid for the damages. And a fight followed. The scene on that day was not more violent nor more tedious than on others; but it was final. . . . I still do not know why.

"You would leave me for a gypsy?"

"No, I leave you for peace."

Three days later I was in Tangiers. She joined me there. I started with a caravan for the interior, where she could not follow me, and remained several months without news from Spain.

When I returned to Tangiers, fourteen letters were waiting for me at the post office. I took a boat which carried me to Italy. Eight more letters followed me there. Then silence.

I returned to Seville after a year of travels. She had been married, a fortnight before, to a young fool, otherwise well born, whom she dispatched to Bolivia with significant haste. In her last letter she had said: "I shall be for you only or for anyone who wants me." I suspect that she is keeping her second promise. I have said everything, monsieur. Now you know Concepcion Perez. As for me, my life has been shattered for having met her on the road. I expect nothing from her except forgetfulness, but an experience so harshly acquired must and should be transmitted in case of danger. Do not be surprised that I have taken the trouble to speak to you so feelingly. The Carnival died yesterday; real life begins again. For your sake, I have lifted, for an instant, the mask of an unknown woman.

"I thank you," André said gravely, shaking his two hands.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

Which Is the Epilogue As Well As the Moral of This Story

ANDRÉ returned on foot to the city. It was seven o'clock in the evening. The earth was transformed, insensibly, by the enchanted moonlight.

In order not to return the same way—or for some other reason—

he walked through the road to Empalme after a long detour in the country. The south wind intoxicated him with its inexhaustible warmth, which, at this nocturnal hour, was even more voluptuous.

As he stopped, his eyes almost closed, to enjoy this new sensation with a thrill, a carriage passed him and stopped suddenly. He stepped forward; someone spoke to him.

"I am a little late," whispered a voice, "but you are kind to have waited for me. Handsome stranger who attracts me, shall I trust myself to you on this dark and deserted road? Ah! Lord! You can readily see that I have no desire to die, this evening."

André threw her a glance which saw a whole destiny; then, becoming suddenly very pale, he took the empty seat beside her.

The carriage drove through the open country, up to a small green house in the shadow of three olive trees. The horses were unharnessed. They slept. The next day, towards three o'clock, they were again in harness. The carriage started for Seville and stopped at 22 Plaza del Triunfo.

Concha was the first to descend, André followed. They entered together.

"Rosalie," she said to her maid, "pack my trunks, quickly! I am going to Paris."

"Madame, this morning a gentleman came who asked to see Madame and who insisted on entering. I did not know him but he said that he had known Madame for a long time and that he would be happy if Madame would receive him."

"Did he leave a card?"

"No, Madame."

But, in the meantime, a servant appeared, carrying a letter. And André learned later that this was the letter:

"My Conchita, I forgive you. I cannot live without you. Return. It is I, now, who kneels and supplicates.

"I kiss your naked feet.

"MATEO."

Seville, 1896; Naples, 1898.

THE SONGS OF BILITIS

TRANSLATED BY

MITCHELL · S · BUCK

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TRANSLATOR'S NOTE

THE Songs of Bilitis, Pierre Louÿs' great sequence of prose poems on an antique theme, was first published in 1894. The title-page of the first edition was lettered, simply, "Translated from the Greek," and this suggestion of translation was strengthened by the inclusion of a "Bibliography" and by recording, in the Index, a number of Songs marked "Not translated," which, as a matter of fact, never existed. But it is extremely doubtful whether anyone acquainted with the Greek Poets could have been misled into imagining that Bilitis—at least, as a poetess—ever really existed. A number of passages indicate modern thought: and some of the Songs, while not exactly translated, are adapted from epigrams by well-known poets in the Greek Anthology. "Philodemos," Pierre Louÿs remarks, however, "twice stole from her," as though to infer that Bilitis was the originator of these poems (CI and CXXXII) attributed to Philodemos.

The greater number of the pastels and, of course, the conception of the work as a whole, were entirely original with Pierre Louÿs; and the resulting book is, perhaps, the most singular bloom of his genius, all the more remarkable in that it was published in his twenty-third year.

Following an imaginary "Life of Bilitis," setting the key for the Songs to follow, the book is divided into three parts. The first is a series of delightful pastorals; the second narrates incidents of Bilitis' life on the Isle of Lesbos; and the third her experiences while living as a courtesan on the Isle of Kypros.

In the Notes at the end of the present edition, such direct translations or paraphrases from antique writers as I have been able to identify, have been indicated, with occasional comment, for the information of the reader.

The work has been more or less known to cultured American readers since the issue, in 1904, of the scholarly pioneer translation by Dr. Horace Manchester Brown. My first translation, made about six-

teen years ago, and published in 1919, has been revised throughout for the present edition and the Notes have been augmented.

I have endeavored to retain, in the translation, the full sense of the original text and yet to give the English version a reasonable amount of that euphony which is so essential in works of this kind. Where unbroken rhythm in the translation would have required amplification or curtailment of literal precision, I have sacrificed rhythm as of secondary importance. In fact, the essential characteristic of successful prose poems, of the pattern used by Pierre Louÿs, is a simple directness, of the kind so noticeable in the Greek Epigram, coupled with a rounding out of the final sentences into a full period, completing both the thought and the acoustic effect. How Pierre Louÿs excelled in meeting these conditions is readily perceptible, even in translation.

MITCHELL S. BUCK

August, 1928

LIFE OF BILITIS

BILITIS was born at the beginning of the sixth century before our era, in a mountain village situated on the banks of the Melas, towards the eastern part of Pamphylia. This country is stony and sad, shadowed by profound forests, dominated by the enormous mass of Tauros; lime springs issue from the rocks, great salty lakes abide on the heights, and the valleys are replete with silence.

She was the daughter of a Greek and of a Phœnician woman. She seems never to have known her father, for he has no part in any of the remembrances of her childhood. Perhaps he had died before she came into the world. Otherwise, it would be difficult to explain how she bore a Phœnician name which her mother alone could have given her.

In this almost deserted land, she lived a tranquil life with her mother and her sisters. Other young girls, who were her friends, lived not far from her. On the woody slopes of Tauros, the shepherds pastured their flocks.

In the morning, at cock-crow, she arose, went to the stable, led the animals to drink and busied herself milking them. During the day, if it rained, she remained in the gynæceum and spun the wool of her distaff. If the weather was fair, she ran in the fields and played, with her companions, many games of which she tells us.

Bilitis regarded the Nymphs with ardent piety. The sacrifices which she offered were nearly always for their fountain. She often speaks of them but it seems that she never saw them, for she reports with so much veneration the accounts of an old man who, one day, had surprised them.

The end of her pastoral existence was saddened by a love of which we know little, although she speaks of it at length. She ceased to sing of it when it became unhappy. Having become the mother of a child which she abandoned, Bilitis left Pamphylia for unknown reasons and never returned to the place of her birth.

We find her again at Mytilene, where she had come by way of the sea, along the fair coasts of Asia. She was then scarcely sixteen years old, according to the conjectures of M. Heim, who established with probability some dates in the life of Bilitis from a verse which alludes to the death of Pittakos.

Lesbos was then the centre of the world. On the main road be-

tween beautiful Attica and magnificent Lydia, it had for its capital a city more elegant than Athens and more corrupt than Sardis: Mytilene, built upon a peninsula overlooking the shores of Asia. The blue sea encompassed the city. From the height of the temples, one could distinguish, on the horizon, the white line of Atarnea which was the port of Pergamos.

The narrow streets were always encumbered by a throng resplendent in many-colored stuffs: tunics of purple and of hyacinth, cyclas of transparent silks, mantles trailing in the dust of the yellow shoes. The women bore in their ears great rings of gold set with raw pearls, and on their arms massive bracelets of silver roughly chiseled in relief. The men themselves wore their hair shining and perfumed with rare oils. The ankles of the Greeks were bare in the fastenings of their sandals, wide bands of bright metal which tinkled at their heels; those of the Asiatics were covered by soft, tinted boots. The passers-by stood in groups before the façades of the shops, where all the goods for sale were on display: rugs of sombre colors, cloths worked with threads of gold, jewels of amber and of ivory, according to the quarter. The animation of Mytilene did not end with the day; there was no hour so late that one could not hear, through the open doors, the joyous sounds of instruments, the cries of women and the noise of dances. Pittakos himself, who wished to give a little order to this perpetual debauch, made a law in defense of flute players too young to be employed in the nocturnal festivals; but this law, like all laws which endeavor to change the course of natural morals, determined the secrecy but not the observance.

In a society where husbands were occupied at night with wine and dancing-girls, the women could not fail to unite and find, among themselves, consolation for their solitude. Thus it was that they softened to those delicate loves to which antiquity has given their name and which have, whatever men may think, more of true passion than of studied viciousness.

At this time, Sappho was still beautiful. Bilitis knew her and speaks of her under the name of Psappha [1] which she bore at Lesbos. Without doubt, she was the admirable woman who taught the little Pamphylian the art of singing in rhythmic phrases and of conserving for posterity the remembrance of her loves. Unfortunately, Bilitis has given us few details of this woman, today so little known; and this is to be regretted, since the least word is precious which touches that great Inspiration. Instead, she has left us, in thirty elegies, the history of her love for a young girl of her own age whom she calls Mnasidika and who lived with her. We already knew the name of this young girl

from a verse of Sappho's [2] in which her beauty is exalted; but even the name is doubtful, and Bergk is inclined to think that she called herself simply Mnais. The Songs we shall read later on prove that this hypothesis may be abandoned. Mnasidika seems to have been a little girl, very sweet and very innocent, one of those charming persons whose mission is to permit themselves to be adored, so much the more cherished since they make few efforts to merit that which is given them. Loves without motives last the longest; this one endured for ten years. One knows how it was broken through the fault of Bilitis whose excessive jealousy understood no eclecticism.

When she felt that nothing held her longer at Mytilene except unhappy memories, Bilitis made a second voyage; she went to Kypros, an island Greek and Phœnician like Pamphylia itself, which must have recalled to her memory the aspect of her native country.

It was there that Bilitis began her life for the third time and in a manner my readers will understand with difficulty unless they recall the point to which love was considered holy among the peoples of antiquity. The courtesans of Amathus were not, like ours, lost creatures, exiled from all worldly society; they were girls from the best families of the city. Aphrodite had given them beauty and they thanked the goddess by consecrating to the service of her worship the beauty they had received. All the cities, like those of Kypros, which possessed a temple rich in courtesans, regarded those women with careful respect.

The incomparable history of Phryne,[3] as transmitted to us by Athenæus, gives some idea of the nature of this veneration. It is not true that it was necessary for Hyperides to strip her naked in order to soften the Areopagos, although her crime was great: she had committed murder. The orator tore off the top of her tunic and revealed only her breasts. And he supplicated the judges: "Do not put to death the priestess and the inspired of Aphrodite."

In distinction from the other courtesans, who went out in transparent cyclas through which all the details of their bodies were visible, Phryne was accustomed to envelop herself, even to her hair, in one of those great, folded vestments of which the statuettes of Tanagra have preserved the grace. No one, unless it were her lovers, had ever seen her arms or her shoulders, and she never appeared in the pool of the public baths. But one dav an extraordinary thing occurred. It was the day of the festival of Eleusis; twenty thousand people, from all parts of Greece, had assembled on the seashore when Phryne advanced to the waves. She removed her garment, she unfastened her cincture, she removed even her under-tunic. "She unrolled her hair and she entered into the sea." And in that throng stood Praxiteles who, after this living

goddess, designed the Aphrodite of Knidos; and Apelles who glimpsed the form of his Anadyomene. Admirable people, to whom naked Beauty could appear without exciting laughter or false shame!

I wish that this history were that of Bilitis for, in translating her Songs, I have learned to love the friend of Mnasidika. Without doubt, her life also was wonderful. I regret only that she is not spoken of oftener and that the ancient authors, at least those whose works have survived, give us so little information about her. Philodemos, who twice stole from her, does not even mention her name. In default of better anecdotes, I beg that you will be contented with the details which she herself has given us about her life as a courtesan. That she was a courtesan is undeniable; and even her last Songs prove that, if she had the virtues of her vocation, she had also its worst weaknesses. But I would know only her virtues. She was pious and skilful. She remained faithful to the temple so long as Aphrodite consented to prolong the youth of her purest devotee. The day when she ceased to be loved, she ceased to write, she said. Nevertheless, it is difficult to admit that the Songs of Pamphylia could have been written at the epoch when the events took place. How could a little shepherdess of the mountains learn to scan verses according to the difficult rhythms of the Æolic tradition? It is more reasonable to believe that, having become old, Bilitis found pleasure in singing for herself the memories of her distant childhood. We know nothing about this last period of her life. We know not even at what age she died.

Her tomb was found by M. G. Heim, at Paleo-Limisso, at the side of an antique road, not far from the ruins of Amathus. These ruins have almost disappeared during the last thirty years and the stones of the house where perhaps Bilitis lived, today pave the quays of Port Said. But the tomb was subterranean, according to the Phœnician custom, and it had escaped even the treasure-hunters.

M. Heim entered it through a narrow well, filled with earth, at the bottom of which he found a walled-up door which had to be demolished. The wide, low tomb, paved with slabs of limestone, had four walls covered with plaques of black amphibolite, on which were graven, in primitive capitals, all the Songs we are about to read, except the three Epitaphs, which decorated the sarcophagus.

There reposed the friend of Mnasidika, in a large coffin of terra-cotta, under a cover modeled in delicate sculpture which figured in clay the visage of the dead. The hair was painted black, the eyes were half closed and prolonged by the crayon as though she were living, and the painted cheek was softened by a slight smile which brought out the lines of the mouth. Nothing can describe the lips, at once delicate and slightly

curling, soft and pure, united one to the other and as though intoxicated by their own union.

When the coffin was opened, she appeared in the state in which a pious hand had placed her, twenty-four centuries before. Vials of perfume hung from pegs of clay, and one of these, after so long a time, was still fragrant. The mirror of polished silver in which Bilitis had viewed herself, the stylus which had trailed the blue pigment over her eyelids, were found in their place. A little naked Astarte, relic forever precious, watched always over the skeleton ornamented with all its jewels of gold and white like a snowy branch, but so soft and so fragile that, at the first breath of air, it crumbled, and mingled with the dust.

PIERRE LOUŸS

Constantinople, August, 1894

I. BUCOLICS IN PAMPHYLIA

Ἀδύ δέ μοι το μέλισμα, καὶ ἦν σύριγγι μελίσδω
κἦν αὐλῷ λάλεω, κἦν δώνακι,
κἦν πλαγιαύλῳ.

THEOCRITOS[4]

I
THE TREE

STRIPPED of my clothes, I climbed into a tree; my bare thighs embraced the smooth, moist bark; my sandals trod upon the branches.

Far up, yet under the leaves and shadowed from the heat, I placed myself astride a projecting branch and balanced my feet in the void.

It had rained. The water drops fell and slipped over my skin. My hands were stained with moss and my toes were reddened from crushed flowers.

When the wind passed, I felt the life of the beautiful tree. Then I pressed my legs yet closer and laid my open lips upon the hairy nape of a bough.

II
PASTORAL SONG

LET us sing a pastoral song, invoking Pan, god of the wind of summer. Selenis and I each watch our flocks, from the round shadow of an olive tree which trembles.

Selenis lies upon the meadow. She raises herself and runs, or searches for grasshoppers, or gathers flowers and herbs, or bathes her face in the cool water of the brook.

And I—I draw the wool from the white backs of the sheep to garnish my distaff, and I spin. The hours move slowly. In the sky, an eagle passes.

The shadow turns; let us move the basket of flowers and the jar

of milk. Let us sing a pastoral song, invoking Pan, god of the wind of summer.

III

MATERNAL ADVICE

MY mother bathes me in the shadow, she dresses me in the bright sunlight and binds my hair in the light of lamps; but if I walk out in the moonlight, she draws my girdle into a double knot.

She says to me: "Play with virgins, dance with little children; look not out of the window, shun the words of young men and turn from the counsel of widows.

"Some evening, someone will come to carry thee, like the others, over the threshold, amidst a great assemblage of sonorous drums and amorous flutes.

"That evening, when thou goest away, Bilito, thou wilt leave me three gourds of gall: one for the morning, one for midday and the third, the bitterest, the third for the days of festival."

IV

THE NAKED FEET

I HAVE black hair all the length of my back and a small round cap. My chiton is of white wool. My legs are fast browned by the sun.

If I lived in the city, I should wear jewels of gold and gilded chitons and shoes of silver.... I regard my naked feet in their slippers of dust.

Psophis! Come here, little beggar! Carry me to the spring, bathe my feet in thy hands and press olives and violets to perfume them like flowers.

Today thou shalt be my slave, thou shalt follow me and serve me; and, at the end of the day, I will give thee, for thy mother, lentils from the garden of mine.

V

THE OLD MAN AND THE NYMPHS

A BLIND old man lives upon the mountain. For having looked upon the nymphs, his eyes died, long ago. And, since, his happiness is a distant memory.

"Yes, I have seen them," he said to me. "Helopsychria, Limnanthis: they were standing near the bank, in the green pool of Physos. The water sparkled higher than their knees.

"Their necks inclined beneath their long hair. Their nails were

thin as the wings of grasshoppers. Their nipples were hollowed like the cups of hyacinths.

"They trailed their fingers upon the water and drew up, from an invisible vase, the long-stemmed water-lilies. Around their parted thighs, the ripples slowly widened."

VI

SONG

"TORI-TORTUE, what doest thou among us?—I wind the wool and the thread of Milet.—Alas! Alas! Why dost thou not dance?—I am too sorrowful. I am too sorrowful.

"Tori-tortue, what doest thou among us?—I cut a reed for a funereal flute.—Alas! Alas! What has befallen him?—I will not tell. I will not tell.

"Tori-tortue, what doest thou among us?—I press the olives for oil for the stele.—Alas! Alas! And who, then, is dead?—Canst thou ask? Canst thou ask?

"Tori-tortue, what doest thou among us?—He has fallen into the sea . . .—Alas! Alas! And how was that?—From the backs of white horses. From the backs of white horses."

VII

THE PASSER-BY

As I was seated in the evening before the door of the house, a young man passed by. He looked at me; I turned aside my head. He spoke to me but I did not answer.

He wished to approach me. I took a sickle from the wall and I would have cut open his cheek if he had advanced a step.

Then, drawing back a little, he began to smile and he breathed in his hand toward me, saying: "Receive a kiss." And I cried! And I wept! So much so that my mother ran to me,

Alarmed, fearing I had been stung by a scorpion. I wept: "He kissed me!" My mother also kissed me and carried me away in her arms.

VIII

THE AWAKENING

IT is already daylight. I should be up. But the drowsiness of morning is sweet and the warmth of my bed enfolds me closer. I long to remain abed.

Soon I shall go to the stable. I shall give the goats grass and

flowers and a flask of fresh water drawn from the well where I shall drink with them.

Then I shall fasten them to the post and milk their soft, warm udders; and, if the kids are not too jealous, I will suck with them from the supple teats.

Amaltheia: did she not feed Zeus? Then I will go. But not yet. The sun has risen too soon and my mother is not yet awake.

IX

THE RAIN

THE fine rain has wet everything, very gently and in silence. It still rains a little. I will go out among the trees—my feet naked, so I shall not stain my shoes.

The rain of springtime is delicious. The branches, laden with moist flowers, have a perfume which bewilders me. The sun sparkles on the delicate bark.

Alas! How many flowers upon the ground! How pitiful, these flowers which have fallen. They should not be swept aside and mingled with the mud, but saved for the bees.

The beetles and snails traverse the path between the puddles of water. I will not tread upon them nor frighten the golden lizard who stretches out, blinking his eyelids.

X

THE FLOWERS

NYMPHS of the woods and fountains, sweetest of friends, I am here. Do not hide yourselves, but come to my aid, for I am laden with many flowers.

I wish to choose, from all the forest, a poor hamadryad with raised arms, and in her hair, the color of leaves, I shall place my largest rose.

See: I have taken so many from the fields that I cannot carry them away unless you help me to make a garland. If you refuse, beware:

She of you with the orange hair, I saw her yesterday embraced like a beast by the satyr Lamprosathes and I will denounce the shameless one.

XI

IMPATIENCE

I THREW myself into her arms and wept, and, for a long time, she felt my hot tears roll over her shoulder, before my sorrow would let me speak:

"Alas! I am only a child; the young men never look at me. When shall I have, like thee, a young woman's breasts to raise my robe and entice kisses?

"There are no curious eyes if my tunic slips; no one gathers up the flower which falls from my hair, nor does anyone threaten to kill me if my mouth is given to another."

She replied to me, tenderly: "Bilitis, little virgin, thou criest like a cat at the moon and thou art troubled without reason. The girls who are the most impatient are not the soonest chosen."

XII

COMPARISONS

SPARROW,[5] bird of Kypris, sing with our first desires! The fresh bodies of young girls bloom with flowers like the earth. The night of all our dreams approaches and we talk of it among ourselves.

Sometimes we compare, all together, the differences in our beauties, our hair already long, our young breasts still small, our puberties like little round quails hiding under the nascent down.

Yesterday I competed thus with Melantho, who is older than I. She was proud of her breasts which had grown in a month and, pointing to my straight tunic, she called me "Little Child."

No man could see us; we compared ourselves naked before the girls: and, if she vanquished me on one point, I far surpassed her on all others. Sparrow, bird of Kypris, sing with our first desires!

XIII

THE FOREST RIVER

I BATHED myself, alone, in the forest river. I am sure I frightened the naiads, for I divined them moving anxiously in the depths of the dark water.

I called them. To resemble them better, I plaited upon my neck irises black as my hair and clusters of yellow gilliflowers.

From a long, floating herb, I made myself a green girdle and, to see it, I pressed up my breasts and inclined my head a little.

And I called: "Naiads! Naiads! Play with me; be kind." But the naiads are transparent and perhaps, without knowing, I have caressed their delicate arms.

XIV

COME, MELISSA

WHEN the sun becomes less burning, we will go and play upon the river banks, we will struggle for a frail crocus or for a damp hyacinth.

We will form a round ring and weave a garland; we will take each other by the hand and by the ends of our tunics.

Come, Melissa![6] Give us honey. Come, Naiads! We will bathe with you. Come, Melissa! Throw a gentle shadow over our perspiring bodies.

And we will offer you, kind Nymphs, not shameful wine, but oil and milk and goats with twisted horns.

XV

THE SYMBOLIC RING

VOYAGERS who return from Sardis tell us that the women of Lydia are covered with collars and stones from the top of their hair to their tinted feet.

The girls of my country have neither bracelets nor diadems, but one of their fingers carries a silver ring and upon the bezel is graven the triangle of the Goddess.

When they turn the point outward, they mean: "Psyche is to be taken." When they turn the point inward, they mean: "Psyche is taken."

The men believe this; the women do not. As for me, I care little which way the point is turned, for Psyche offers herself freely. Psyche is always to be taken.

XVI

DANCES BY MOONLIGHT

ON the soft grass, in the night, the young girls with hair of violets have danced together, one of each pair answering for the lover.

The virgins said: "We are not for you." And, as though they

were bashful, they hid their virginity. Among the trees, an ægipan played upon the flute.

The others said: "You will come to seek us." They had gathered in their robes like the tunics of men, and they struggled gently, entwining their dancing legs.

Then each, acknowledging herself as vanquished, took her friend by the ears, like a cup with two handles,[7] and, including the head, drank a kiss.

XVII

THE LITTLE CHILDREN

THE river is almost dry; the brittle reeds are dying in the mud; the air burns and, far beyond the hollowed banks, a clear brook flows over the gravel.

It is there that, from morning to evening, the little naked children come to play. They bathe themselves, but no higher than their calves, for the river is low.

But they walk in the current, sometimes slipping on the rocks; and the little boys throw water on the little girls, who laugh.

And, when a troop of passing merchants lead their great white oxen to drink, they clasp their hands behind them and watch the enormous beasts.

XVIII

THE STORIES

I AM loved by the little children; when they see me, they run to me and cling to my tunic or clasp my legs in their little arms.

If they have gathered flowers, they give them all to me; if they have caught a beetle, they put it in my hand; if they have nothing, they caress me and make me sit before them.

Then they kiss me on the cheek, they rest their heads upon my breasts; they supplicate me with their eyes. I know well what they wish to say.

They wish to say: "Dear Bilitis, tell us, for we are quiet, the history of Perseus the hero, or of the death of little Hellé."

XIX

THE MARRIED FRIEND

OUR mothers were pregnant at the same time and, this evening, she is married, Melissa, my dearest friend. The roses are still upon the path; the torches have not yet burned out.

And I return, by the same path, with my mother; and I dream. Thus, what she is today, I could be also. Am I not already a grown girl?

The cortège, the flutes, the nuptial song and the flowered car of the bridegroom, all the festival, some other evening, will unfold for me under the branches of the olives.

Like Melissa at this same hour, I shall unveil myself before a man, I shall know love in the night; and, later, little children shall nourish themselves at my swollen breasts. . . .

XX

CONFIDENCES

THE next day, I went to her house, and we blushed when we saw each other. She led me into her chamber where we could be alone.

I had many things to say to her, but when I saw her I forgot them all. I did not even dare throw myself upon her neck; I regarded her high girdle.

I was astonished that nothing in her face had changed, that she still resembled my friend although, since the sleepless night, she had learned so many things which frightened me.

Suddenly, I seated myself upon her knees, took her in my arms, and whispered quickly, anxiously, into her ear. Then she laid her cheek against mine and told me all.

XXI

THE MOON WITH EYES OF BLUE

NIGHT mingles with the hair of women and the branches of the willows. I walked at the edge of the water. Suddenly I heard singing; then only I knew that young girls were there.

I said to them: "Of whom do you sing?" They replied: "Of those who return." One awaited her father, another her brother; but she who awaited her lover was the most impatient.

They had woven for themselves crowns and garlands cut from the branches of palms and lotos drawn from the water. They rested their arms on each others' necks and sang, one after another.

I moved along the river, saddened and all alone; but, looking about me, I saw, behind the great trees, the moon with eyes of blue conducting me.

XXII

SONG

"SHADOW of the woods, whence she should come: tell me, where has my mistress gone?—She has descended upon the plain.—Plain, where has my mistress gone?—She has followed the banks of the river."

"Fair river, who hast seen her pass, tell me: is she near this place? —She has left me for the path.—Path, dost thou see her still?—She has left me for the road."

"O white road, road of the city, tell me: where hast thou led her?—To the street of gold which enters into Sardis.—O street of light, touchest thou her naked feet?—She has entered the palace of the king."

"O palace, splendor of the earth, return her to me.—See! She has collars on her breasts and circlets in her hair, an hundred pearls along her legs, two arms around her waist."

XXIII

LYKAS

COME, we will go into the fields, under the thicket of juniper; we will eat honey from the hives, we will make snares for grasshoppers with the twigs of asphodels.

Come, we shall see Lykas, who tends his father's flocks on the slopes of shadowy Tauros. Surely he will give us milk.

Already I hear the sound of his flute. He plays most skilfully. Here are the dogs and the sheep and he himself standing against a tree. Is he not handsome as Adonis?

O Lykas! give us milk. Here are figs from our fig trees. We are going to rest with thee. Bearded goats, do not leap, for fear of exciting the restless bucks.

XXIV

THE OFFERING TO THE GODDESS

IT is not for Artemis whom they adore at Perga, this garland woven by my hands, although Artemis may be a good goddess who will watch over my couches of pain.

It is not for Athena whom they adore at Sidon, although she

may be of ivory and of gold and carry in her hand a pomegranate which tempts the birds.

No, it is for Aphrodite, whom I adore in my heart, for she only can give me what my lips most need, if I hang on her sacred tree my garland of tender roses.

But I will not ask aloud that which I beg of her. I will raise myself upon my toes and confide my secret to a cleft in the bark.

XXV

THE COMPLAISANT FRIEND

THE storm continued all the night. Selenis of the beautiful hair had come to spin with me. She remained for fear of the mud and, pressed one against the other, we filled my little bed.

When girls lie together, sleep remains at the door. "Bilitis, tell me, tell me, whom lovest thou?" She slipped her leg over mine to caress me gently.

And she said, against my mouth: "I know, Bilitis, whom thou lovest. Close thine eyes. I am Lykas." I replied, touching her: "Do I not know thou art a girl? Thy jest fits badly."

But she replied: "In truth, I am Lykas if thou wilt close thine eyes. These are his arms, these are his hands. . . ." And tenderly, in the silence, she enchanted my reverie into a singular illusion.

XXVI

A PRAYER TO PERSEPHONE

PURIFIED by the ritual ablutions and clad in violet tunics, we have kissed toward the earth our hands laden with branches of olive.

"O Persephone of the Underworld, or whatever may be the name thou desirest: if this name is acceptable to thee, hear us, O Shadowy-Haired Queen, sterile and unsmiling.

"Kokhlis, daughter of Thrasymakos, is ill, and dangerously. Do not call her yet. Thou knowest she cannot escape thee; some day, much later, thou shalt take her.

"But drag her not away so soon, O Unseen Ruler! For she weeps because of her virginity; she supplicates thee through our prayers; and we will give, for her deliverance, three black unshorn ewes."

XXVII

THE GAME OF DICE

As we both loved him, we played for him with dice. It was a great match. Many young girls looked on.

She threw at first the cast of Kyklopes and I the cast of Solon. But she the Kallibolos and I, feeling myself lost, I prayed to the Goddess.

I played; I had the Epiphenon, she the terrible cast of Kios, I the Antiteukos, she the Trikias, and I the cast of Aphrodite which won the disputed lover.

But, seeing her pale, I threw my arm about her neck and said, close to her ear (so that she alone heard me): "Do not weep, little friend; we will let him choose between us."

XXVIII

THE DISTAFF

All the day, my mother has kept me in the gynæceum with my sisters whom I do not love and who talk among themselves in low voices. I, in a little corner, I spin my distaff.

Distaff, since I am alone with thee, it is to thee I will talk. With thy wig of white wool, thou art like an old woman. Listen to me.

If I could go, I would not be here, seated in the shadow of the wall and spinning wearily. I would be sleeping with the violets upon the slopes of Tauros.

Because he is so much poorer than I, my mother will not espouse me. However, I say to thee: either I will have no wedding day or it is he who shall carry me over the threshold.

XXIX

THE FLUTE

For the day of Hyacinthus, he gives me a syrinx made of carefully cut reeds united with white wax which is sweet as honey to my lips.

He teaches me to play, seated upon his knees; but I tremble a little. He plays after me, so softly that I can scarcely hear him.

We have nothing to say to each other, so near we are, one to the other; but our songs reply to each other and, by turns, our lips touch the reeds.

It is late; there is the song of the green frogs which begins with the night. My mother will never believe that I have stayed so long searching for my lost girdle.

XXX

THE HAIR

He said to me: "Last night, I dreamed. I had thy hair about my neck. I had thy locks like a black collar about my neck and over my breast.

"I caressed them, and they were mine; and we were bound thus forever, by the same locks, mouth upon mouth, like two laurels with but a single root.

"And, little by little, it seemed to me that our limbs were mingled; that I became thyself and that thou didst enter into me like my dream."

When he had finished, he softly laid his hands upon my shoulders and looked at me with so tender a regard that I lowered my eyes, shivering.

XXXI

THE CUP

Lykas saw me coming, clad only in a little chiton, for the days were overwhelming. He wished to mould my breast, which was uncovered.

He took fine clay, kneaded in the fresh, clear water. When he laid it upon my skin, I thought I should faint, for the earth was very cold.

From my moulded breast, he made a cup, round and umbilicate. He placed it in the sun to dry and tinted it all over with the purple and ochre of crushed flowers.

Then we went to the fountain which is consecrated to the nymphs and threw the cup into the current, with stalks of gilliflowers.

XXXII

ROSES IN THE NIGHT

When the night mounts into the sky, the world belongs to us and to the gods. We go over the fields to the spring, through the dark wood to the glades, wherever our naked feet lead us.

The little stars shine enough for such little shadows as we are. Sometimes, under the low branches, we find sleeping hinds.

But, more charming than all else in the night, is a place known

only to ourselves, which attracts us through the forest: a thicket of mysterious roses.

For nothing in the world is so divine as the perfume of roses in the night. How is it that, in the time when I was alone, I never felt their ecstasy?

XXXIII

REMORSE

At first I did not reply; shame flushed my cheeks and the beating of my heart distressed my breasts.

Then I resisted; I said: "No. No." I turned away my head and the kiss did not open my lips nor love my fast-closed knees.

Then he begged my forgiveness, he kissed my hair, I felt his burning breath, and he departed.... Now I am alone.

I regard the empty place, the deserted wood, the trampled earth. And I bite my fingers until they bleed and I smother my cries in the grass.

XXXIV

THE INTERRUPTED SLEEP

All alone I fell asleep, like a partridge in the heather.... The light wind, the sound of the waters, the sweetness of the night, all held me there.

Imprudently I slept and awakened with a cry; and I struggled, and I wept. But already it was too late. Of what use are the hands of a child?

He would not leave me. Rather, with greater tenderness, he drew me closer in his arms, and I saw in all the world neither the earth nor the trees but only the light in his eyes....

To thee, Kypris Victorious, I consecrate these offerings still moist with the dew, vestiges of the pains of virginity, witnesses of my sleep and of my resistance.

XXXV

THE WASH-WOMEN

Wash-women, say not that you have seen me! I confide in you; do not repeat it! Between my tunic and my breasts, I bring you something.

I am like a little frightened hen.... I know not whether I dare tell you.... My heart beats as though I would die.... It is a veil that I bring you.

A veil and the ribbons from my legs. You see: there is blood. By Apollo, it was in spite of me! I defended myself well; but the man who loves is stronger than we.

Wash them well; spare neither the salt nor the chalk. I will place four oboli for you at the feet of Aphrodite; even a drachma of silver.

XXXVI

SONG

WHEN he returned, I hid my face with my two hands. He said to me: "Fear nothing. Who has seen our kissing?—Who has seen us? The night and the moon.

"And the stars and the first dawn. The moon has mirrored herself in the lake and has told it to the water under the willows. The water of the lake has told it to the oar.

"And the oar has told it to the boat and the boat has told it to the fisher. Alas! Alas! If that were all! But the fisher has told it to a woman.

"The fisher has told it to a woman. My father and my mother and my sisters and all Hellas will know it."

XXXVII

BILITIS

ONE woman envelops herself in white wool. Another clothes herself in silk and gold. Another covers herself with flowers, with green leaves and with grapes.

As for me, I live only when I am naked. My lover, take me as I am, without robe or jewels or sandals. Here is Bilitis, quite alone.

My hair is black with its own blackness and my lips are red of their own color. My locks float about me, free and round, like feathers.

Take me as my mother made me in a night of love long past; and, if I please thee so, forget not to tell me.

XXXVIII

THE LITTLE HOUSE

THE little house where he has his bed is the prettiest in the world. It is made from the branches of trees, four walls of dried earth and a roof of thatch.

I love it, for there we have slept since the nights have grown cold; and, as the nights become still colder, they become longer also. When the day comes, I am very tired.

The mattress lies upon the ground; two covers of black wool shut in our bodies which warm each other. His chest presses against my breasts. My heart throbs. . . .

He embraces me so vigorously that he bruises me, poor little girl that I am; but when he is within me I know nothing more of the world, and my four limbs could be cut off without awakening me from my delight.

XXXIX

THE LOST LETTER

ALAS for me! I have lost his letter. I had placed it between my skin and my strophion, under the warmth of my breasts. I ran; it must have fallen.

I will retrace my steps; if someone has found it, they will read it to my mother and I shall be whipped before my jeering sisters.

If it is a man who has found it, he will return it to me; or even if he wishes to talk to me in secret, I will know how to charm it from him.

If it is a woman who has read it, O Guardian Zeus protect me! For she will tell it to all the world or she will take away my lover.

XL

SONG

"THE night is so profound that it penetrates my eyes.—Thou wilt not see the road. Thou wilt lose thyself in the forest."

"The noise of falling waters fills my ears.—Thou wouldst not hear the voice of thy lover were he but twenty steps away."

"The perfume of the flowers is so powerful that I shall faint and fall.—Thou wouldst not feel him even if he crossed thy path."

"Ah! He is very far from here, on the other side of the moun-

tain; but I see him and I hear him and I feel him as though he touched me."

XLI

THE OATH

"WHEN the water of the river mounts to the snow-hidden summits: when barley and wheat are sown in the moving furrows of the sea:

"When the pines grow from the lakes and water-lilies from the rocks: when the sun becomes black, when the moon falls upon the grass:

"Then, but only then, will I take another woman and forget thee, Bilitis, soul of my life, heart of my heart."

He has said that to me; he has said that to me! What matters the rest of the world; where art thou, boundless happiness which can compare with my happiness!

XLII

THE NIGHT

IT is now I who search for him. Each night, very softly, I leave the house and I go by a long path to his meadow to see him sleeping.

Sometimes I remain for a long time without speaking, happy merely in seeing him, and I approach my lips to his and kiss only his breath.

Then, suddenly, I stretch myself upon him. He awakens in my arms, and he cannot rise, for I struggle. He gives up, and laughs, and clasps me. Thus we play in the night.

...First dawn,[8] O wicked light, thou already! In what ever-darkened cave, on what subterranean meadow, can we love so long that we lose remembrance of thee....

XLIII

CRADLE SONG

SLEEP: I have sent to Sardis for thy toys, and for thy vestments to Babylon. Sleep: thou art the daughter of Bilitis and a king of the rising sun.

This wood is the palace which was built for thee alone and which I have given to thee. The trunks of the pines[9] are the columns; the high branches are the arches.

Sleep. That he may not awaken thee, I will sell the sun to the sea. The breeze from the wings of a dove is no lighter than thy breath.

Daughter of mine, flesh of my flesh, when thou openest thine eyes, say whether thou wishest the plain or the city or the mountain or the moon or the white cortège of the gods.

XLIV

THE TOMB OF THE NAIADS

THROUGH the woods covered with hoarfrost, I walked; my hair before my mouth glistened with little icicles, and my sandals were heavy with muddy cakes of snow.

He said to me: "What seekest thou?—I follow the tracks of a satyr. His little cloven steps alternate like holes in a white mantle." He said to me: "The satyrs are dead.

"The satyrs and the nymphs also. For thirty years there has been no winter so terrible. The track thou seest is that of a buck. Let us pause here, where their tomb is."

And, with the iron of his hoe, he broke the ice of the spring where once laughed the naiads. He lifted the great, frozen pieces and peered through them, toward the pale sky.

II. ELEGIACS AT MYTILENE

Εὐμορφοτέρα Μναισίδικα τᾶς ἁπαλᾶς Γυριννῶς.

SAPPHO [10]

XLV
TO THE VESSEL

BEAUTIFUL ship that has brought me here, along the shores of Ionia, I abandon thee to the glistening waves and, with a light foot, I leap upon the beach.

Thou wilt return to the country where the virgin is the friend of the nymphs. Forget not to thank those invisible counselors, and to carry them, as an offering, this branch plucked by my hands.

Thou wert once a pine and, on the mountains, the vast hot Notos shook thy branches with their squirrels and birds.

Let Boreos be now thy guide and push thee gently toward the port, black ship, escorted by dolphins, at the will of the kindly sea.

XLVI
PSAPPHA

I RUB my eyes . . . I believe it is already day. Ah! Who is this near me? . . . A woman? . . . By Paphia, I had forgotten. . . . O Charites! how I am shamed.

To what country am I come, and what is this island where love is understood thus? [11] If I were not so wearied, I would believe it a dream. . . . Is it possible this may be Psappha? [1]

She sleeps. . . She is certainly beautiful, although her hair is cut like that of an athlete.[1] But this astonishing countenance, this virile breast, and these narrow hips. . . .

I would like to go before she awakens. Alas! I am against the wall. I must step over her. I am afraid lest I touch her hip and that she will take me as I pass.

XLVII

THE DANCE OF GLOTTIS AND KYSE

TWO little girls carried me away to their house and, with the door firmly closed, they lit, at the fire, the wick of a lamp, and wished to dance for me.

Their cheeks were not painted and were brown as their little bellies. They pulled each other by the arms and talked at the same time in an agony of gaiety.

Seated on a mattress raised upon two trestles, Glottis sang in a sharp voice and struck the measures with her sonorous little hands.

Kyse danced shakily, then stopped, suffocated with laughter, took her sister by the breasts, bit her on the shoulder and overthrew her like a goat which wishes to play.

XLVIII

COUNSELS

THEN Syllikmas entered and, seeing us so familiar, seated herself upon the bench. She took Glottis upon one knee, Kyse on the other, and said:

"Come here, little one." But I remained away. She resumed: "Art thou afraid of us? Approach: these children love thee. They will teach thee something thou knowest not: the honey of a woman's caresses.

"Man is violent and lazy. Doubtless thou knowest this. Avoid him. He has a flat chest, a rough skin, short hair, shaggy arms. But women are altogether beautiful.

"Women alone know how to love. Stay with us, Bilitis, stay. And if thou hast an ardent soul, thou wilt see thy beauty, as in a mirror, upon the bodies of the women thou lovest."

XLIX

UNCERTAINTY

I KNOW not whether I should espouse Glottis or Kyse. As they are not like each other, one would not console me for the other, and I fear lest I choose badly.

Each holds one of my hands and one of my breasts also. But to which shall I give my mouth? To which shall I give my heart and all that one cannot divide?

It is shameful to remain thus, all three in the same house. They talk of it in Mytilene. Yesterday, before the temple of Ares, a woman who passed did not say: "Greeting."

It is Glottis whom I prefer; but I cannot reject Kyse. What would become of her, all alone? Shall I leave them as they were and shall I take another friend?

L

THE MEETING

I HAVE found her, like a treasure, in a field, under a bush of myrtle, enveloped from throat to feet in a yellow peplos broidered with blue.

"I have no friend," she said; "for the nearest city is forty stadia from here. I live alone with my mother, who is a widow and always sad. If thou wishest, I will follow thee.

"I will follow thee to thy house, though it be at the other side of the island, and I will live with thee until thou sendest me away. Thy hand is tender and thine eyes are blue.

"Let us go. I carry nothing with me but this little naked Astarte which hangs from my necklace. We will put it near thine and we will give them roses in recompense for each night."

LI

THE LITTLE TERRA-COTTA ASTARTE

THE little guardian Astarte which protects Mnasidika was modeled at Camiros by a skilful potter. She is large as a thumb and of fine yellow earth.

Her hair falls back and curls upon her narrow shoulders. Her eyes are cut very long and her mouth is very small. For she is the Most-Beautiful.

With her right hand she points to her delta which is worked with little holes on the lower belly and along the groins. For she is the Most-Amorous-One.

With her left arm, she supports her heavy, rounded breasts. Between her wide hips protrudes a fecund belly. For she is the Mother-Of-All-Things.

LII

DESIRE

SHE entered and, passionately, her eyes half closed, she united her lips with mine and our tongues touched each other. . . . Never was there in my life a kiss like that one.

She stood against me, all love and consentment. One of my knees, little by little, gave way as though for a lover.

My hand wandered over her tunic, seeking to divine the hidden body which, by turns, undulating, yielded or, arching, stiffened with shiverings of the skin.

With her eyes in delirium, she pointed toward the bed; but we had not the right to love before the ceremony of wedding, and we separated brusquely.

LIII

THE WEDDING

IN the morning they had the wedding feast [12] at the house of Acalanthis whom she had adopted for a mother. Mnasidika wore the white veil and I the male tunic.

Then, amidst twenty women, she put on her robes of festival. Perfumed with bakkaris, sifted with powder of gold, her cool and animated skin attracted furtive hands.

In her chamber filled with foliage, she waited for me like a spouse. And I carried her away on a chariot between myself and the nymphagogue. One of her little breasts burned in my hand.

They chanted the nuptial song; the flutes played also. I carried Mnasidika under the shoulders and under the knees, and we crossed the rose-covered threshold.

LIV

THE PAST WHICH SURVIVES

I WILL leave the bed as she has left it, unmade and rumpled, the covers tangled, so that the form of her body may remain impressed beside mine.

Until tomorrow, I will not go to the bath, I will not wear any garments, I will not comb my hair, for fear lest I efface her caresses.

This morning, I will not eat, nor this evening; and upon my lips

I will place neither rouge nor powder, in order that her kiss may remain.

I will leave the shutters closed and I will not open the door, for fear lest the remembrance which she has left might fly out upon the wind.

LV

METAMORPHOSIS

FORMERLY I was amorous of the beauty of young men and the remembrance of their words kept me awake.

I remember having graven a name in the bark of a plane tree. I remember having left a strip of my tunic in a path where someone would pass.

I remember having loved . . . O Pannychis, my babe, in what hands have I left thee? How, O unfortunate one, have I abandoned thee!

Today and forever, Mnasidika alone possesses me. May she receive, as a sacrifice, the happiness of those whom I have deserted for her.

LVI

THE NAMELESS TOMB

MNASIDIKA took me by the hand and led me outside the gates of the city, to a little uncultivated field where there was a marble stele. And she said: "This was the lover of my mother."

Then I felt a great shiver and, still holding her by the hand, I leaned upon her shoulder in order to read the four lines between the broken cup and the serpent:

"It is not death which has carried me away, but the Nymphs of the fountains. I rest here under the light earth with the severed hair of Xantho. Let her alone weep for me. I tell not my name."

For a long time we remained standing, and we did not pour a libation. For how could we call an unknown soul from the throngs of Hades?

LVII

THE THREE BEAUTIES OF MNASIDIKA

SO that Mnasidika may be protected by the gods, I have sacrificed to the Aphrodite-Who-Loves-The-Smiles, two male hares and two doves.

And I have sacrificed to Ares two cocks armed for fighting, and to sinister Hekate two dogs that howled under the knife.

And it is not without reason that I have implored these three

immortals, for Mnasidika carries on her countenance the reflection of their triple divinity.

Her lips are red like copper, her hair bluish like iron, and her eyes black like silver.

LVIII

THE CAVE OF THE NYMPHS

THY feet are more delicate than those of silvery Thetis. Between thy crossed arms thou unitest thy breasts, cradling them softly like the bodies of two beautiful doves.

Beneath thy hair thou dissemblest thy moist eyes, thy trembling mouth and the pink flowers of thine ears; but nothing stops my regard nor the warm breath of my kiss.

For, in the secret of thy body, it is thou, Mnasidika, beloved, who hidest the Cave of the Nymphs[18] of which old Homer spoke: the place where the naiads weave their purple linens:

The place where glide, drop by drop, the inexhaustible springs, and where the gate of the North lets men descend and the gate of the South lets immortals enter.

LIX

MNASIDIKA'S BREASTS

CAREFULLY, with one hand, she opened her tunic and offered me her warm, sweet breasts, as one would offer to the goddess a pair of living turtle-doves.

"Love them well," she said to me. "I love them so much! They are cherished, little children. I busy myself with them when I am alone. I play with them; I give them pleasure.

"I douche them with milk. I powder them with flowers. My soft hair, which dries them, is dear to their little points. I caress them, and shiver. I enfold them in wool.

"Because I shall never have children, be their nursling, my love; and, because they are so far from my mouth, give them kisses for me."

LX

THE DOLL

I HAVE given her a doll, a doll of wax with rosy cheeks. Its arms are attached by little pegs and even its legs can move.

When we are together, she couches it between us and it is our child. In the evening she cradles it and gives it the breast before putting it to sleep.

She has woven it three little tunics and we gave it jewels on the day of the Aphrodisian Festival; jewels and flowers also.

She watches over its virtue and will not let it go out without her; not in the sun, above all, for the little doll would melt into drops of wax.

LXI

TENDERNESSES

CLOSE thine arms; gently, like a girdle about me. O touch, touch my skin thus! Neither water nor the breeze of noontide are so soft as thy hand.

Today, cherish me, little sister; it is thy turn. Remember thou the tendernesses which I taught thee in the night past, and kneel thou near me, silently, for I am weary.

Thy lips descend upon my lips. All thine unbound hair follows them like a caress after a kiss. It glides over my left breast, it hides thine eyes from me.

Give me thy hand; it is hot. Press mine; hold it always. Hands better than mouths unite, and their passion is equaled by nothing.

LXII

GAMES

MORE than her toys or her doll, I am a play-thing for her. With all parts of my body, she amuses herself like a child, through the long hours, without speaking.

She loosens my hair and reforms it according to her caprice, knotting it under my chin like a thick cloth, or twisting it upon the nape of my neck, or braiding it to the end.

She regards with astonishment the color of my lashes, the fold of my elbow. Sometimes she makes me kneel and place my hands upon the rugs.

Then (it is one of her games) she slips her little head underneath and imitates the trembling kid which sucks from the belly of its mother.

LXIII

PENUMBRA

UNDERNEATH the cover of transparent wool, we slipped, she and I. Even our heads were covered, and the lamp illumined the cloth above us.

Thus I saw her dear body in a mysterious light. We were very near, one to the other, more free, more intimate, more naked. "In the same chiton," she said.

We had left our hair bound up in order to be still more uncovered, and in the close air of the bed, the odors of two women ascended, of two natural cassolettes.

Nothing in the world, not even the lamp, saw us that night. Which of us was loved, she alone, and I, could say. But the men shall know nothing of it.

LXIV

THE SLEEPER

SHE sleeps in her unbound hair, her hands joined behind her neck. Does she dream? Her mouth is open; she breathes gently.

With a bit of white swan's-down, I wipe away the perspiration of her arms, the fever of her cheeks, but without awakening her. Her closed eyelids are two blue flowers.

Very softly, I will arise; I will go draw water, milk the cow and ask fire of the neighbors. I would arrange my hair and dress before she opens her eyes.

Sleep, dwell for long between her fair, curved eyelids, and continue the happy night with a dream of good augury.

LXV

THE KISS

I WILL kiss, from one end to the other, the long dark waves spreading from thy neck, O sweet bird, captive dove, whose heart bounds beneath my hand.

I will take thy lips within my lips as an infant takes the breast of its mother. Shudder! ... for the kiss penetrates deeply and suffices love.

I will move my tongue lightly along thine arms and upon thy neck; and I will wind along thy tender sides the lengthening caress of my nails.

Hear, roaring in thine ears, all the rumor of the sea . . . Mnasidika! Thy look makes me suffer. Like thy lips, I would enclose thy burning eyelids with my kiss.

LXVI

JEALOUS CARE

Do not arrange thy hair, for fear lest the over-heated iron burn thy neck or thy locks. Leave it upon thy shoulders and spread over thine arms.

Do not dress thyself, for fear lest the girdle redden the slender folds of thy hips. Remain naked, like a little girl.

Do not ever rise, for fear lest thy tender feet be injured in walking. Remain in the bed, O victim of Eros, and I will dress thy poor wound.

For I would not see upon thy body other marks, Mnasidika, than the stain of a prolonged kiss, the scratch of a sharp nail, or the reddening bar of my embrace.

LXVII

THE DISTRACTED EMBRACE

Love me, not with smiles, flutes, or woven flowers, but with thy heart and thy tears, as I love thee with my breast and my lamentations.

When thy breasts alternate with my breasts, when I feel thy life touching my life, when thy knees draw up behind me, then my panting mouth knows not how more to unite with thine.

Clasp me as I clasp thee! See, the lamp has died out; we roll about in the night; but I press thy moving body and I hear thy perpetual plaint. . . .

Moan! moan! moan! O woman! Eros leads us in sorrow. Thou wilt suffer less on the bed in bringing a child into the world than when giving birth to thy love.

LXVIII

THE HEART

Panting, I take her hand and press it against the moist skin of my left breast. And I turn my head here and there and I move my lips without speaking.

My disordered heart, abrupt and hard, beats and beats in my breast as an imprisoned satyr would knock, imprisoned in a leathern bottle. She says to me: "Thy heart makes thee ill...."

"O Mnasidika," I respond, "The heart of a woman is not there. That is only a poor bird, a dove which stirs its feeble wings. The heart of a woman is more terrible.

"Like a little myrtle berry, it burns with a red flame and under an abundant foam. It is there that I feel myself bitten by voracious Aphrodite."

LXIX

WORDS IN THE NIGHT

We rest, our eyes closed: the silence is deep about our couch. Ineffable nights of summer! But she, believing me asleep, lays her warm hand upon my arm.

She murmurs: "Bilitis, thou sleepest?" My heart throbs, but, without response, I respire regularly like a woman couched in dreams. Then she begins to speak:

"Because thou hearest me not," she says, "Ah! How I love thee." And she repeats my name: "Bilitis... Bilitis...." And she touches me with the tips of her trembling fingers.

"It is mine, this mouth! Mine alone! Is there another so beautiful in the world? Ah! My happiness, my happiness! Mine are these naked arms, this neck, this hair...."

LXX

ABSENCE

She has gone out, she is far away, but I see her, for all things in this chamber are full of her, all belong to her, and I, like the rest.

This bed, still warm, over which I let my mouth stray, is impressed with the form of her body. On this soft pillow has lain her little head enveloped in her hair.

This is the basin in which she has bathed, this comb has penetrated the knots of her tangled hair. These slippers have received her naked feet. These pockets of gauze have enclosed her breasts.

But that which I dare not touch with my finger is the mirror in which she has seen her fiery bruises and in which, perhaps, still exists the reflection of her moist lips.

LXXI

LOVE

ALAS! If I think of her, my throat becomes dry,[14] my head droops, my breasts harden and pain me, I shiver and I weep as I walk.

If I see her, my heart stops, my hands tremble, my feet grow cold, a blush of fire mounts to my cheeks, my temples throb grievously.

If I touch her, I become mad, my arms stiffen, my knees falter. I fall before her and lie like a woman about to die.

Whenever she speaks to me, I am wounded. Her love is a torture and the passers-by hear my plaints.... Alas! How can I call her Well-Belovèd?

LXXII

PURIFICATION

THERE thou art! Take off thy ribbons and thy clasps and thy tunic. Remove even thy sandals, even the ribbons from thy legs, even the band from thy breast.

Wash the black from thine eyebrows and the red from thy lips. Efface the white from thy shoulders and uncurl thy hair in the water.

For I would have thee all pure as thou wert born upon the bed at the feet of thy fecund mother and before thy proud father.

So chaste that my hand in thy hand will make thee blush even to thy lips and one word of mine in thine ear will enflame thy wandering eyes.

LXXIII

THE CRADLE OF MNASIDIKA

MY little child, though I may have so few years more than thee, I love thee, not as a lover but as though thou hadst come forth from my laboring entrails.

When, stretched upon my knees, thy two frail arms about me, thou seekest my breast, thy mouth clinging, pressing my nipples slowly between thy palpitating lips:

Then I dream that, in former times, I truly nursed this delicate mouth, supple and moist, this vase of crimson murrhine in which the happiness of Bilitis is mysteriously enclosed.

Sleep. I will cradle thee with one hand upon my knee which

rocks thee. Sleep so. I will sing for thee little mournful songs which bring sleep to the newly-born.

LXXIV

A WALK BY THE SEA

As we were walking upon the shore, without speaking and enveloped to the chin in our robes of sombre wool, joyous young girls passed by.

"Ah! It is Bilitis and Mnasidika! See the pretty little squirrel we have caught; it is soft as a bird and timid as a rabbit.

"At Lydia's house we will put it in a cage and give it plenty of milk with lettuce leaves. It is a female; she will live a long time."

And the care-free ones departed, running. As for us, without speaking we seated ourselves, I upon a rock, she upon the sand, and we gazed at the sea.

LXXV

THE OBJECT

"GREETING, Bilitis, Mnasidika, greeting.—Be seated. How is thy husband?—Too well. Do not tell him that you have seen me. He would slay me if he knew I had been here. Have no fear."

"And this is your chamber? And this your bed? Pardon me: I am curious.—Thou knowest, however, the bed of Myrrhina.—So little.—It is said to be pretty.—And lascivious. Oh my dear! But we conceal it."

"What wishest thou of me?—That thou lend me . . .—Speak.—I dare not name the object.[15]—We do not have one.—Truly?—Mnasidika is a virgin.—Then where can one buy it?—From the harness-maker, Drakon."

"Tell me also where thou buyest thy thread for embroidery. Mine breaks if one looks at it.—I make it myself, but that which Nais sells is excellent.—At what price?—Three oboli.—It is dear. And the object?—Two drachmæ.—Farewell."

LXXVI

EVENING NEAR THE FIRE

THE winter is hard, Mnasidika. All is frozen except our bed. But arise and come with me, for I have lit a great fire with dead branches and broken wood.

We will warm ourselves, crouching quite naked, our hair over our backs, and we will drink milk from the same cup and we will eat cakes with honey.

How gay and noisy the flame is! Art thou not too near? Thy skin reddens. Let me kiss it wherever the fire has burned it.

Amidst the ardent firebrands, I will heat the iron and I will dress thy hair here. With a dead ember I will write thy name upon the wall.

LXXVII

ENTREATIES

WHAT dost thou wish? Say. If it is necessary, I will sell my last jewels so that an attentive slave may wait upon the desire of thine eyes and every thirst of thy lips.

If the milk of our goats seems insipid to thee, I will hire for thee, as for an infant, a nurse with swollen breasts who will suckle thee each morning.

If our bed seems rough to thee, I will buy all the soft cushions, all the coverlets of silk, all the feather-woven cloths, of the Amathusian merchants.

All. But I should suffice thee; and though we slept upon the earth, thou shouldst find it softer than the warm bed of a stranger.

LXXVIII

THE EYES

GREAT eyes of Mnasidika, how happy you make me when love darkens your lids and quickens you and shadows you with tears.

But how maddened, when you turn elsewhere, distracted by a woman who passes or by a remembrance which is not mine.

Then my cheeks hollow themselves, my hands tremble, and I suffer.... Before you, life seems to leave all my members.

Great eyes of Mnasidika, cease not to regard me, or I will pierce you with my needle and then you will see only the terrible night.

LXXIX

FARDS

ALL, all my life, and the world, and the men: all that is not of her is nothing. All that is not of her, I give to thee, passer-by.

Does she know the labors I accomplish to be fair in her eyes, with my hair and with my fards, with my robes and my perfumes?

As long a time I would turn a mill-stone, I would wield an oar or dig in the earth, if it were a necessary price to retain her here.

But may she never know, Goddesses who watch over us. The day on which she learns that I love her, she will seek another woman.

LXXX

THE SILENCE OF MNASIDIKA

SHE had laughed all the day, and she even had mocked me a little. She had refused to obey me before many strange women.

When we returned, I affected not to speak to her, and as she cast herself upon my neck, saying: "Thou art offended?" I said to her:

"Ah! Thou art no longer as formerly, thou art no longer as on the first day. I no longer recognize thee, Mnasidika." She did not respond to me.

But she put on all the jewels which she had not worn for a long time, and the same yellow robe, broidered with blue, as on the day of our meeting.

LXXXI

SCENE

"WHERE wert thou?—At the flower-merchant's. I bought some very beautiful irises. Here they are, I have brought them to thee.—In so long a time thou hast bought four flowers?—The merchant-woman detained me.

"Thy cheeks are pale and thine eyes brilliant.—It is fatigue from the walk.—Thy hair is moist [16] and tangled.—It is the heat and the wind which blew down my hair.

"Someone has untied thy girdle. I made the knot myself, looser than this one.—So loose that it became undone; a slave who was passing retied it for me.

"There is a spot upon thy robe.—It is water which has fallen from the flowers.—Mnasidika, my little soul, thine irises are fairer than any in all Mytilene.—That I know well; that I know well."

LXXXII

WAITING

THE sun has passed all the night among the dead, while I have waited, seated upon my bed, weary from watching. The wick of the exhausted lamp has burned to the end.

She will not return; there is the last star. I know well that she will not return. I know even the name that I hate. Nevertheless, I still wait.

If she might come now! Yes, if she might come, her hair disordered and without roses, her robe soiled, spotted, rumpled, her tongue dry and her eyelids black!

When she opened the door, I would say to her... but here she is.... This is her robe that I touch, her hands, her hair, her skin! I kiss her with distracted lips and I weep.

LXXXIII

SOLITUDE

For whom, now, shall I fard my lips? [17] For whom shall I polish my nails? For whom shall I perfume my hair?

For whom are my breasts powdered with rouge, if they no longer tempt her? For whom are my arms laved with milk, if they may never more embrace her?

How can I sleep? How can I lie upon the bed? This evening, my hand, in all my bed, could not find her warm hand.

I dare not return to my house, to the chamber so frightfully empty. I dare not reopen the door. I dare not even reopen mine eyes.

LXXXIV

A LETTER

It is impossible, impossible. I pray thee upon my knees, with tears, all the tears I have wept over this horrible letter, not to abandon me thus.

Consider thou how terrible it is to lose thee forever for a second time, after having had the great joy of hoping to reconquer thee. Ah! My love! Thou knowest not to what point I have adored thee!

Hear me. Consent to see me once more. Wilt thou be, tomorrow, at sunset, before thy door? Tomorrow, or the day following? I will come to take thee. Do not refuse me this.

The last time, perhaps; be it so; but once more, this once more! I demand it of thee, I beg it of thee. Reflect that, upon thy reply, the rest of my life depends.

LXXXV

THE ATTEMPT

THOU wert jealous of us, Gyrinno, too ardent girl. How many garlands didst thou suspend from the knocker of our door! Thou didst wait for us in the passage and thou didst follow us in the streets.

Now thou art, according to thy vows, extended upon the loved place and thy head is upon the pillow about which floats the odor of another woman. Thou art larger than she was. Thy different body startles me.

See! I have yielded at last. Yes, it is I. Thou mayest play with my breasts, caress my belly, open my knees. All my body surrenders to thy tireless lips—Alas!

Ah! Gyrinno! With love my tears also overflow. Wipe them with thy hair; do not kiss them, my dear; and enlace me closer yet, to still my tremblings.

LXXXVI

THE EFFORT

AGAIN! Enough of sighs and of outstretched arms! Recommence! Thinkest thou, then, that love is a recreation? Gyrinno, it is a task, and of all the most rude.

Awaken, thou! Thou shalt not sleep! What care I for thy blue eyelids and the bar of pain which burns thy thin legs! Astarte seethes in my loins.

We entered our couch before twilight. Behold already the wicked dawn; but I am not wearied with so little. I will not sleep before the second evening.

I will not sleep; nor shalt thou sleep. Oh! How bitter is the taste of morning! Appreciate it, Gyrinno. The embraces are more difficult, but stranger and softer.

LXXXVII

TO GYRINNO

THINK not that I have loved thee. I have eaten thee like a ripe fig, I have drunk thee like an ardent water, I have carried thee about me like a girdle of skin.

I have amused myself with thy body, because thou hast short

hair, pointed breasts upon thy lean chest, and nipples black like two little dates.

Like water and fruits, a woman also is necessary; but already I no longer know thy name, thou who hast passed through my arms like the shadow of another adored one.

Between thy flesh and mine, a burning dream has possessed me. I pressed thee upon me as upon a wound, and I cried: "Mnasidika! Mnasidika! Mnasidika!"

LXXXVIII

THE LAST ESSAY

"WHAT wishest thou, old woman?—To console thee.—It is useless trouble.—They have told me that since thy separation, thou goest from love to love, finding no forgetfulness nor peace. I have come to offer thee someone.

"Speak.—It is a young slave, born at Sardis. She has no equal in the world, for she is at the same time man and woman, although her chest, her long hair and her clear voice produce the illusion.

"Her age?—Sixteen years.—Her stature?—Tall. She has known no one here except Psappha who loves her desperately and would buy her of me for twenty minæ. If thou wilt hire her, she is thine.—And what should I do with her?

"Behold, for twenty-two nights I have essayed in vain to escape from memory.... Be it so; I will take this one more. But warn the poor little one, that she be not frightened if I sob in her arms."

LXXXIX

THE WOUNDING MEMORY

I REMEMBER . . . (at what hour of the day is it not before my eyes!) I remember the manner in which She lifted her hair with her pale, slender fingers.

I remember one night which she passed, her cheek upon my breast, so softly that happiness held me awake; and on the day following she had upon her face the mark of my rounded nipple.

I see her holding her cup of milk and regarding me sideways, with a smile. I see her, powdered, her hair dressed, opening her great eyes before her mirror and retouching with her finger the red of her lips.

And, above all, if my despair is a perpetual torture, it is because

I know, moment by moment, how she swoons in the arms of another, what she demands of her and what she gives her.

XC

TO THE WAX DOLL

DOLL of wax, dear plaything which she called her child, she left thee also, and she has forgotten thee like myself who, with her, was thy father or thy mother, I know not which.

The pressure of her lips has faded thy little cheeks; and here, on thy left hand, is the broken finger which made her weep so much. This little cyclas which thou wearest, it was she who broidered it for thee.

She said thou couldst already read. Nevertheless, thou wert not weaned and, in the evening, bending over thee, she would open her tunic and give thee the breast, "so that thou wouldst not cry," she would say.

Doll, if I wished to see her again, I would give thee to Aphrodite, as the dearest of my gifts. But I wish to think that she is wholly dead.

XCI

FUNEREAL CHANT

SING a funereal chant, Muses of Mytilene, sing! The earth is sombre like a vestment of mourning and the yellow trees quiver like severed hair.

Heraïos! O sweet and sorrowful month! The leaves fall gently like snow; the sun penetrates more deeply into the thinning forest.... I hear nothing more, but the silence.

Behold, they have carried Pittakos, laden with years, to the tomb. Many whom I knew are dead. And she who lives is to me as though she were no longer.

This is the tenth autumn I have seen dying upon this plain. It is time I also vanished away. Weep with me, Muses of Mytilene; weep upon my steps!

III. EPIGRAMS IN THE ISLE OF KYPROS

Αλλά με ναρκίσοις ἀναδήσατε, καὶ πλαγιαύλων
γεύσατε καὶ κροκίνοις χρίσατε γυῖα μύροις.
Καὶ Μυτιληναίῳ τὸν πνεύμονα τέγξατε Βάκχῳ
καὶ συζεύξατε μοι ψωλάδα παρθενικήν.

PHILODEMOS [18]

XCII

HYMN TO ASTARTE

MOTHER inexhaustible, incorruptible, creatrix, first-born, self-engendered, self-conceived, issue of thyself alone and rejoicing in thyself: Astarte!

O perpetually fecund, O virgin and nurse of all, chaste and lascivious, pure and fruitive, ineffable, nocturnal, soft, breather of fire, foam of the sea!

Thou who accordest favors in secret, thou who unitest, thou who lovest, thou who possessest in furious desire the multiple races of savage beasts and joinest the sexes in the forests!

O Astarte, irresistible, hear me, take me, possess me, O moon; and, thirteen times each year, draw from my entrails the libation of my blood!

XCIII

HYMN TO THE NIGHT

THE black masses of the trees are immovable as the mountains. The stars fill the vast sky. A warm breeze like a human breath caresses my eyes and my cheeks.

O Night, who gavest birth to the Gods! How sweet thou art upon my lips! How warm thou art in my hair! How thou enterest into me now, and how I feel myself pregnant with all thy springtime!

The flowers that shall blossom shall all be born of me. The

wind which respires is my breath; the perfume which passes is my desire. All the stars are in mine eyes.

Thy voice: is it the roar of the sea? Is it the silence of the plain? Thy voice: I comprehend it not, but it bends my head to the ground, and my tears lave my two hands.

XCIV

THE MENADES

THROUGH the forests that dominate the sea, the Menades hurtled. Maskale, with hot breasts, shrieked, brandishing the phallos of sycamore smeared with vermilion.

All, under their bassaris skins and their crowns of vine branches, ran and cried and leapt, the krotales clapping in their hands and the thyrsi [10] cracking the skins of the resounding drums.

With wetted hair, agile legs, reddened and crowding breasts, sweating cheeks, foaming lips, O Dionysos, they offered thee again the love thou didst cast within them.

And the wind of the sea lifted toward the sky the ruddy hair of Helikomis, twisting it like a furious flame upon a torch of white wax.

XCV

THE SEA OF KYPRIS

ON the highest promontory, I stretched myself out. The sea was dark as a field of violets. The milky-way gushed out from the great divine breast.

A thousand Menades slept about me in the mangled flowers. The long grasses mingled with their hair. And then, behold, the sun was born from the waters of the East.

They were the same waters and the same shores that, one day, saw appear the white body of Aphrodite.... Suddenly, I hid my eyes in my hands.

For I had seen, trembling upon the water, a thousand tiny lips of light: the pure sex or the smile of Kypris Philommeïdes.

XCVI

THE PRIESTESSES OF ASTARTE

THE priestesses of Astarte make love at the rising of the then they arise and bathe in a vast basin with a marge of silver.

With their curved fingers, they comb their hair; and their hands, tinted with crimson, blended with their black curls, seem like branches of coral in a sombre and undulating sea.

They never depilate themselves, so that the triangle of the Goddess marks their belly as on a temple; but they paint themselves with brushes and perfume themselves deeply.

The priestesses of Astarte make love at the setting of the moon; then, in a carpeted hall where burns a tall, gold lamp, they stretch themselves out at random.

XCVII

THE MYSTERIES

WITHIN the thrice-mysterious enclosure where the men never enter, we made a festival for thee, Astarte of the Night, Mother of the World, Fountain of the Life of the Gods!

I will reveal something, but not more than is permitted. About a Phallos crowned, an hundred women rocked, shrieking. The initiates were in men's vestments, the others in divided tunics.

The smoke of perfumes, the fumes of torches, wavered between us like clouds. I wept burning tears. All, at the feet of the Berbeia, we cast ourselves upon our backs.

At last, when the religious Act was consummated and when, into the Unique Triangle, had been plunged the crimson Phallos, the mystery commenced; but I will tell no more.

XCVIII

THE EGYPTIAN COURTESANS

I HAVE been, with Plango, among the Egyptian courtesans, at the highest part of the old city. They have amphoras of earth, plates of copper, and yellow matting where they squat without effort.

Their chambers are silent, without angles and without corners, so much their successive coatings of blue lime have blunted the pillars and rounded the base of the walls.

They sit motionless, their hands resting on their knees. When they offer food, they murmur: "Happiness." And when one thanks them, they say: "Grace to thee."

They understand Hellenic but feign to speak it badly so as to laugh at us in their own tongue; but we, (a tooth for a tooth) we speak Lydian and they are suddenly uneasy.

XCIX

I SING OF MY FLESH AND MY LIFE

SURELY I shall not sing of celebrated lovers. If they are no more, why speak of them? Am I not like them? Have I not enough to think of in myself?

I will forget thee, Pasiphaë, although thy passion was extreme. I will not praise thee, Syrinx, nor thee, Byblis, nor thee, chosen among all by the Goddess, Helen of the white arms!

If anyone has suffered, I scarcely know it. If anyone has loved, I love more. I sing of my flesh and my life, and not of the sterile shadows of buried lovers.

Rest upon thy bed, O my body, according to thy voluptuous mission! Taste thy daily enjoyments and the passions without a to-morrow. Leave not a delight unknown to be regretted on the day of thy death.

C

THE PERFUMES

I WILL perfume all my skin to attract lovers. Upon my fair legs, in a basin of silver, I will pour the spikenard of Tarsos and the metopion of Egypt.

Under my arms, crisp mint; upon my lashes and upon my eyes, sweet-marjoram of Kôs. Slave, loosen my hair and fill it with the smoke of incense.

Here is œnanthium from the mountains of Kypros; I will let it run between my breasts; this liquor of roses, which comes from Phaselis, shall perfume my neck and my cheeks.

And now, pour upon my loins the irresistible bakkaris. It is better, for a courtesan, to know the perfumes of Lydia than the ways of the Peloponnesos.

CI

CONVERSATION[20]

"GOOD morning.—Good morning, also.—Thou art in a great hurry.—Perhaps less than thou thinkest.—Thou art a pretty girl.—Perhaps more so than thou believest."

"What is thy charming name?—I do not tell that so quickly.—

Thou hast someone this evening?—Always the one who loves me. —And how dost thou love him?—As he wishes."

"Let us sup together.—If thou wishest it. But what wilt thou give?—This.—Five drachmæ? It is for my slave. And for me?— Say it thyself.—An hundred."

"Where livest thou?—In this blue house.—At what hour dost thou wish me to send for thee?—At once, if thou wishest.—At once. —Go before."

CII

THE TORN ROBE

"Ho there! By the two goddesses, who is the insolent one who has put his foot upon my robe?—It is a lover.—It is a blockhead. —I have been awkward; pardon me."

"Imbecile! My yellow robe is all torn in the back, and if I walk thus in the street, they will take me for a poor girl who serves Kypris inversely."

"Wilt thou not stop?—I believe that he speaks to me again!— Why dost thou leave me, thus angered? ... Thou respondest not? Alas! I dare speak no more."

"I certainly must return to my house to change my robe.—And may I not follow thee?—Who is thy father?—He is the wealthy ship-owner, Nikias.—Thou hast fine eyes; I pardon thee."

CIII

THE JEWELS

A DIADEM of fretted gold crowns my straight, white forehead. Five chains of gold which follow the curve of my cheeks and chin, are suspended from my hair by two large clasps.

Upon my arms, which Iris would envy, thirteen silver bracelets are ranged. How heavy they are! But they are weapons; and I know one enemy who has suffered from them.

I am truly all covered with gold. My breasts are cuirassed with two pectorals of gold. Even the images of the gods have not more riches than I.

And I wear over my heavy robe a girdle [21] worked with silver wire. There thou canst read this verse: "Love me eternally; but be not afflicted if I deceive thee three times each day."

CIV

INDIFFERENCE

WHEN he has entered my chamber, whoever he may be, (this matters nothing): "See," I say to my slave, "what a handsome man! And should not a courtesan be happy?"

I declare he is Adonis, Ares or Herakles, according to his countenance; or The Old Man of the Sea, if his hair is pale silver. And then what disdain for trifling youth!

"Ah!" I say, "If I had not to pay my florist and my goldsmith tomorrow, how I would love to say to thee: I do not wish thy gold! I am thy passionate servant!"

Then, when he has clasped his arms beneath my shoulders, I see a boatman [22] pass like a divine image over the starry sky of my transparent lids.

CV

PURE WATER OF THE BASIN

"PURE water of the basin, immobile mirror, tell me of my beauty. —Bilitis, or whoever thou art, Tethys perhaps, or Amphitrite, thou art beautiful, thou knowest.

"Thy face inclines beneath thy thick hair which is heavy with flowers and perfumes. Thy soft eyelids scarcely open, and thy flanks are weary from the movements of love.

"Thy body, fatigued with the weight of thy breasts, bears the fine marks of nails and the blue stains of the kiss. Thine arms are reddened from the embrace. Each line of thy skin was loved.

"Clear water of the basin, thy freshness brings repose. Receive me, who am truly wearied. Take away the fard of my cheeks and the sweat of my body and the remembrance of the night."

CVI

VOLUPTUOUSNESS

UPON a white terrace, in the night, they left us, swooning among the roses. Warm sweat ran like tears from our armpits, over our breasts. Overwhelming voluptuousness purpled our prostrate heads.

Four captive doves, bathed in four perfumes, fluttered above us

in the silence. From their wings, drops of perfume fell upon the naked women. I was overrun with the essence of iris.

O lassitude! I rested my cheek upon the belly of a young girl who enveloped herself in the coolness of my moist hair. The perfume of her saffroned skin intoxicated my opened mouth. She closed her thighs about my neck.

I slept, but an exhausting dream awakened me; the iynx, bird of nocturnal desires, sang distractedly from afar. I coughed with a shiver. Little by little, a languishing arm like a flower raised itself in the air toward the moon.

CVII

THE INN

INNKEEPER, we are four. Give us a chamber and two beds. It is now too late to return to the city, and the rain has broken the road.

Bring a basket of figs, some cheese, and dark wine; but first remove my sandals and bathe my feet, for the mud tickles me.

Send to the chamber two basins with water, a full lamp, a krater and kylix. Shake thou the covers and beat the cushions.

But let the beds be of good maple and the planks noiseless! Tomorrow thou needst not awaken us.

CVIII

THE SERVANTS

FOUR slaves guard my house: two robust Thracians at my door, a Sicilian in my kitchen, and a docile and silent Phrygian woman for the service of my bed.

The two Thracians are handsome men. Each has a staff in his hand to chase away poor lovers and a hammer to nail upon the wall the garlands which are sent me.

The Sicilian is a rare cook; I paid twelve minæ for him. No one knows as he does how to prepare fried croquettes and cakes of poppy.

The Phrygian bathes me, dresses my hair and depilates me. She sleeps in the morning in my chamber, and, three times each month, she takes my place with my lovers.

CIX

THE BATH

CHILD, guard well the door and let no passer-by enter, for I and six girls with beautiful arms would bathe ourselves in secret in the warm water of the basin.

We wish only to laugh and swim. Let the lovers stay in the street. We will dip our legs in the water and, seated upon the marble brink, we will play with dice.

We will play also with the ball. Let no lovers enter; our hair is too wet, our throats have goose-flesh and the ends of our fingers are wrinkled.

Moreover, he would repent it, he who surprised us naked! Bilitis is not Athena,[23] but she shows herself only at her hours and chastises too ardent eyes.

CX

TO HER BREASTS

FLOWERS of flesh, O my breasts! How rich in voluptuousness you are! My breasts in my hands, how soft you are, how gently warm, how youthfully perfumed!

Formerly you were frozen like the breast of a statue and hard as the insensate marble. Since you have softened, I cherish you more, you who have been so loved.

Your sleek, rounded forms are the honor of my brown torso. Whether I imprison you in golden lace or whether I deliver you all naked, you precede me with your splendor.

Therefore, be happy, this night. If my fingers give forth caresses, you alone shall know them until tomorrow morning; for, this night, Bilitis has paid Bilitis.

CXI

MYDZOURIS

MYDZOURIS, little filth, weep not. Thou art my friend. If the women insult thee again, it is I who will answer them. Come into my arms and dry thine eyes.

Yes, I know thou art a horrible child and that thy mother taught thee early to prove thy courage in all things. But thou art young and therefore thou canst do nothing that is not charming.

The mouth of a girl of fifteen remains pure in spite of all. The lips of a gray-haired woman, even if virgin, are degraded; for the only disgrace is to grow old and we are blemished only by wrinkles.

Mydzouris, I admire thy frank eyes, thine impudent and bold name, thy laughing voice and thy light body. Come to my house, thou shalt be my aid and, when we go out together, the women shall say to thee: "Greeting."

CXII

THE TRIUMPH OF BILITIS

IN the procession they carried me in triumph, me, Bilitis, all naked upon a car formed like a shell, into which slaves, during the night, had placed the blooms of ten thousand roses.

I reclined, my hands under my neck, my feet alone clad in gold, and my body outstretched softly upon the bed of my warm hair mingled with cool petals.

Twelve children, with wings on their shoulders, served me as a goddess; one of them held a shade, the others showered me with perfume or burned incense in the prow.

And all about me I heard rustling the ardent murmur of the multitude, while the breath of desire floated about my nudity in the blue fog of the aromatics.

CXIII

TO A GOD OF WOOD

O VENERABLE Priapos, god of wood whom I have fastened in the marble border of my bath, it is not without reason, guardian of orchards, that thou art watching here over the courtesans.

God, we did not buy thee to sacrifice our virginities to thee. No one can give that which is no more, and the zealots of Pallas run not in the streets of Amathus.

No. Formerly thou didst watch over the leafy hair of the trees, over the wet flowers, over the heavy and savory fruits. It is for that we chose thee.

Guard thou today our blond heads, the opened poppies of our lips and the violets of our eyes. Guard the firm fruit of our breasts and give us lovers who resemble thee.

CXIV

THE DANCING-GIRL WITH KROTALES

THOU attachest to thy light hands the resounding krotales, Myrrhinidion my dear, and, stepping naked from thy robe, thou extendest thy nervous limbs. How pretty thou art, thine arms in the air, thy loins arched and thy breasts reddened!

Thou beginnest: thy feet, one before the other, pose, hesitate, and glide softly. Thy body bends like a scarf, thou caressest thy shivering skin and voluptuousness inundates thy long, swooning eyes.

Suddenly thou strikest the krotales! Arch thyself, erect upon thy feet, shake thy loins, throw out thy legs, and let thy clamoring hands call all the desires in a band about thy turning body.

We, we applaud with great cries, whether, smiling over thy shoulder, thou agitatest with a shiver thy convulsed, muscular croup, or whether thou undulatest, almost extended, to the rhythm of thy memories.

CXV

THE FLUTE PLAYER

MELIXO, thy legs joined, thy body inclined, thine arms forward, thou slippest thy light, double-flute between thy lips moist with wine and thou playest about the couch where Teleas still embraces me.

Am I not most imprudent, I who hire so young a girl to distract my hours of labor? Am I not thoughtless, I who show her thus naked to the curious looks of my lovers?

No, Melixo, little musician, thou art an honest friend. Yesterday thou didst not refuse to change thy flute for another, when I despaired of accomplishing a love full of difficulties. But thou art safe.

For I know well of what thou thinkest. Thou awaitest the end of this night of excesses which animates thee cruelly and in vain, and, at the first dawn, thou wilt run in the street, with thine only friend Psyllos, to thy little broken mattress.

CXVI

THE WARM GIRDLE

"THOU thinkest thou lovest me no longer, Teleas, and for a month thou hast passed thy nights at the table, as though the fruits, the

wines, the honey, could make thee forget my mouth. Thou thinkest thou lovest me no longer, poor fool!"

Speaking thus, I loosened my moist girdle and I rolled it about his head. It was still quite warm with the heat of my belly; the perfume of my skin issued from its fine meshes.

He breathed it deeply, his eyes closed; then I felt that he returned to me and I even saw very clearly his reawakening desires which he hid not from me; but, as a ruse, I resisted.

"No, my friend! This evening, Lysippos possesses me. Farewell!" And I added, as I fled: "O gormand of fruits and vegetables! the little garden of Bilitis has only one fig, but it is good."

CXVII

TO A HAPPY HUSBAND

I ENVY thee, Agorakrites, for having a wife so zealous. It is she herself who attends to the stable; and in the morning, in place of making love, she gives drink to the cattle.

Thou shouldst rejoice in her. How many others, thou sayest, dream only of base pleasures, awake at night, asleep in the daytime, and yet demanding from adultery a criminal satiety?

Yes; thy wife labors in the stable. They say even that she has a thousand tendernesses for the youngest of thine asses. Ah! Ha! He is a good animal. He has a black spot over his eyes.

They say that she plays between his hooves, under his soft, gray belly.... But those who say that are slanderers. If thine ass pleases her, Agorakrites, it is without doubt because she recalls thy look in his.

CXVIII

TO AN ESTRAY

THE love of women is the most beautiful of all that mortals know; and thou wouldst think so, Kleo, if thou hadst a truly voluptuous soul. But thou dreamest only vanities.

Thou triflest away thy nights in cherishing youths who are ungrateful to us. Look at them! How ugly they are! Compare to their round heads, our thick hair; seek our white breasts upon their chests.

Beside their narrow flanks, consider our luxuriant hips, a broad couch hollowed for a lover. Say, above all, what human lips, save hers they would desire, can perfect the pleasures?

Thou art sick, O Kleo, but a woman can cure thee. Go to young

Satyra, the daughter of my neighbor Gorgo. Her croup is a rose of the sun, and she will not refuse thee the pleasure she herself prefers.

CXIX

INTIMACIES

THOU askest, O Bilitis, why I have become Lesbian? But what player of the flute is not, a little? I am poor; I have no bed; I lie with her who wishes me and I thank her with what I have.

While yet small, we dance naked; those dances: thou knowest them, my dear: the twelve desires of Aphrodite. We regard each other, we compare our nudities and we find them so pretty.

During the long night, we inflame ourselves for the pleasure of the spectators; but our ardor is not feigned and we feel it so much that sometimes, behind the doors, one of us may entice her companion who consents.

How then can we love man, who is rough with us? He takes us as women and leaves us before the delight. Thou, thou art a woman; thou knowest how I feel. Thou canst take it as for thyself.

CXX

THE COMMAND

"OLD woman, hear me. I give a festival in three days. It is to divert me. Thou shalt lend me all thy girls. How many hast thou, and what can they do?"

"I have seven. Three dance the kordax with the scarf and the phallos. Nephelis of the sleek armpits will mimic the love of doves between her rosy breasts.

One singer, in a broidered peplos, will chant the songs of Rhodes, accompanied by two auletrides who will have garlands of myrtle rolled about their brown legs."

"It is well. See that they are freshly depilated, bathed, and perfumed from head to foot, ready for other games, if they are demanded. Go give the orders. Farewell."

CXXI

THE FIGURE OF PASIPHÆ

IN a debauch that two young men and some courtesans made at my house, where love gushed out like wine, Damalis, in honor of her name, danced the figure of Pasiphæ.

She had caused to be made at Kition two masks of a cow and of a bull, for herself and for Karmantidea. She wore terrible horns, and a hairy tail upon her croup.

The other women, whom I led, holding flowers and torches, circled about with cries, caressing Damalis with the tips of our pendent tresses.

Their lowings and our songs and the dancing of our loins lasted longer than the night. The empty chamber is still warm. I regard my reddened knees and the kanthares of Kios in which are roses floating.

CXXII

THE JUGGLER [24]

WHEN the first dawn blended with the feeble glimmer of the torches, I sent into the orgy a flute-player, vicious and agile, who trembled a little, being cold.

Praise the little girl with blue lids, short hair, pointed breasts, clad only in a girdle from which hung yellow ribbons and the stems of black iris.

Praise her! For she was adroit and performed difficult tricks. She juggled with hoops, without breaking anything in the room; she glided through them like a grasshopper.

Sometimes she made a wheel, bending upon her hands and feet. Or, with her two legs in the air and her knees apart, she curved herself backward and touched the ground, laughing.

CXXIII

THE DANCE OF THE FLOWERS

ANTHIS, dancing girl from Lydia, has seven veils about her. She unrolls the yellow veil; her black hair spreads out. The rosy veil slips from her mouth. The white veil falls, revealing her naked arms.

She releases her little breasts from the red veil which loosens itself. She lets fall the green veil from her double, rounded croup. She draws the blue veil from her shoulders, but she presses upon her puberty the last transparent veil.

The young men supplicate her; she tosses her head backward. Only at the sound of the flutes, she tears it a little; then, suddenly, and with the gestures of the dance, she culls the flowers of her body.

Singing: "Where are my roses? Where are my perfumed violets? Where are my tufts of parsley?—Behold my roses; I give them to

you. Behold my violets; will you have them? Behold my pretty, curling parsley."[25]

CXXIV

VIOLENCE

No, thou shalt not take me by force; count not on that, Lamprias. If thou hast heard it said that someone violated Parthenis, know that she abetted it; for no one plays with us without being invited.

Oh! do thy best; make efforts. See: it is a failure. I scarcely defend myself, yet. I will not call for help. And I do not even struggle; but I dodge. Poor friend, it is a failure again.

Continue. This little game amuses me. The more so as I am sure to conquer. Again an unhappy essay and perhaps thou wilt be less disposed to show me thine extinguished desires.

Butcher, what doest thou! Cur! thou art breaking my wrists! And this knee, this knee which forces me open! Ah! Go now. It is a fine victory, that of ravishing a young girl, in tears, upon the ground.

CXXV

SONG

The first gave me a collar, a collar of pearls, worth a city with its palaces and temples, its treasures and its slaves.

The second made verses for me. He said that my tresses were black as those of the night and my eyes blue as those of the morning.

The third was so beautiful that his mother could not embrace him without blushing. He placed his hands upon my knees and his lips upon my naked foot.

Thou, thou hast told me nothing, thou hast given me nothing, for thou art poor. And thou art not beautiful, but it is thee I love.

CXXVI

ADVICE TO A LOVER

If thou wouldst be loved by a woman, O young friend, whoever she may be, tell her not that thou wishest her, but let her see thee every day; then disappear, to return.

If she address her speech to thee, be amorous without eagerness. She, of herself, will come to thee. But thou must take her by force, the day when she intends to give herself.

When thou receivest her in thy bed, neglect thine own pleasure. The hands of an amorous woman are trembling and without caresses. Excuse them from being zealous.

But thou, take no repose. Prolong thy kisses to breathlessness. Allow her no sleep, even though she beg it of thee. Kiss always that part of her body toward which she turns her eyes.

CXXVII

FRIENDS AT DINNER

MYROMERIS and Maskale, my friends, come with me, for I have no lover this evening and, lying upon beds of byssos, we will converse over our dinner.

A night of repose will do you good; you shall sleep in my bed, even without fards and with undressed hair. Wear a simple tunic of wool and leave your jewels in their box.

No one shall make you dance to admire your legs and the heavy movements of your loins. No one shall demand the Sacred Figures to judge whether you are amorous.

And I have not commanded for us two flute-players with pretty mouths, but two pots of browned peas, cakes of honey, fried croquettes, and my last leathern bottle of Kios.

CXXVIII

THE TOMB OF A YOUNG COURTESAN

HERE lies the delicate body of Lydé, little dove, the most joyous of all the courtesans, who, more than all others, loved orgies and floating hair, soft dances and tunics of hyacinth.

More than all others, she loved the pleasant mingling of tongues, caresses upon her cheek, games that only the lamp saw, and the love which bruises the limbs. And now she is a little shadow.

But, before putting her in the tomb, they arranged her hair marvelously and laid her in roses; even the stone which covers her is all impregnated with essences and perfumes.

Sacred earth, nurse of all, receive gently the poor dead. Let her sleep in thine arms, O Mother, and may there grow about her stele, not nettles and briers, but tender white violets.

CXXIX

THE LITTLE ROSE MERCHANT [26]

"YESTERDAY," Nais said to me, "I was in the market when a little girl in red tatters, carrying roses, passed before a group of young men. And this is what I heard:

'Buy something from me.—Explain thyself, little one, for we know not what thou sellest. Thyself? Thy roses? Or all together? —If you will buy from me all these flowers, you may have mine for nothing.

'And how much wishest thou for thy roses?—I must have six oboli for my mother, else I shall be beaten like a bitch.—Follow us. Thou shalt have a drachma.—Then shall I go for my little sister?'

"And both followed those men. They had no breasts, Bilitis. They knew not even how to smile. They trotted along like kids which one leads to the butcher."

CXXX

THE DISPUTE

AH! By Aphrodite, behold thee! outrage! rottenness! infection! sterile one! carcanet! clumsy! good-for-nothing! evil sow! Do not try to escape me; come yet nearer.

Behold this woman of the sailors, who knows not even how to fold her garment on the shoulder, and who uses fard so badly that the black of her brows runs over her cheek in floods of ink!

Thou art Phœnician; lie with those of thy race. As for me, my father was Hellene: I have right over all those who wear the petasos. And even over the others, if it pleases me so.

Pause not in my street again, or I will send thee to Hades to make love to Karon and I will say very justly: "Let the earth cover thee lightly!" [27]—so that the dogs may dig thee out.

CXXXI

MELANCHOLY

I SHIVER; the night is cool, and all the forest wet. Why hast thou led me here? Is not my wide bed softer than this moss strewn with stones?

My flowery robe will be spotted with verdure; my hair will be

tangled with twigs; my neck: look at my neck: already it is soiled by the damp earth.

Formerly, I followed into the woods he who... Ah! Leave me for a while. I am sad, this evening. Leave me, without speaking, my hand over my eyes.

In truth, canst thou not wait! Are we beasts, to take each other so! Leave me. Thou shalt open neither my knees nor my lips. Even my eyes shall stay closed, lest they weep.

CXXXII

THE LITTLE PHANION

STRANGER, pause; see who is signing to thee: it is little Phanion of Kôs. She merits that thou shouldst choose her.

See, her hair is curled like parsley, her skin is smooth as the down of a bird. She is small and brown. She speaks nicely.

If thou wouldst follow her, she would not demand of thee all the money from thy voyage; no, only a drachma or a pair of slippers.

Thou wilt find, at her house, a good bed,[28] fresh figs, milk, wine; and, if it be cold, there will be a fire.

CXXXIII

INDICATIONS

PASSER-BY who pauses, if thou wishest slender thighs and nervous loins, a firm throat, knees that clasp, go to Plango; she is my friend.

If thou seekest a laughing girl with exuberant breasts, delicately shaped, the croup plump and the loins hollowed, go to the corner of this street, where Spidhorodellis dwells.

But if long tranquil hours in the arms of a courtesan, a soft skin, a warm body and fragrant hair please thee, seek Milto and thou wilt be content.

Expect not much love, but avail thyself of its experience. One may demand all from a woman when she is naked, when it is night, and when the hundred drachmæ are upon the hearth.

CXXXIV

THE MERCHANT OF WOMEN

"WHO is there?—I am the merchant of women. Open the door, Sostrata; I offer thee two opportunities. This is the first. Approach, Anasyrtolis, and strip thyself.—She is a trifle large."

"She is a beauty. Beside, she dances the kordax and she knows eighty songs.—Turn thyself. Raise thine arms. Display thy hair. Give me thy foot. Smile. It is well."

"Now this one.—She is too young!—Not at all; she was twelve years old the day before yesterday, and thou wilt teach her nothing. —Remove thy tunic. Let me see. No; she is thin."

"I ask but one mina.—And the first?—Two minæ, thirty.—Three minæ for the two?—It is said.—Enter there and bathe yourselves. And thou, farewell."

CXXXV

THE STRANGER

STRANGER, go not farther into the city. Thou wilt not find elsewhere girls younger or more expert than mine. I am Sostrata, renowned beyond the sea.

See this one whose eyes are green as water in the grass. Thou wouldst not have her? Here are other eyes which are black as violets, and hair three cubits long.

I have better still. Xantho, open thy cyclas. Stranger, these breasts are hard as quinces; touch them. And her pretty belly, thou seest, carries the three folds of Kypris.

I bought her with her sister, who is not yet of the age for love but who will second her usefully. By the two goddesses! Thou art of a noble race. Phyllis and Xantho, follow the illustrious one!

CXXXVI

THE REMEMBRANCE OF MNASIDIKA

THEY danced, one before the other, with rapid, flying movements; they seemed always wishing to embrace and yet did not even touch, unless with the tips of their lips.

When they turned their backs in dancing, they looked at each other, the head upon the shoulder, the perspiration gleaming under their lifted arms, and their delicate hair gliding across their breasts.

The languor of their eyes, the fire of their cheeks, the gravity of their faces, were three ardent songs. They grazed each other furtively; they bent their bodies upon their hips.

And suddenly they fell, to finish the soft dance upon the ground. ... Remembrance of Mnasidika, it was then thou camest to me; and all, except thy dear image, troubled me.

CXXXVII

THE YOUNG MOTHER

BELIEVE not, Myromeris, that, in becoming a mother, thou hast lessened thy beauty. See how thy body, beneath thy robe, has drowned its slim form in a voluptuous softness.

Thy breasts are two vast flowers, reversed upon thy chest, whose cut stems give out a milky sap. Thy softened belly swooms beneath the hand.

And, beside, consider the tiny babe, born of a quiver which thou didst feel one evening, in the arms of a passer-by whose name thou dost not even know. Dream of her distant destiny.

Her eyes, which now scarcely open, will some day be elongated in a line of black fard, and they will sow among men sorrow or joy by one movement of their lashes.

CXXXVIII

THE UNKNOWN

HE sleeps. I know him not. He horrifies me. Nevertheless, his purse is filled with gold and he gave four drachmæ to the slave on entering. I expect a mina for myself.

But I told the Phrygian to enter the bed in my place. He was drunk and took her for me. I would rather die in torment than stretch myself out near this man.

Alas! I dream of the meadows of Tauros.... I was a little virgin.... Then I had a light heart and I was so mad with amorous envy that I hated my married sisters.

What would I not have done to obtain that which I refused this night! Today, my breasts are drooping and, in my exhausted heart, Eros slumbers from lassitude.

CXXXIX

THE CHEAT

I AWAKEN.... Is he then gone! He has left something? No: two empty amphoras and some soiled flowers. All the rug is red with wine.

I have slept, but I am still drunk.... With whom, then, did I return? ... At least, we lay down together. Even the bed is drenched with sweat.

Perhaps there were several; the bed is so disordered. I know not.... But someone saw them! There is my Phrygian. She still sleeps across the door.

I kick her in the breast, and I cry: "Bitch, thou couldst not..." I am so hoarse that I can say no more.

CXL

THE LAST LOVER

CHILD, do not pass without loving me. I am still beautiful in the night; thou shalt see how much warmer my autumn[29] is than the springtime of another.

Seek not for love from virgins. Love is a difficult art in which young girls are little versed. I have prepared it all my life to give it to my last lover.

Thou shalt be my last lover; I know it. Behold my mouth, for which a nation has paled with desire. Behold my hair, the same hair which Psappha the Great has sung.

I will gather for thee all that remains of my lost youth. I will burn even the memories. I will give thee the flute of Lykas, the girdle of Mnasidika.

CXLI

THE DOVE

FOR a long time I have been beautiful; the day comes when I shall no longer be a woman. And then I shall know heart-rending memories, burning, solitary envy, and tears in my hands.

If life is a long dream, of what good to resist? Now, four and five times a night, I demand amorous enjoyment; and when my loins are exhausted, I sink asleep wherever my body falls.

In the morning, I open my eyelids and I shiver in my hair. A dove is at my window; I ask of her in what month we are. She says to me: "It is the month when women are in love."

Ah! Whatever be the month, the dove speaks truly, Kypris. And I throw my two arms about my lover and, with great tremblings, I stretch my still benumbed legs to the foot of the bed.

CXLII

THE RAIN OF MORNING

THE night has passed. The stars are far away. See, the last courtesans have returned with their lovers. And I, in the rain of morning, I write these verses on the sand.

The leaves are laden with brilliant water. The rivulets across the paths drag along the earth and the dead leaves. The rain, drop by drop, makes holes in my song.

Oh! How sad and alone I am here! The young regard me not; the old have forgotten me. It is well. They will learn my verses, they and the children of their children.

That is what neither Myrtale nor Thaïs nor Glykera may say, the day when their lovely cheeks shall be wrinkled. Those who will love after me will sing my strophes together.

CXLIII

THE TRUE DEATH [80]

APHRODITE, merciless goddess, thou hast willed that, for me also, the happy youth of beautiful hair shall vanish in a few days. Why am I less than dead!

I regard myself in my mirror; I have no longer smiles nor tears. O sweet face which loved Mnasidika, I cannot believe that thou wert mine.

Can it be that all is ended? I have not yet lived five times eight years; it seems to me that I was born only yesterday; and now, behold, I must say: No one will love me more.

All my cut hair I have twisted into my girdle, and I offer it to thee, Kypris Eternal! I will never cease to adore thee. This is the last verse of the pious Bilitis.

THE TOMB OF BILITIS

FIRST EPITAPH

IN the country where the springs are born from the sea and where the river beds are shelving rocks, I, Bilitis, was born.

My mother was Phœnician; my father, Damophylos, Hellene. My mother taught me the songs of Byblos, sad as the first dawn.

I have adored Astarte at Kypros. I have known Psappha at Lesbos. I have sung as I have loved. If I have lived well, Passer-by, tell it to thy daughter.

And sacrifice not for me a black goat; but, in soft libation, press her teats above my tomb.

SECOND EPITAPH

UPON the sombre banks of Melas, at Tamassos in Pamphylia, I, Bilitis, daughter of Damophylos, was born. Thou seest, I rest far from my native land.

As a child, I learned the loves of Adonis and of Astarte, the mysteries of the holy Seris, and the death and return to Her-Of-The-Rounded-Eyes.

If I have been a courtesan, what is the harm? Was it not my duty as a woman? Stranger, the Mother-Of-All-Things guides us. To disregard her is not prudent.

In gratitude to thee who has paused, I wish thee this destiny: Mayest thou be loved, but never love. Farewell; remember thou, in thine old age, that thou hast seen my tomb.

LAST EPITAPH

UNDER the black leaves of the laurels, under the amorous blooms of the roses, it is here that I lie, I who have woven line with line, embellishing the kiss.

I grew up in the land of the nymphs; I lived on the isle of

lovers; I died on the isle of Kypros. It is for this that my name is illustrious and my stele polished with oil.

Weep not for me, thou who pausest; my funeral rites were beautiful; the weepers tore their cheeks. They have laid in my tomb my mirrors and my necklaces.

And now, over the pale meadows of asphodel, I walk, an impalpable shadow; and the remembrance of my earthly life is the joy of my life in the underworld.

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NOTES

TO THE SONGS OF BILITIS

1. Psappha.—"As she spelled her name in her soft Æolic dialect." (ROBINSON.)

   On the testimony of common-sense, and of many writers of antiquity, who, at least, had more on which to base an opinion than we have, Pierre Louÿs' description in *Song* XLVI ("Psappha") of "... her hair is cut like that of an athlete ... virile breast ... narrow hips ..." and, as assumed, ready to prey lasciviously upon any passer-by, seems absurd and defamatory. Sappho's brother, Larichus, was public cup-bearer at Mytilene, an office held only by young men of noble birth. She herself, "violet-weaving, pure, soft-smiling" as Alcæus says, although "small and dark" according to Maximus Tyrius, was, according to her own words, "of a quiet temper" and, in all probability, was married and the mother of a daughter named Cleis whom she mentions in an extant fragment (WHARTON, 72), which, considering the personal tone of so many of her poems, may be taken as something more than a poetic fancy. "I have a fair daughter with a form like a golden flower, Cleis the beloved, above whom I prize nor all Lydia nor lovely Lesbos." Philoxenos describes her as "sweet-voiced." Damokaris, in the *Anthology* (Plan. App. xvi, 310) describes her picture in glowing terms: "Her eyes overflow with brilliance, showing a fancy rich in happy images. Her skin, smooth and not too reddened, shows simplicity; and the blended gaiety and gravity of her features proclaims the union, in her, of the Muse and Kypris."

   That she gathered about her a society of maidens to whom she taught the Art of Poetry is well known; the names of many of her pupils and friends have been preserved in fragments of her verse. How much further her friendships were carried, as suggested in some of her poems, will always be a matter of speculation; but that she was a charming, lovely woman, sufficiently reserved, of perfect maturity and free from petty or promiscuous vice, seems undeniable, otherwise, we may be sure the writers of antiquity would have treated her with far less admiration and respect than they did.

2. This verse of Sappho's is placed by Pierre Louÿs on the half-title of the section in his book entitled "Elegiacs at Mytilene."

3. The crime of which Phryne was accused, and for which she was tried before the Areopagos at Athens, was that of profaning the Eleusinian

Mysteries—a crime even more serious than Pierre Louÿs' "Murder."

4. This quotation from Theocritos translated reads: "Sweet too is my music, whether I make melody on pipe, or discourse on the flute, or reed, or flageolet." (XX. 28-29. LANG.)

5. *Song* XII.—French, *Bergeronnette;* Latin, *Passer.* A species of sparrow, but not necessarily our "English sparrow." Various living things were sacred to Aphrodite, as symbolic of her diverse attributes. The sparrow symbolized productivity.

6. *Song* XIV.—That is "bee." Marcus Argentarius has an epigram in the *Anthology* using the word: "Melissa is thy name and truly so, as my heart bears witness. Thy soft lips sweeten thy kisses with honey, but thou also piercest with a cruel sting." (Anth. Pal. v. 32).

7. *Song* XVI.—The "amphora kiss," as though one drank the kiss from a beaker with two handles.

8. *Song* XLII.—Execrations of the morning light were popular among the Greek amatory poets. See, among others, Meleager: "Star of Morning, enemy of lovers, why shinest thou so quickly upon the couch where, a moment since, I lay warm with Demo? . . ." (Anth. Pal. v. 172).

9. *Song* XLIII.—The same thought is in the "Song of Songs" (Song of Solomon, I, 17): "The beams of our house are of cedar and our rafters of fir."

10. This quotation from Sappho (referred to above in *Note* 2), translated reads: "Mnasidika is more shapely than the tender Gyrinno." (WHARTON, 76.)

11. *Song* XLVI.—John Addington Symonds, in his *Problem in Greek Ethics* (London, 1901, pp. 71-72), remarks: "Lesbian passion, as the Greeks called it, never obtained the same social sanction as boy-love. It is significant that Greek Mythology offers no legends of the goddesses parallel to those which consecrated pæderastia among the male deities. Again, we have no recorded example, so far as I can remember, of noble friendships between women rising into political and historical prominence. . . . The Greeks, while tolerating, regarded it rather as an eccentricity of nature, or a vice, than as an honourable and socially useful emotion. . . . There is an important passage in the *Amores* of Lucian which proves that the Greeks felt an abhorrence of sexual inversion among women similar to that which moderns feel for its manifestation among men. . . . And . . . while the love of males for males in Greece obtained moralization and reached the high position of a recognized social function, the love of female for female remained undeveloped and unhonoured, on the same level as both forms of homosexual passion in the modern European world are."

The exposition, perhaps beyond decorum, of Lesbian love in this section of the *Songs of Bilitis* has no parallel in all Greek literature, where references to the subject are very few.

12. *Song* LIII.—In *Aphrodite* (I, 7), Pierre Louÿs has given a description

of this custom as carried out at Ephesos. I have been unable to locate any classic authority for the description.

13. *Song* LVIII.—"The pleasant cave and shadowy, sacred to the nymphs that are called the Naiads." (Odyssey, XIII. LANG). In "the secret places of this wondrous cave," at Athene's suggestion, Odysseos hides his treasure, and there he is transformed into an old man, as a disguise to conceal him from Penelope's wooers.

14. *Song* LXXI.—See *Sappho* (WHARTON, 2): "... For when I see thee but a little, I have no utterance left, my tongue is broken down, and straightway a subtle fire has run under my skin. With my eyes I have no sight, my ears ring, sweat pours down, and a trembling seizes all my body; I am paler than grass, and seem in my madness little better than one dead. ..."

15. *Song* LXXV.—See the sixth mime of *Herondas*. This mime describes a visit between two women in reference to the same sort of object enquired for by Bilitis' friend. One of Herondas' ladies remarks, about the leather-worker: "He works at his house and sells secretly.—Every door is afraid of the tax-collectors!—But the things he makes, all of them, are worthy of Athena. ... Hunt as you might, you could not find another cobbler so kindly disposed toward women." (BUCK.)

16. *Song* LXXXI.—See Meleager: "Truly, thou betrayest thyself; thy locks, still moist with perfumes, denounce thy dissolute life; thine eyes, heavy with fatigue, show well how thy night has been passed; this coronal upon thy forehead reveals the festival; this disordered hair shows the path of amorous hands; and all thy body staggers under the vapors of the wine. ..." (Anth. Pal. v. 175.)

17. *Song* LXXXIII.—See Paulus Silentiarius: "For whom curl my hair? for whom trim my nails? for whom perfume my hands? To what end this purple-banded cloak, since I go not to beautiful Rhodopis? ..." (Anth. Pal. v. 228.)

18. This quotation from Philodemos translated reads: "Bind my head with narcissus and let me taste the crooked flute. Anoint my limbs with saffron ointment, wet my gullet with wine of Mytilene and mate me with a virgin who will love her nest." (Anth. Pal. XI, 34, PATON).

19. *Song* XCIV.—The thyrsos as carried by votaries of Dionysos was usually a long rod with a pine cone fastened upright on the end. Sometimes a tall umbellifer (Narthex) was used, stripped of its leaves up to the top, leaving only the umbellar blossoms. In either case they were too long to be used as drum-sticks.

20. *Song* CI.—See Philodemos: "I salute thee.—I salute thee also.—What is thy name?—And thine? Thou mayest know mine later.—Thou art in a hurry?—And thou art not?—Hast thou someone?—I have always my lover.—Wilt thou eat dinner with me today?—If thou wishest.—Good. What shall I give thee?—Give me nothing in advance.—That is strange.—But when the night is over, give what thou wishest.—Thou art a just girl. Where is thy dwelling? I will send for thee.—I will

show thee.—And when wilt thou come?—At once, if thou wishest.—At once, then.—Lead the way." (Anth. Pal. v. 46.)

21. *Song* CIII.—See Asclepiades: "Upon a day, I played with facile Hermione. Like the Goddess, she wore a girdle broidered with flowers; and on it I read, in letters of gold: 'Love me, but grieve not if I give myself to another.' " (Anth. Pal. v. 158.)

22. *Song* CIV.—In the original, "un batelier du port," literally, "a boatman of the port," which translates simply as "boatman." The most extensive cogitations have failed to clear up this obscure passage. Possibly Pierre Louÿs intended to convey the thought that the ecstasy transfigured a common boatman into a "divine image." But the nearest approach to a solution (and the one which the artist has chosen to illustrate), is that suggested in Secundus (XIII), according to the eighteenth century translation:

"With am'rous Strife exanimate I lay,
Around your Neck my languid Arm I threw;
My trembling Heart had just forgot to play,
Its vital Spirit from my Bosom flew:
The Stygian Lake; the dreary Realms below,
To which the Sun a cheering Beam denies;
Old Charon's Boat, slow-wand'ring to and fro,
Promiscuous pass'd before my swimming Eyes."
Etc., etc.

23. *Song* CIX.—Artemis was more likely to be seen bathing with disastrous results to the spectator, as noted in the legend of Actæon.

24. *Song* CXXII.—A much better piece of work than Automedon's epigram on a similar subject (Anth. Pal. v. 129).

25. *Song* CXXIII.—This Song is quoted by Athenæus (Deipnosophists, XIV, 27).

26. *Song* CXXIX.—See Dionysos: "Little vendor of roses, thou art as fair as thine own flowers. But what sellest thou? thyself? or thy roses? or both together?" (Anth. Pal. v. 81.)

27. *Song* CXXX.—The hope, frequently expressed in the *Sepulchral Epigrams*. See Meleager: "Hail, Earth, Mother of all! To him who bore so lightly upon thee, Aesigenes, mayest thou now be equally light." (Anth. Pal. VII. 461. Englished from Pierre Louÿs' translation.) The less flattering interpretation of the hope is expressed by Ammianus: "May the dust be light on thee when under earth, wretched Nearchus, so that the dogs may easily dig thee out." (Anth. Pal. XI. 226. PATON.)

28. *Song* CXXXII.—See Antipater: "For a drachma one may have Europa the Athenian, without fear of rivals or refusals. She has a soft bed and, if the night is cold, a fire. Surely, O Zeus, there was no need for thee to make thyself a bull!" (Anth. Pal. v. 109.) See also Philodemos: "Philenion is small and brown, but her hair is curled like parsley and her skin is soft as down. . . ." (Anth. Pal. v. 121.)

29. *Song* CXL.—See Paulus Silentiarius: "Philinna, thy wrinkles are preferable to the fresh tints of young girls. I love less in my hands their straight, hard breasts, than thine which incline like full-blown roses. Thine autumn is fairer than their springtime; their summer is colder than thy time of snows." (Anth. Pal. v. 258.)

30. *Song* CXLIII.—Compare Rufinus: "Once I had soft skin, firm breasts and pretty feet; my body was supple, mine eyebrows arched, my hair undulating. Time has changed all. Not one treasure of my youth remains; . . ." (Anth. Pal. v. 76.)

For the theme developed, see François Villon's "Les regrets de la belle Heaulmière."

THE ADVENTURES OF KING PAUSOLE

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TRANSLATOR'S PREFACE

IN Englishing this unique work of an individual genius for the sake of those who "have no French," I have kept two objects in view: one, to present it in idiomatic English without straying too far from the literal text; the other, to give (as nearly as possible) a faithful English replica of the spirit and style of the original.

The usual translation (especially of French, which has so many highly individualized locutions) has the unsightly bones of the original sticking through the English dress. I have tried to garb "Pausole" so that his Gallic countenance will show serenely, but not his Gallic skeleton.

At the same time, the thought and spirit of the whole are intensely French, and it would be unwise, if not impossible, to suppress the national characteristics. The French atmosphere is, of necessity, felt in the locale, the *mise-en-scène*, the French form of the proper names and modes of address (which I felt it desirable to retain), the mention of French courage and measures of distance, and the like.

The subject matter (to change the figure again) offers the privileged reader a delectable and highly seasoned dish, which is conceived of a perfervid imagination, salted with subtle satire, spiced with delicious irony and cooked over the flame of an amazing *recherché* genius; a concoction to titillate the palate of the most jaded of the *cognoscenti*.

To the most casual reader of Louÿs, his fondness for the theme of tribadism is striking. It is woven into the thread of the narrative of *Aphrodite* and forms the staple of *Les Chansons de Bilitis*. But he invariably exalts it to the plane of emotional romance and disdains the brutal realism that a de Maupassant could throw into such a story as *La Femme de Paul*.

Our author's ironic vein, however, at times discards its smiling malice and assumes a mordant sharpness, as in his satiric commentary

on Parisian preferences in Book III, chapter VII of the present volume.

But the narrative as a whole is refreshing and joy-compelling. To the conscientious objector against the bigotry of the present era, with its sumptuary and prohibitory legislation, with its arbitrary official restrictions upon the personal habits of the individual, the air of Pausole's land of Tryphême will come with "the glory and the freshness of a dream."

The tale has, in fact, the vividly real unreality of a dream; such things cannot be and yet they must. And, floating in that dream, are the very essences of beings and events that we have known, but which are touched with the imagination of fairyland. Again as in a dream, the material mingles with the romantic in a sublimated distillation of fancy and reality.

The most ardent "praiser of the good old days" (Horace, *Ars Poetica, 173*) will be transported into the seventh heaven of chuckling delight.

If I have succeeded in capturing and preserving some measure of the charm and spirit of the original, I shall feel well repaid.

If the annotations occasionally insult the reader's intelligence, he will forgive me. It is better to err on the side of caution. But a number of allusions to contemporary Parisian life can only be sensed from the context.

A visit to Tryphême on the wings of fancy is a delight. To live there would perhaps be too great a tax on the vitality of an ardent spirit!

BOOK ONE

CHAPTER ONE

How King Pausole Learned for the First Time the Vicissitudes of Existence

It is nothworthy that among nations where the laws regulating propriety are fewer and more elastic, the fundamental laws of common sense are better observed. MONTAIGNE, III, 5

KING PAUSOLE[1] was holding court beneath a cherry tree; because, said he, the cherry tree gives as much shade as any other and has the advantage over the ceremonial oak of bearing quite delicious fruit in summer time.

Although he still displayed on his person the historic robes of state, which, by the amplitude of their folds, best expressed in his belief the majesty of royalty, he was, however, not opposed to an improvement dictated by reason. A man must keep pace with the times. Hence King Pausole wore a crown so fashioned that its body of aluminum was masked by a thin but gleaming coat of gold.

He was wont to observe discreetly how far lighter was such a head-dress than the towering hat affected by his cousin the King of Greece. True it is that a certain few of the passers-by were not at all deceived as to its composition. But, remarked the King further, when a man is cunning enough to discern from a distance the nature of precious metals, he could not be seriously impressed by a close view of the crown even were it of massive, weighty gold. How useless, then, for him to burden his head!

[1] A name derived from the Greek and signifying "inactivity" or "hesitation," from the same root as "pause."

King Pausole was absolute monarch of Tryphême,[2] a marvelous country, which, however, does not appear upon the official maps. This omission I might explain, if so required, by hazarding the hypothesis that, even as happy nations have no history, so prosperous lands have no geography. It is still the custom, on recent maps, to portray in white a number of unexplored tracts; what more natural than to have portrayed Tryphême in blue, in the Mediterranean?

But no. Such is not the reason for so regrettable a lacuna.[3]

If Tryphême is a name expunged from all the encyclopedias, if the map of Europe is falsified, if this verdant peninsula is amputated from the coast of our continent, it is because they have organized against this land a "conspiracy of silence."

Every one knows that this is the term applied to that immediate and secret understanding which is established among literary critics upon the appearance of a work of power. And thus is budding talent stifled, even with its maiden smile upon its lips! Explorers and geographers, displaying a spirit no less base, make use of the same process to steer travelers away from a land that they know to be delightful.

It is easily done; I wash my hands of such wretched plots. Here is the truth: Tryphême is a peninsula that carries the Pyrenees in the direction of Balearic waters. It adjoins Catalonia and French Roussillon.[4] I have been there and I know. It is important that the reader shall not regard as fiction the genuine and contemporaneous narrative which I have written for his edification.

With this preface, let us enter the thick of events.

It was during the twentieth year of his reign that King Pausole, after a succession of peaceful days, came one day to a sense of the difficulties of life and the burden of a perplexed soul.

He had risen, this morning in June, long, long after the sun and, gently cradled upon his mule Macarie,[5] he was being conveyed to the seat of justice.

A retinue of servants attended his progress; one carrying his cigarettes, another his sunshade, the majority doing nothing.

None of them bore weapons. The King always fared forth without guards, to prove ostentatiously his cherished success in inspiring his people with love rather than fear.

"Fear," said he, "hath no lasting durance, nor endurance." Whereas, on the other hand, the love of the people is an everlasting

[2] Likewise from the Greek and signifying "indulgent ease."

[3] A gap or omission. Technical.

[4] i.e., Northeastern Spain and Southern France.

[5] A Greek derivative signifying "heavenly content."

sentiment, which thrives on memories, welcomes the smallest gesture as a new favor and asks for virtually nothing but the lively esteem of him who is the object thereof.

The court of justice, presided over every day by the King beneath a cherry tree in his gardens, had succeeded in bringing about the acceptance of his judgment by all. By common consent, no appeal could be taken, and no other tribunal took cognizance of the cases that lay without the jurisdiction of the justices of the peace. By dint of repeatedly simplifying the Book of Customs inherited from his ancestors, Pausole had finally enacted a code which consisted of but two articles and thus possessed the unique distinction of being intelligible to the populace-at-large. Here it is in its entirety:

I. Do no wrong to thy neighbor.

II. Observing this, do as thou pleasest.

It is superfluous to call to the reader's attention that the second of these articles is not admitted among the laws of any civilized country. It was precisely this provision to which the people of Tryphême clung most closely. I am well aware that it shocks the moral sense of my fellow-citizens.

Pausole reserved to himself the daily pleasure of upholding by his decrees a number of individual liberties. It was not a fatiguing task; and besides, the excellent fellow could not have accepted any other, for his personal liberty was undoubtedly his paramount interest in life and he respected his own caprice, which admonished him to be lazy.

On the day in question, a dozen plaintiffs and a motionless throng were waiting upon the shady lawn, when the King appeared beneath the branches, in the midst of a murmur of veneration, loving sympathy and curiosity. He replied to these utterances by waving before his face a flaccid and friendly hand, like a welcoming handkerchief. He then mounted the three steps of his throne, which put him at once well above the level of the audience.

The first seeker after justice advanced. He was a foreigner, a Spanish sailor. As he stretched forth his arms from his short-sleeved shirt, they were seen to be bronzed well-nigh to blackness.

"Sire," cried he, "justice upon my wife! She has gone off with another man!"

"Alack-a-day!" said the King. "What do you want me to do about it?"

He plucked a cherry from the cherry tree, skinned it with the tip of his teeth and sucked the pulp to his evident refreshment.

"But, Sire, we were married before the Alcalde and before the priest, too. She swore upon the Bible—"

"And if she had sworn to you not to die for thirty years, would you send her to prison the day she caught the plague? She swore, say you? That is the only wrong that I discover in her. And yet, with the laws of your peculiar country, such a vow was the most idle of forced oaths. What has just happened is a clear proof of that. Now, if she were still trying to hoodwink you, or if she were pretending to be in love with you, in order to carry on her amorous intrigues, undetected, then you could—! But she is not deceiving you at all, since she has run away. Her frankness is beyond reproach. And why has she run away? Doubtless because she has found somebody that is your superior, in youth, good looks, character or, who knows, perhaps even in worldly goods. You admit that a maiden may well weigh such arguments when she contemplates matrimony; all the more reason for a woman to do so after marriage and with experience to counsel her."

"Yet it is written in the code: 'Thou shalt not wrong thy neighbor!'"

"That is exactly why I forbid you to pursue your successor. Pass on to the second case."

"Your Majesty!" spoke a deep bass voice, "a scoundrel of a goatherd has violated my only child."

"Oh, oh!" protested the King. "There is no need to jump at the conclusion that she offered resistance. Get the evidence first. I am curious to see the victim."

She was brought before him.

She wore the favorite costume of the young women of Tryphême; over the hair, a handkerchief of sun yellow; on the feet, slippers of moon silver; the rest of the body, quite nude.

Pausole considered, you see, that the sight of a person ugly or old or feeble is veritable torture to some people. Accordingly, he had passed a law forbidding the unfortunate possessor of a defective frame or distorted features to appear in public uncovered. But as the spectacle of a girl in her youth or of a man in his prime can awaken nothing but the purest thoughts and those most conducing to true virtue, Pausole had given his people to understand that, apart from a few weeks when the very Mediterranean is chilled by the winter, he felt himself impelled to reveal to all a gift so precious, and so fleeting as human beauty.

"My good friend," said the King, bending towards the ear of an attendant, "the cherries that are left are so high that I cannot pick them without trouble. And I have no intention of moving to another tree. I am used to this one. Tomorrow, hang a dozen choice cherries on the lower branches."

He then turned once more towards the young girl [6] who was awaiting his pronouncement with nervous but hopeful anticipation.

"Well?" said he. "Are you entering a plea in person? For I shall give ear to your father only on condition that he sues in your name."

"Oh, Sire! Do you speak to him yourself and do not let me be whipped! I have been too excited this past week to hold my tongue for two successive days and I shall not be ashamed of anything before you, who are so just. Last evening I had set out for my sister's house in the mountains, with a jug of milk for her little baby. She had often spoken to me about the things that make life sweet for her; things that I miss so sadly during my long nights.

"Then I started back through the woods, perhaps with a little blush on my cheeks and a heart sorely stirred, when I met beneath the willows a goatherd of my own age. He, too, seemed quite sad at being alone. Sire, he was just stepping from the bath; he was so handsome, so clean, so sweet; his whole body—! He must have seen in my eyes that I really found him very pleasing.

"Men are always imagining that we are tempting them; and, not only that, but they scarcely have anything to do with the girls that will not look at them: if a man takes us, even by force, it is after he has read in our eyes that we should not find it unpleasing.... Oh! in this case, I swear I did not do it on purpose. I did not want him to touch me. Or—or at any rate I did not think I wanted it.

"But after all, I did look at the young man and that, too, at the very moment when I was admiring him the most; and suddenly he seized my hand—then—my father told you the truth, Sire; I resisted with all my might. I did not cry out! Oh, no! Not for anything in the world would I have called for help in the position I was in then—and besides, I was hoping hard to get out of it all by myself.

"I struggled with my four limbs, as if I were in danger of my life, from sunset until it was quite dark; then I saw that it was too late to go back home, and I got discouraged; and so, before next morning, I lost courage several times and I decided to waste no more energy in such unequal encounters. Your Majesty has just now been requested to protect my poor weak body from any further assaults: father's whippings are the only kind that terrify me. I can attend to the others without any help."

Pausole had listened to this sweet little plea without a single word

[6] The French *jeune fille* is almost untranslatable into English. "Chicken" or "flapper" would most accurately represent it, but the reiterated slang would be a blemish. I have rendered it variously to suit the context.

of interruption. When the last syllable was uttered, he at once pronounced judgment.

"Here is a child quite superior to her father in maturity of spirit, initiative and vital instinct. Come! We must set her free. I do not know by what right I should exercise restraint of any sort over a little head that reasons so well. Cunning young brain! Be off with you; you are free. Do no evil, but follow your own fancy, in accordance with the code of Tryphême. Call the third case."

Now it happened that the third case was not precisely of the sort that the King might have anticipated.

During the young girl's discourse, there could be observed, in the avenue of magnolias that led to the royal palace, the faltering and withal comical progress of a little old woman, who was wearing skirts and skipping like a grasshopper.

She approached by alternate leaps from one toe to the other. Soon could be heard the sighs and groans that gave utterance to her distress. She staggered toward the King's throne, crooked her feeble arm over a branch, as if to prevent collapse until the last possible moment, and gasped forth: "Sire—," but in a voice so thin that the people thought her already expiring.

"It's one of the old women from the palace," remarked a servant.

"Duenna of the royal apartments," explained another.

And as the Court etiquette was subject in relaxation in view of the King's democratic nature, the joy of the entire entourage was expressed by the cry of one soul that was getting bored:

"Something has happened!"

The King had risen:

"What's the matter!"

"Sire—the fair Aline [7]—Ah! Sire—the Princess your daughter—"

"Well?"

"Ah!—"

And the old woman sank down in a pitiful swoon.

At the same moment, there came up a second lady of honor. She was calmer and carried a tiny epistle. First folding her yellow parasol, she communicated her tidings in the following formal terms:

"I regret to announce to your Majesty that Her Royal Highness, the Princess Aline, has left the palace under mysterious circumstances which, however, do not admit of any cause for alarm as to her very

[7] The best rendering, I think, for *la Blanche Aline*. "The white Aline" would be awkward. This needs explanation only because of the reference below to the loss of her "Homeric epithet," an allusion to the adjective "white-armed" often applied by Homer to Hera.

precious health. The lady of honor whose duty it is to awaken Her Highness and to interpret her dreams for her, presented herself respectfully at Her Highness' door and knocked for four hours without obtaining any response. Worried, properly enough, by a silence that was wholly inexplicable to her, she took it upon herself to enter, in spite of the boldness of such a step. Her Highness was no longer in her apartment. The Princess Aline had left her chamber without advising any one of her plans and without taking any baggage with her, except her little powder box, her rouge case, her pocketbook and an article of the feminine toilette, the precise name of which doubtless does not interest Your Majesty. Nobody knows either the hour of her departure or the route she was pleased to take. We can only surmise that she must have left by the window. In the course of the investigations carefully pursued by us, we discovered on her dressing table a note with these words: 'For Papa.' I consign it to Your Majesty's hands."

Pausole refused to understand. In vain had the lady of honor set forth her tale in the bright light of high noon; Pausole remained unseeing.

"My dear," he said to her, "you are wandering. I hear from your lips a meaningless babble of words. I see the glare of insanity in your eyes. Let us see now! Why should my daughter have left me? Where can she be better off than at the palace, with her father? And why believe that she has departed without even bidding me good-bye? It is madness, I tell you. If she didn't sleep in her chamber, it is because it was too warm there. She must be somewhere on the terrace, in her hammock with the pretty ribbons. I'll wager nobody thought of that. So go and look instead of disturbing my reflections in this deplorable fashion."

As he finished speaking his gaze fell upon the note that he was still holding in his hand. Across the middle of a tinted envelope, the words: "For Papa" were scrawled in fantastic, irregular but legible characters; while beneath them a line, which must have had every intention of being horizontal, rose deliriously heavenward, like a jumping rope.

The King tore open the envelope in hesitant silence. He drew forth a letter that spoke to him thus:

"Dear little papa,

"If I thought that it would cause you suffering, I should never have the courage to run away at a minute's notice; but you cannot feel hurt because I am happy, and you have always told me that you desired my happiness.

"I shall return in seven months, for my coming-of-age, on my fifteenth birthday. Wait for me and don't worry. I am going away with—"

(No, he had not read amiss)

"—I am going away with some one as nice as can be, who will watch over me as you would yourself. Here's a kiss for you, if you are not angry.

"Your own little Line."

The crowd had been drawing nearer bit by bit. Without knowing what was going on, but with a murmur of curiosity, they were gazing at the King's agitation, an extraordinary phenomenon! Several plaintiffs were growing impatient. The girl who had gained her discharge in the last case, fearing to see her good cause wrecked by ensuing complications, made bold to ask for confirmation:

"Then I am free, Sire? Would Your Majesty deign to inform my father, too?"

The King made a violent gesture.

"All pending cases be damned! Varlets! Off with my robes! Ha! That shall not be! That daughter of mine is crazy enough to be put in a cell! We must get her back with all speed. Never has the world seen such a catastrophe— Varlets! Stupid dogs! Run ahead!"

And upon the mule Macarie, who was galloping for the first time in a long and peaceful existence, King Pausole was seen to dash away in a cloud of white dust, while the wind of his passage lifted his light crown and mockingly hung it on a supple twig of myrtle.

CHAPTER TWO

Wherein We Meet King Pausole, His Harem, His Chief Eunuch and the Royal Palace

My love inconstant comes and goes,
Like ebb and flow of tide;
As soon as e'er my love she knows
I feel my love has died.

SAINT-AMANT

ON the day when Pausole came to know himself (it was long before the year in which the fair Aline was born), he affirmed that his character was possessed of three virtues and one defect.

These virtues were, in descending order: laziness, love of luxury and beneficence.

For the first, he sought inactivity; for the second, indulgence; for the third, philanthropy.

His defect of character, which will play a predominant part in this tale, was a specific and general irresolution, of which he never complained; for this in itself afforded, by contrast, a sensual satisfaction superior to the peace of indolence.

He experienced a sense of the irreparable whenever he closed a window. Choosing a piece of fruit, a wife or a scarf smote him with a perplexity bordering on anguish. Never did he tear a piece of paper, even an envelope, without fear of later regretting so ill-considered a determination. Scarcely had he expressed a wish or issued an order than he immediately halted his attendants, who would jump to obey, with utterances such as: "Wait—it is not the proper moment," or "We shall see later," or "Never mind that." All of which maintained his whole existence in an atmosphere of the circumspect and the provisional, so much did he dread the definite.

He did dread it; but for himself alone. By a species of revenge upon his personal hesitancy, he discerned the duty of others with an immediate and positive clairvoyance and pronounced his official judgments with remarkable decision. A singular result of this assurance in discovering chicanery was a reputation for infallibility, which made his court pre-eminent. His confidence in himself was readily imparted to others; indeed, nothing is more dangerous for a superior than to lose himself in thought before making a reply to a subordinate. Pausole never wasted time in thought while beneath the tree where he gave audience, except when necessary to make a choice between two cherries blushing like virgins.

As soon as Pausole had gained this measure of information as to his virtues and his failing, he did not expend his energies in impossible self-reform, but in indulging his weaknesses and in extracting from them all possible advantages that might conduce to the convenience of himself and his household.

And thus, warned by long experience, he found it wiser every evening to forbear choosing a companion from among the women that he had gathered in the royal harem. He experienced a most pitiful shrinking from this daily selection and almost always let himself be entrapped by the boldest creature, instead of calmly following his mysterious preferences. Hence he immediately regretted having forgotten the fairest.

One day, by establishing an unalterable rule which spared him the

distress of these individual decisions, he reduced the number of his wives to exactly three hundred and sixty-five. One of the women that this decision sent back to her home displayed her love by such a burst of anguished tears that the King, unfailingly paternal, consented to keep her under a subsidiary title for leap years.

By this means his nightly occupations were regulated in a fashion that no longer occasioned him any confusion. Every evening a face new, yet familiar, approved and perhaps even regretted for a whole year, came to lay upon his pillows two rosy cheeks made precious by a long unsatisfied desire. And Pausole, freed from the care of making preparations for the following night, tasted with all the more delight an untroubled joy.

It goes without saying that the apartments of the Queens occupied almost the entire royal palace. They were divided according to the four seasons, in a long multi-colored building, where, along the façade, a thousand curtains fluttered in the sun like festal decorations.

Two pavilions of more than one story flanked this enormous edifice.

In one dwelt the King himself; in the other his Cabinet of ministers held their deliberations. Pausole was obliged to pass through the harem in order to preside over the councils of state.

It is just as well to admit frankly that, after leaving the South pavilion, he never got as far as the pavilions on the North.

He himself had conceived this architecture and foreseen this result. As, said he, the best monarchs have been luxurious queens who have allowed their officers of state to rule in peace, so shall I, by a salutary device, release my spirit from any ultimate temptation to mingle in public affairs.

And, as a matter of fact, everything went along in the best possible fashion. Nobody complained, neither people nor sovereign; or at least, the scattered malcontents blamed "the ministers," who, mockingly ensconced behind the barrier of their collective anonymity and otherwise quite satisfied to work without direction, returned thanks to their destiny.

Pausole had extended his spirit of abdication so far that he did not even govern his wives. At the head of the harem, and combining the function of Chief Eunuch with that of Marshal of the Palace, a singular personage held sway in the King's name.

It was the Huguenot Taxis.[8]

Sparse of frame, cadaverous of cheek and tricky of eye, this meticulous, intractable and domineering soul, Taxis, will play in the subse-

[8] "The man of regulation," Greek.

quent narrative (let us explain for the sake of clearness) the essential rôle of the Antagonistic Personality. In spite of this, Pausole had appointed him, and no one could doubt that the King accorded his functionary a measure of esteem, confidence and almost admiration.

This one-time tutor in algebra, one-time professor of Protestant theology, later employed successfully on divers political missions and finally promoted to the post of Chief Eunuch, possessed a sense of order and a respect for principle that far surpassed a simple mania. He had displayed a universal aptitude for all political offices and had been able to prove himself indispensable, if not to his underlings, at any rate to his superiors. A single example will suffice; the harem had been reduced to subjection one week after the appointment of its chief—a chimerical consummation which Pausole hitherto had not even remotely imagined in the illusions of his golden dreams.

It would be a delicate matter to lay stress upon the qualifications that Taxis urged to further his candidacy for the Chief Eunuchship; a delicate matter and one of little interest besides. Suffice it to say that Taxis was blessed with quite natural qualifications for that privileged post. Heaven had spared him the concupiscences of the flesh and in an excess of compassion had spared them equally to all women that came in contact with him. Providence never intended that a man proof against desire should yet have the pain of inspiring it in those around him. He was neither the victim nor the cause of sin.

Nevertheless, he had to resign himself to not making proselytes among his young charges. That would have been to exceed the duties of his office. He rigorously restrained himself. The King, a foe to all warfare, abhorred in particular religious warfare; a friend to all liberties, he interfered with the conscience of nobody, were he Jesuit or Freemason. Within the confines of his harem, as throughout his whole territory, Pausole tolerated a thousand cults and practiced several of them himself, in order to learn by turns the consolations of each different Paradise.

The King's favorite shrine, on a terrace in the park, was a little temple dedicated to Demeter and Persephone. The two goddesses, having no longer any other worshipers on earth, hearkened benevolently to this sole remaining disciple. To Demeter he prayed especially for good harvests for his people; to Persephone, for the favor of not being brought into her presence until the latest possible moment.[9]

Such, then, were Pausole, his wives, his Chief Eunuch and his palace. When we shall have added the description of the fair Aline,

[9] Pausole's prayers are addressed to Demeter as the goddess of the grain and the harvest, to Persephone as the Queen of Hades.

we shall be able to interrupt these descriptive chapters; that is to say, to no longer oblige our readers of the fair sex to skip so many pages at once.

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CHAPTER THREE

Wherein Is Described the Fair Aline from Top to Toe, in Order That the Reader May Deplore Her Flight and at the Same Time Pardon It

> *If painters have depicted the nude, the sin is very great, inasmuch as they cannot attain this end without seeing the original.*
>
> SURVEY OF GENERAL CONDITIONS, ETC., 1676

THE fair Aline was the daughter of a woman of Holland and probably also of King Pausole.

At any rate, nobody ever expressed a doubt of it.

Her hair was blonde, her complexion ivory-white, but subject to violent blushes, her nostrils wide and her lips gay.

I know that it is not the custom to trace the portraits of young girls in a state of undress beyond the décolleté. No matter: in a few years we shall all be enlightened, the old mode will fall into disuse and, were it only to encourage painters in an aim so commendable, I shall take no account of established rules.

The fair Aline, fourteen years and five months after her birth, conceived the liveliest interest in following the development of her gracious person. It is quite natural that we should bear her company as she stands before her glass, where every morning she gazed upon herself with so much affectionate curiosity.

She would run thither immediately upon awakening, leaving her trailing night gown on the bed and preserving naught of her nightly toilette, but the dancing braids of her hair. The interview with her reflection was quite a touching scene.

This began with a smile of welcome, followed by a battery of resounding kisses, from her two hands, from her ten fingers. During the first minute, her tenderness for herself was dominant. Her gaze told her unforgettable things; it was a communion of souls, wherein her beauty added nothing to a sympathetic understanding already quite devoted. But, little by little, this sentiment gave place to another, which assumed the form of fixed admiration.

She had passed from childhood but five weeks ago; hence came discoveries without number. Her breasts, rounded out in so short a time, preserved under her hands all the freshness of new toys. With the familiarity (and carelessness) of the child that she still was after all, she caught at these fragile roses as if they were toy balloons; she tried to pull them together; she tickled the little points of them; she teased them a thousand ways. Then, suddenly abandoning her sportive play, with her left leg extended and her right knee bent, she would measure with her eyes the graceful outline of a hip, very young to be sure, but growing rounder and rounder every day. Indeed, was there anything that she did not admire? By a peculiarity that pleased her no less than her other charms, she did not yet bear all the external marks of her adolescence; but, upon carefully examining, she found in that something a bit Greek which was not unbecoming.

And whom then should she have loved, if not her own beloved image? Her father had given her no other playmate.

You have guessed it already; Pausole, so tolerant toward the behavior of his people, was far less so toward that of his own daughter.

The more delight he took in a chance encounter in the streets with nude young virgins, the more reluctance he felt at presenting the Crown Princess to his faithful subjects in the same costume. Assuredly he was not restrained by any sense of propriety; but the Southern sun is fiery; sunburn is becoming only to brunettes; to the skin of blondes it gives the appearance of boiled lobster, and the fair Aline would soon have lost the Homeric epithet which made her a marked personality in the midst of all the little girls, if they had let her race her body in the open air without protection. So they forced her to wear clothes and even to carry a parasol.

Certain analogous reasons—I mean those likewise inspired by paternal tenderness—had deterred Pausole from applying to his own daughter his well-known theories upon the education of children.

Moralists never have any fear of appearing contradictory. They consider with good reason that they have done enough in preaching the good word, and that a personal example is not a necessary adjunct to spreading their doctrines.

Without doubt, said the King to himself, I realize that monkeys are reared with extreme freedom and are left to their own instincts; that is to say, to the earliest joys of their poor little lives. But my daughter was born amid very exceptional conditions. Her interest demands special treatment. No rule is made for everybody. In short, he imprisoned the hapless child.

She had, to be sure, heard that fate had accorded her three hun-

dred and sixty-six step-mothers, the majority of whom excelled in wit or beauty; but the harem remained closed to her day and night. Her mother had died long since. She had no sisters, no companions. Even the ladies of honor had orders not to address the Princess except with a view to her literary instruction. However, scarcely dreaming that a better life existed elsewhere, the fair Aline remained gay.

In the morning, the whole park belonged to her. It was the hour at which the King and his Queens were asleep. She would play alone, but with as much ardor and activity as if a throng of children had been sharing her pleasure. Trees were her friends, little nooks her confidants. She often returned panting from a game of hide-and-seek with a green lizard or a race with rosy rabbit.

And, then, suddenly, one morning she found it more interesting to play at flights of fancy and to dance the minuet with her image.

Some six weeks later Pausole learned from her letter that she had left the palace with "some one as nice as could be," who was expected to watch over her.

Thus, even in the solitude in which her father had kept her shut up, the fair Aline had known, without advice and quite without experience, but happily aided by her youthful imagination, how to find the comrades that she required at the age of her metamorphosis.

CHAPTER FOUR

How King Pausole Returned to His Palace and What He Saw Fit to Do There

Perched atop of a fagot, to pipe holding fast,
Leaning gloomily o'er the hearth fire's broad span,
With mutinous soul and with eyes downward cast,
I think of the cruelty man shows to man.

SAINT-AMANT

In front of the steps of the portico, the mule Macarie halted upon four quivering hoofs, with an air of deep offense at having been driven to a mad career that was not consistent with her age, her habits or her character.

And through the archway, King Pausole was seen to enter; his crown gone, his hair awry, his robe covered with dust, his hands beating the air.

He sputtered. He almost wept. Sweaty, dusty and purple with anger, he was in a state of pitiful revolt.

Nobody was anxious to offer him the initial explanations. The corridors, emptier than the galleries of a museum, led to deserted chambers.

The Swiss guards had abandoned their halberds and the ladies of honor had left their bits of sewing harpooned with a hasty needle. Pausole launched a kick at a solitary phonograph, which was bleating Mephisto's serenade into his ears.

He imagined that every one had departed in the train of the Princess and that the Court had changed its base, to please her by imitating her gracious example.

Finally, in the embrasure of a window, he spied a laundress.

"Is it true?"

His throat gave forth no sound. Besides, the terrified attitude of the domestic showed him the folly of so idle a question.

Pausole continued his advance through the apartments. He traversed fifteen salons in which the divans everywhere preserved their accustomed positions. Not one of them was occupied.

He passed on into the portrait gallery and halted before a painting which, to his confused memory, still recalled somewhat the supple form of Queen Christiane, mother of the Princess Aline.

He questioned it:

"Unhappy girl! Is this thy blood! Thy stock?"

But Queen Christiane, who was portrayed by the picture in the character of Danaë,[10] continued to smile and spread her knees, while not the least shame mantled her ivory brow.

Then the King penetrated into the silent harem.

It was the hour of the siesta.

The great hall was scented with the breath of three hundred dreams.

All the women were still lying wherever sleep had overtaken them. They were spread over the mats of cold rushes, they ornamented the couch covers, their legs swung from the wide meshes of each and every hammock. Pausole found it impossible to walk, to sit down or to raise his head without touching a sleeping nude. One divan alone contained fifteen of them. A ribbon depending from above encircled two

[10] The mother of Perseus by Zeus, who penetrated her prison in the form of a shower of gold. The subject has been treated by Rembrandt, Correggio and Titian. A "pastel" on Danaë by Pierre Louÿs, appeared in the Mercure de France, July, 1895; reprinted in "Le Crépuscule des Nymphes," 1925.

of them, pressed them body to body. Those who were suffering from the heat had sought their bed in the shallow basin of the fountain, and, with heads pillowed on the marble rim, they stretched their limbs beneath the water until their toes rested against the central figure of a siren, who thus became the pistil of the open tulip formed by their radiating bodies.

In the midst of this vast silence, Pausole grew gradually calmer. Peace, like trouble, is contagious. The shady calm of the harem overspread his thoughts.

Casting his eyes upon his attire, he saw that it was in a deplorable condition, and his mind was already becoming clear enough to advise him to change his garments.

This was done. But not without difficulty.

For the laundress had had time to spread through the whole palace the report that the King had returned crownless, voiceless, reasonless; that he had almost throttled her, and hence she had been taken sick two days sooner than usual.

Consequently, the first valet that appeared between the folds of a portière, in response to the King's call, was assuredly moved by a curiosity that prompted him to defy death; but he tottered in amazement when he heard the well-known pleasant tones of Pausole asking for his Turkish dressing gown and his cigarette case.

The sovereign of Tryphême, to have made so quick a recovery, had taken counsel with himself.

It was not enough to proclaim that the fair Aline should be pursued. Even that was a decision that could not lightly be made. And granted that such an extremity were necessary, how to map out the program of so delicate an investigation?

Whom to charge with carrying it out?

And—still supposing these difficulties resolved—what instructions to issue to his representative in the probable event of the Princess' refusing to yield to the solicitations, urgent appeals or even to the formal offers of marriage [11] that it would doubtless be necessary to tender her?

Evidently, all these problems could not be settled in five minutes.

And besides, there was no hurry.

What good end was served by rushing matters?

Everything indicated that it was already too late to protect the fair Aline from the most distressing danger.

But it would never be too late to escort her back to the palace.

[11] The French phrase *sommations, respectueuses* actually implies the formal request for permission to marry addressed by minors to their parents. The inversion here furnishes a mild joke.

Since nothing could alter an accomplished fact, since it was an open scandal known to all, the better course would be to consider only the consequences and to plan the remedy for them at leisure.

Having thus decided to decide nothing on the spur of the moment, Pausole took a bath, smoked two cigarettes and ate a few biscuits dipped in old port.

One image, however, obsessed his brain. He realized that at the precise moment when, within his rooms, he was taking time for rest and reflection, his daughter was no doubt accomplishing the most important act of her nascent womanhood. In spite of himself, he saw her in a posture (alas!) too easy to imagine, and all the phases of the well-known scene were reproduced in his mind's eye with the most harrowing verisimilitude.

He was especially wrought up at having no information as to the second of the two characters that played their parts in the adventure. His life was being upset; a capital wrong was being done to his tranquillity of spirit, and he did not even know upon whom to vent his rage! Such an event should not have come to pass without at least his taking a share in the planning. Every branch of education requires its specialized exponent, whose ability and competence can scarcely be appreciated by the mere pupil. Pausole did not understand how, at a time when his daughter was on the brink of her initial trial of such a classic experience, she had selected a teacher on her own responsibility, without troubling to make any inquiry into the question of his fitness for giving instruction.

Yes. It was certainly an oversight.

But it was now beyond repair.

Therefore, he had to accept it with good grace.

Criticizing the irremediable is a waste of time.

The King recalled this maxim and several others equally productive of consolation.

To waste time—"to pausole" (as he himself used to be fond of saying)—another day, he would have consented to do that without a struggle.

This evening his reveries seemed distasteful to him.

He returned to the harem.

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CHAPTER FIVE

How the King Took Counsel With the Women of His Harem and How He Was Enabled to Choose From Among Various Proffers of Advice

Wherefore are the ladies so happy when one tells them that the other ladies make love even as they? Because thereby their fault becometh not so large.
DIVERS QUESTIONS AND REPLIES TO THE SAME, 1617

WHILE Pausole thus communed, all the clocks had struck the hour of four, and before the last stroke had ceased to vibrate Taxis, holding a little bell in his hand, was already striding majestically through the great hall, with rhythmic and determined tread.

The women were all loath to awake. The majority, turning over with a protesting sigh, attempted to recapture the interrupted dream, but without hope that they would be permitted.

"Ladies," said the Chief Eunuch, "it is the hour of awakening. The privilege of sleep is yours no more. Up, up!"

"No—bother!" came a few supplicating voices.

"It is no use to combat the rule," said Taxis. "The Good Book teaches us: 'To everything there is a season under the heaven; a time to be born and a time to die; a time to kill and a time to heal; a time to break down and a time to build up.' There is a time to dream and a time to live. Up with you!"

Stopping, he examined a corner all littered with long-limbed, languorous bodies.

"Ah!" he cried impatiently, "there is a scandalous disorder prevailing here. From this evening henceforth, I intend to assign to each one of Your Majesties a fixed and unalterable position, which none shall have the right to abandon during the hour of the siesta."

A loud murmur arose, which was immediately quelled by a look shot with menace.

"Silence!" cried Taxis. "My words are first of all inspired by considerations of hygiene, policy and decency; but even were they not so, they would still follow the word of God, for it is written: 'Ye shall keep my statutes and my judgments.' What is chosen by caprice is damnable; what is conceived by authority is sanctified. Therefore a sane, severe and authoritative voice must assert itself."

"Pardon, monsieur," said a young girl, "why not let us choose?

I for my part love to sleep on a mat and my sister on a rug. If you assign us the contrary, it will give pleasure to neither and distress to both."

"No matter. You do not know what is good for you. Authority knows it for you and gives it to you without your knowledge and in spite of you; that is the rôle assigned to Authority."

"What if nobody invokes it?"

"Authority asserts itself. It never yields. Only with itself does it argue its rights, limit its domain and decide its action."

"In whose name?"

"In the name of Principle."

Then, cutting short the discussion, he strode rapidly towards a hammock where two turtle doves were still languidly reclining.

"I see," said he, "from this example, that it is necessary to enact stringent laws inasmuch as my counsels go for naught. Have I not admonished you of all that is unseemly and pernicious in such a posture! You give no heed to my opinions. Very well; I shall pass a rule covering that point."

But one of the women thus apostrophized let fall a limp arm which tilted the hammock, and as she was a Jewess she knew how to make reply:

"It is written, monsieur, 'if two lie together, then they shall have heat; but how can one be warm alone?' Would you attempt to deny what the Bible teaches us?"

"Madame," said Taxis, taken aback, "since you know the Old Testament so thoroughly, you would do well to choose from it texts clearer in sense and—"

"Oh! It is quite clear."

"—And less subject to controversy. Where you see only concrete and brutal words, the interpreter sees a mystic sense, the loftiness of which escapes your understanding. But let that be. I have bidden you never to sleep two by two, in order to avoid opportunities for straying into certain insane practices which I am, to be sure, not authorized by the King to forbid you, but which I nevertheless declare on my own responsibility to be abominable."

"It is not forbidden by the Pentateuch."

"Because no one dared foresee so abysmal a perversion."

"Oh! But they did foresee some far more remarkable ones.... They foresaw them all, except that one! Let us imagine that it was permitted."

"It did not even exist."

"What do you say? It didn't even exist? Ah, my dear sir! You are inimitable!"

Amidst bursts of laughter, Taxis was about to reply, when a second infraction caused him to leap in another direction.

"Candy?" said he. "You are eating candy at this hour? Candy at ten minutes past four? Tea is not served until five o'clock. It is so provided in the Daily Schedule. It is strictly forbidden to consume any sort of food outside of meal times. I regret to announce that Your Majesty shall be deprived of her stroll in the park four days dating from tomorrow."

Once more he dashed away.

"The same punishment for you, madame. You have taken a book. Reading is not permitted until half-past five. From four to five, awakening, ablutions, and conversation; you should know the rule."

The young Queen thus punished did not accept the reproof in silence. Taking advantage of the liberty that the King was wise enough to permit his wives in the matters of speech and deportment, she approached with a smile:

"Don't be afraid," she said, "I shan't tell you what I think of your person, for I should put myself in the way of another penalty; but I know how dear is Modesty to you; so I am going to shatter your ideal with impunity, beneath your very eyes, Sir Chief Eunuch, with all the everlastingly new resources of my little imagination."

"Madame—"

"Prepare yourself. I have deigned to give you warning."

And, suiting the action to the word, she accentuated her pantomime with words so lyrically sensual that Taxis, with hair on end, blanched and recoiled in horror against the wall.

"Madame—in pity's name—"

"Why, I was just telling you something very pretty. Why can't you see it that way?"

"Do you not then realize, unhappy child, into what an abyss of hell and damnation you are thereby casting your eternal soul!"

"Alas, no!" said the young woman.

She even added:

"I'm going on."

But Taxis, helpless against this serene and fearless voluptuousness, the flame of which licked the whole throng with every word, could endure no more. He fled in the wind of scandal.

A cheer acclaimed his eclipse; at the same moment, Pausole appeared and, imagining himself the cause of so touching a demonstration of joy, the good King bowed with a full heart.

The same warm shadow still filled the great hall, now grown noisy; but the descending rays of the setting sun breathed upon it clouds of transparent purple and long copper-colored shafts where the dust arose. The women seemed clothed in golden gauze. There were some who, as they stood up, plunged their brown into a shadow as of night. Others, reclining on the mats, seemed painted from head to foot, as if enameled by the flames.

Pausole scarcely paused for contemplations to which circumstances did not lend themselves.

He stretched out on a divan, and the seven Queens assigned for the tender ministrations of the week at once surrounded him with an agitated sympathy which prompted much chatter.

"Well?"

"How can it be?"

"What news?"

"Who would have thought it?"

"It's impossible!"

"How did it happen?"

"We don't know a thing."

"Are they sure it's so?"

"Do they know with whom she ran away?"

"Are you on their trail?"

"Where did they hide?"

The King shrugged his shoulders.

"I don't know any more about it than you do."

"But what have you decided to do?"

"It's impossible to decide anything today; it's nonsense."

"Why?"

"Because hasty plans lead to the worst catastrophes."

"But time is passing and the Princess is on her way."

"Rubbish! She will not leave Tryphême, be sure of that. If I make up my mind to have her traced (and that prospect is odious to me), it will be possible to do so tomorrow; still possible the day after. That is a truth which strikes the eye at once."

"And what now?"

"Now I am going to ask your advice. Whether I shall follow it, I don't know. But perhaps one of you can really suggest the very stratagem that I need?"

The women flocked around eagerly.

"Oh! I'll—," said one.

"And I—," interrupted a second.

But before they could get the words out of their mouths, Queen Denyse had insinuated her little persuasive voice:

"Sire, you ought to write to Saint Anthony. You see, when you have lost anybody or anything that is the only way to find it again."

The surrounding women expressed doubt.

She blushed but insisted:

"Oh, yes!"

And she added the complete narrative of a personal experience, which, it must be admitted, was conclusive.

Pausole, during this testimony, was looking insistently at a Queen very young and still quite innocent, who up to that time had not uttered a word. He questioned her delicately.

"Where should you be by this time, if such an adventure had abducted you from me? What means should you have taken to escape, and what route? Should you run far from here, to get a good start, or should you hide close by, to mislead your pursuers? Tell me everything, Gisele; and reflect well; it is interesting."

Gisele, in astonishment, held her peace.

"Oh, yes," smiled the King. "I understand. You are not willing to betray your feminine devices—"

"Oh!" said she, piqued at the reproach. "I never have need of any! If I hesitated, it was because it is almost impossible to reply to such a question. We lead men into our arms, but after that, it is they who lead us. I have seen that in novels, Sire, for I have had no other experience. And yet, even in my ignorance, I find that it turns out that way. I left my father and mother to come here where you see me, and I should follow you anywhere, if such should be your pleasure. Be assured that the Princess has confidence rather than presumption. You who know men better than I; you yourself deduce what her lover can have done; that is the best way to find out where she is."

"That will keep until later," said the King. "There is no use in imposing a task upon myself that can just as well be performed by some of my menials. When one is confronted by a complicated case, requiring cogitation, it takes considerable effort to wade through the preliminary nonsense. I never trouble myself with those initial exertions. In a few days, the question will be threshed out without its costing me the lifting of an eyelash. I shall see then whether I shall be obliged to do my share of the thinking; but more probably I shall be satisfied to make a choice from the best bits of advice offered—unless that task, too, seems too delicate to me."

"Then what would happen?"

"We shall see, we shall see. At the moment it is your duty to do my thinking for me. I am all ears."

"May I speak?" asked Queen Françoise.

"I demand it," repeated Pausole.

"Well, in an elopement, the first day begets imprudence, and the second, cunning. The Princess is not ten steps away from here; I know it as well as if I saw her. Her young fool of a companion imagines himself concealed by a bush or by the curtains of his bed. He has taken her to the nearest one, there is clearly no doubt of that. Tomorrow. he will wake up to the fact that he has made a stupid move. And by the day after tomorrow, he will have taken so many precautions that all the police of the realm won't be able to find a trace of him. You must act today, at once, without losing a moment. Don't you think so?"

"Thank you," said the King. "There's the first bit of nonsense. I am delighted that it is over and done with; I shall not have to bother with it again. Besides, the advice doesn't please me in the least; but, Françoise, your skin is so beautifully shaded round the waist and so delicate between the breasts that I am willing to grant that you are right—for at least five minutes."

"You are making fun of me."

"You are the only one that thinks so."

"Sire," said Queen Diane, "I should like to speak too."

Diane, who was surnamed in the harem Diane à la Houppe [12]—a delightful homonym that designated her several attributes—Diane à la Houppe trembled slightly. It was she who that night, the envied of three hundred and sixty-five rivals, was to share the King's bed. The women knew it and gossiped about it; it was perfectly clear to them that the year of hopes and memories, the year of which she saw the end so nigh, had outlasted her patience by several days. Hence she was unnerved and stammered with a blush:

"Sire, they are misleading you. The first day of an elopement is the day of all mysteries; the second is a day of forgetfulness of the world. The Princess Aline's unknown confidant has proved himself able to conduct her from the palace, through the midst of five hundred people, without being detected. He had a very clever and well executed plan. You may be sure he is still following it. Tonight he doubtless imagines that the whole world is at his heels; he will take good care

[12] Literally "Diana with the tufts," an expression so awkward that I have thought it best to keep the French form. "Tassels" or "Top-knot" would be still worse, and the latter would be inadequate. It is needless to comment on the reason for the epithet.

not to let himself be caught; and if he is hiding behind a bush, that bush is precisely the last hiding place you would conceive of.... But he cannot stay there forever. Wait for him to come out. The more clearly you indicate to him, from now on, that he has been over-cautious, the more careless will he be in consequence. His capture is assured by watchful waiting. If he is not pursued, within a week's time you will find him on the highways or in a box at the Opera. And so, not only can you well afford to wait for him, but it is very important than you remain calm tonight."

"I am overwhelmed," the King replied. "Your advice is just as nonsensical, just as valuable and just as inevitable as the first. Furthermore, it contradicts the other perfectly and balances it to a nicety. The scales of my mind refuse to tilt under two such equal weights."

After a brief silence, he concluded in this wise:

"Hence, with an exquisite sense of freedom, untrammeled by the least anxiety, I adopt your opinion for my own, Diane à la Houppe. Repeat it to me, for it pleases me. And so, beloved, you declare—"

"That the best thing is to do nothing and go to bed—"

Pausole made a gesture of assent.

The fair Diane heaved a sigh and completed her advice, her sentence and her thought:

"—With me," she said, and smiled.

CHAPTER SIX

How Diane à la Houppe and King Pausole Beheld Some One Enter Whom They Were in No Wise Expecting

As her robes are discarded, her beauty is seen;
Every line of her body the eye doth invite.
Herself the sole source of that glorious sheen,
Her effulgence shines forth with a goddess-like light.
MALLEVILLE, 1634

As Diane à la Houppe, watched over by a lady-in-waiting, was once upon a time copying a Bacchus by Velasquez in the square gallery of Pausole's art museum, the King entered and, admiring the excellence of her taste and sensing the excellence of her figure, he promptly sued for her unstinted favor with marked show of respect.

The girl accepted his proposal on the spot. Even her duenna, when consulted, could urge no objection. Her parents, indeed, would have been glad to keep their daughter at home, but they knew on what sacred principle Pausole founded his protection of personal liberties, and they quite forbore to express publicly their unpardonable selfishness.

When led into one of the antechambers of the harem, Diane, with a sigh of relief, cast on the chaise longue the garments that she had been compelled to wear during her years of family bondage.

And Pausole stood and watched the gradual revelation of a body of firm and vivid tints, as she cast off one by one the ungainly chemisette, the monkish skirt, the unshapely undergarments.

She was not merely pretty; she was beautiful. She had early blossomed into full womanhood. A rounded torso, shapely shoulders, firmly moulded breasts and beautifully modeled limbs were divested with agile grace of the encumbering folds of a complicated lingerie. At last her whole body came into view, with its skin of full and tawny richness, soft and downy even into the hollow of her hips and the fullness of her thighs; while her jet-black hair, freed from the clutch of the tortoise shell's teeth, spread down her back like a feathery wing.

The other women of the harem, when introduced to this... umbrageous beauty, were disposed to laughter to give vent to their wilful malice by dubbing her "the lady with the tufts." The theories of women as to the æsthetic qualities of their rivals have a character all their own. Diane à la Houppe was not the least bit angry. She was a girl of excellent disposition. Then, too, her first conversation with the King, from eve to morn, had put her in the mood to find the whole palace charming.

Alas! It was not so during the twelve-month that followed this solitary interview. In vain did Pausole explain to her that if he saw her no more, if it was necessary for her to submit to the common régime, it was because he was in desperate fear of falling in love with her; a catastrophe that would have jeopardized at once his peace of mind and the interests of state. Diane failed completely to comprehend such reasoning. Neither did she share the indifference of her companions, who regarded the annual ceremony as an excellent means of obtaining silks from Manila or slippers from Paris. Diane à la Houppe, even as Saint Augustine in the days of his youth, was in love with love and disdained all else. With the King denied her, she had even no desire to learn the various traditional games, which the other Queens constantly sought to teach her and which, in her presence, they either declared to be excellent time-killers or lauded to the skies as incomparable, according to their mood at the moment.

The poor girl lived for a year in an atmosphere of expectation; a year of tears and brooding. The last day, as you can well imagine, was inevitably the most harrowing. With the disappearance of the Princess Royal on that very morning, the terrified Diane for several hours conjured up in her despair the picture of the King himself setting out on her trail.

"Ah, Sire!" she cried, as soon as the portières of the royal chamber had closed upon herself and him, "do not look too hard at my eyes. I have wept so much since this morning."

"Houppe, you are charming," he replied. "It is true that your eyelids are swollen and your eyes still moist; but that gives to their gaze the expression of Desire personified. Were you exhausted well-nigh to fainting by long nights of passion, your eyes, dear Houppe, would gleam with the same brilliance. Do not undeceive me; one moment more and I can believe that I am the cause of this emotion."

The many eyes of night peeped into the darkness of the room through a wide bay that opened on a terrace. Beneath the curtain draped from the lintel, between the wide-flung doors, Tryphême appeared, softly outlined in blue and white.

It was an undulating country, sown with woods and low-lying houses. There was the great highway bordered with trees, a road that the King would have taken to go to his capital, if he had not had a hundred reasons (perhaps even three hundred and sixty-six) for not leaving his palace. The shadow of a huge fig tree bespread the balustrade like a carpet; its branches concealed by its broad leaves and its lilac-tinted fruit. To the left, the park bulked large, with its shedding magnolias, its quivering eucalyptus, its squat palms from Japan, its magnificent curving sagos. A rampart of aloes girdled the shadowed garden and the plain swept thence to the starry horizon.

"How like is this to my wedding night!" murmured Diane. "There has been no other night so lovely for a year. This is the twin sister of that other one. Is it not true that there are wondrous nights when the landscape that gazes upon us has the air of containing all the happiness that we long to seize and lock within ourselves?"

Pausole made no reply.

"Some one knocked," continued the Queen.

"That must mean dinner," said Pausole. "I'm ravenous."

And he called out:

"Come in! Come in!"

But, instead of the Royal Cup-bearer, it was the Chief Eunuch who displayed between the portières his ugly countenance that typified the Antagonistic Personality.

"Oh, what's up now?" said the King, in the most sullen of tones. "I have no need for your presence, Taxis, I am engaged."

"Get out," said the fair Diane, "you have no business to be poking your nose in here."

"It is my dinner hour," continued Pausole. "I have no intention of reading any documents but the menu."

"Have you the menu?" repeated Diane. "No? Then get out!"

"My friend," went on the King, "if you are going to usurp the functions of the other court officials, we shall have anarchy. Go and tell the Royal Cup-bearer that this evening, too, I beg of him to be so good as to select, on my authority, the wine that I no doubt prefer. I have too much on my hands to make any decision on that score and still more reason not to listen to you. Good-bye!"

"Oh, won't you get out!" cried Diane, at the end of her tether.

Taxis, respectful but obstinate, made no move to obey. Diane took him by his two shoulders and spoke straight at him in the most serious tone:

"You psalm-singing Methodist! If you impose upon the King's good nature and obtain permission to confer here, I shall force you to leave before you have uttered a single word. Oh, no! Not by violence, but by a means that you know too well!"

The King raised his arms.

"Come, come! said he. "A quarrel? Houppe, calm yourself. Taxis is going to leave. He is a man of sense. He must have comprehended by this time that we have no desire at present for his elevating conversation."

Taxis wore a honeyed smile, which conveyed his idea of the importance of his mission.

"Verily," said he, "if the inflexible voice of my conscience, if my supreme devotion to duty, no matter how unpleasant, and if a passion for the truth did not summon me hither, Sire, I should already have deferred to the wishes expressed by Your Majesty. But my present task stands above my personal interest, and even though I be punished for it, I shall do my duty to the bitter end. In spite of your Majesty's recent cruel reproaches, I am not usurping the functions of my colleagues. I am Marshal of the Palace, and as such I am bounden to act upon the grave event that came to pass this morning on the ground floor of the South pavilion. I have not been found wanting in energy. I have instituted search for the Princess Aline."

"Alas!" groaned Queen Diane.

But, suddenly recovering her possession, she arose and demanded:

"Who gave you the order?"

"The King has confided to me the sacred duty of preventing, checking and suppressing at need disorder and excess within the confines of the royal residence."

"Ah! Preventing, eh? Well, it appears that you have not prevented, as a stranger has been able to make his way into the palace as if it were his own home. Neither have you 'checked' since the Princess has gone off under your nose and nobody knew of it for six hours. Now you propose to 'suppress,' eh? The King forbids you, milord Chief Eunuch."

"His Majesty . . ."

"The King disapproves, that's all. And it is enough. About face! The King has just made an admirable decision and he will certainly not reconsider it to give ear to your wild whims. It is much better to do nothing in the matter for at least a year; there is no need to explain to you why, but such is the order. Obey it. Off with you! Recall your men. Say nothing about the occurrence and go hide yourself until tomorrow evening. Do you hear me?"

The trembling Taxis extended the three papers that he held in his hand.

"But, Sire, here are the reports. The abductor is discovered. The Princess is still with him. We are keeping their retreat in view without their knowing it. I need only a word from you to act."

"My dear sir," replied Pausole, "I am not in the habit of plunging heedlessly into unaccustomed courses of action. I have no fondness for adventures and I have no intention of indulging in them. You speak and decide with a deadly precipitancy. There is neither wisdom nor method in such headstrong action and I don't know where I conceived the esteem in which I hold you. Taxis, you are like a bull in a china shop. Withdraw the surveillance that you have so hastily organized over my daughter's retreat and let her sleep in peace. That will do for this evening. I have spoken. You will please retire."

Taxis took three steps backward and pointed a bony finger at the ceiling:

"The Eternal Father will pronounce judgment!" said he.

With these words, he raised his hand to his parchment brow and disappeared.

Diane, left alone with the King, struck while the iron was hot.

"Ah, Sire! When will you deliver us from this odious person? You cannot imagine the tortures that he invents to drive us mad. He regulates everything, he doles out everything, he controls our very thoughts. We cannot sleep, nor dance, nor romp in the park, nor read novels, nor eat candy, except at hours fixed by this monomaniac. The

least slip consigns us to prison: even a momentary delay. He is killing us! We have but one means of driving him away; the device that I was on the point of employing a few minutes ago. And what is more, if you had not forbidden him to talk propriety to us, he would punish us terribly for using that means; for nothing puts him in a greater rage than the spectacles that we sometimes, of necessity, force him to witness. But such a device is repugnant to me and I seldom even enjoy seeing it employed by the rest.

"And what a singular idea to put a Protestant pastor in charge of a harem of nude women! It is your own wish and so it must be the ideal method. I put these questions, Sire, without attempting a solution. Why not give us genuine eunuchs, such as they have in the East? My companions often regret the lack of them; because, they say, these poor creatures are actually capable of giving women complete satisfaction without obtaining any for themselves; and thus nobody could possibly experience any jealousy. I, of course, scarcely think of such things. My only joy is the remembrance of you, but I could wish that nobody would prevent my dreaming of it as I pleased, and that no detestable countenance would intrude all day long between me and my dream."

"Yes, yes, of course," said Pausole, "but Taxis has some good qualities."

CHAPTER SEVEN

Which Is Considerably Shortened Out of Respect for Prevailing Laws

> *If it is possible to recover one's virginity after not having slept with one's husband for nineteen years, assuredly my virginity is restored.*
>
> LETTER OF THE DUCHESS OF ORLEANS TO THE DUCHESS OF HANOVER, Sept. 2, 1696

I SHALL omit a description of the repast that followed.

In fact, I have been told that the laws of our country permit a novelist to portray all the crimes of his characters, but not the least detail of their indulgences. Wholesale murder is a far lesser crime in the eyes of the legislator than pleasure.

As, then, I do not know for sure whether it is the delights of the bed or of the table that are banned from our works; as, furthermore, upon exhaustive consultation with my conscience and my sincerity, I

find it impossible to divine which is the greater atrocity, to eat a tartlet or to conceive a child; I prefer to take my own precautions and to speak here neither of women's breasts nor of pomegranates.

A few words will then suffice to indicate the dinner enjoyed by King Pausole and Queen Diane.

Some hors-d'œuvres.	A salad.
A first entrée.	A vegetable.
An appetizer.	A side dish.
A second entrée.	Fruits and confections.
A roast.	Wines X, Y, Z.

It was a light dinner; we will say no more.

Let us likewise draw a veil over what followed.

Diane, separated from the King for a whole year and, after a single morning of love, confined within the cloistered seclusion of the harem, had again become a young girl. Understand who can. I offer no explanations. In brief, the King himself found that this second intimate interview bore a marked resemblance to the first.

A little before sunrise, the two went out to take the air on the carpet-strewn terrace. To gather the high-hanging figs, Diane à la Houppe lifted her outstretched arms with a dolorous sigh, displaying three tufts of black against the flower-like smoothness of her skin.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Wherein Pausole Inquires Into Some Disclosures Regarding a Letter Whose Importance Will Surely Not Escape the Reader

> *It is not difficult to guess what a young coxcomb accustomed to easy conquests may say to an inexperienced girl, when he has climbed seven flights of stairs to reach her, and especially when he believes that his coming is eagerly awaited.*
>
> MME. ANCELOT, 1839

TOWARDS noon, as was his custom, Pausole simply awoke. He held no morning reception. Needless ceremonies never encumbered his existence.

His ring brought in without delay a chambermaid, who was on

that morning making her début in the royal bedroom service. The young person, trembling in every limb, stumbled, knocked her knees against the chairs and blushed violently when she caught sight of Diane shamelessly sleeping beside the King.

"Sh!" said Pausole. "Speak softly. What time is it?"

"Yes, Sire—No, no—I don't know," stammered the poor child.

"Give me my dressing gown and have my bath prepared. Also summon my reader and the groom of the kitchens. And now, close the curtains, in order that the Queen may sleep as long as possible."

Then, with a thousand precautions, he noiselessly placed his feet one after the other on the floor. The prospect of saying adieu to the redoubtable Diane for a second year did not deter him in the least.

He escaped.

Shortly afterwards, lolling in a perfumed bath, he admitted his reader-in-ordinary, who took her assigned position at six paces from the tub. This woman came every morning to give him a summary of the telegraphic reports and a résumé of the leading newspapers. By virtue of the first article in the code of Tryphême ("Thou shalt not wrong thy neighbor"), the papers were forbidden to insert any scandalous or defamatory news. So not a single sheet published the flight of the Princess Aline; and if several, here and there, had permitted themselves some veiled allusions to it, the reader had the tact not to understand them.

Pausole, however, remained distraught. As soon as his toilette was completed, the groom of the kitchens served him a smoking breakfast in his den. When Pausole had consumed this and smoked two cigarettes of fresh tobacco, he left the room himself and entered the chamber in which his daughter had grown up.

Everything was in disorder there. The apartment still preserved the aspect inevitable to a completed toilette and a hasty departure. In consequence, the study, the tiring-room, the boudoir and the bath presented a singular array of corkscrews, geographies, black stockings and tennis rackets. A copy of Telemaque [18] was floating on the calm waters of the tub.

Wrapped in melancholy, Pausole wandered from room to room for a quarter of an hour. He opened the copy-books, lifted the little corsets, unrolled a leather belt and restored three pins to their box.

Then, pressing his finger on a bell button, he said to the valet who responded:

"Inform the Marshal of the Palace that I await him here and desire speech with him."

[18] A Romance by Fénelon, published in 1699.

Taxis entered.

"Sir," said Pausole, "I appreciate your method and your zeal, in so far as they deliver me every day from a source of worries that would otherwise occupy my entire time. But your investigation of yesterday was most untimely, especially in view of the hour and place where you presumed to tender me your report upon it. Moreover, I have indicated to you that between five o'clock in the evening and two o'clock in the afternoon, I never desire to discuss business. You have overstepped your authority by taking the initiative, in a case where your competence was more than doubtful, and by asking for orders from me without my having manifested the intention of giving you any."

Thereupon, with the utmost composure, he sat down, lit a cigarette, placed his right elbow on the broad arm of a chair, inclined his head in the same direction, crossed his legs, waved his arm and spoke:

"Now, read your report."

Taxis had made no mistake. The counsels of the night had had a pacifying influence upon his eager zeal and he had ceased to cry out that his career was subordinate to the demands of his immediate duty. Furthermore, upon consulting his Bible, he had paused at this categorical passage:

"And you shall cry out because of your king which you yourselves have chosen; and the Lord will not hear you on that day."

This banished all his scruples. He became once more the courtier.

"Sire, here is the affair in two words. The notes upon the progress of my activities are in this portfolio, but I am sure it is preferable to summarize them."

He walked over to the open window.

"Yesterday morning, apparently about four o'clock, Her Royal Highness the Princess Aline was seated, fully dressed, upon the marble sill of this window. Having lifted her legs and performed from right to left a rotary movement that has left its traces in the dust, she leaped from a height of about seventy-five centimetres into the midst of the flower bed. Both her feet have left their impress there, at first parallel, then alternate. There are no other footprints. Her Highness then departed alone."

With this revelation, Taxis clasped his hands over his lean belly and paused.

"Yesterday evening," he continued, "the Princess was intending to pass the night in an inn named the 'Hotel du Coq,' [14] which is

[14] Here again, the impossibility of such renditions as "The Rooster House" or "The Sign of the Cock," leads us to retain the French. And there seems to be no object in substituting a different name.

situated on the highroad three and one-fifth kilometres from the capital. She arrived there at 3.40 P. M., coming from a small wood nearby and accompanied by a young man whose description is in my hands, but who is unknown in this region."

"How old is he?" said Pausole.

"Very young—not more than seventeen."

"Well, that's a pretty state of affairs," said the King.

"If Your Majesty had so desired, the abductor would have been arrested yesterday on the spot and the Princess escorted back to the palace."

"By policemen, you mean?"

"Rather by special envoys."

"And who are they? Taxis, you never see the delicate point of a situation, nor the complications that result from the duties demanded by a scrupulous affection."

"I do not insist. Your Majesty's wisdom is superior to mine. I deferred to your commands and the surveillance was removed at eight o'clock last night. Since then, I have strictly observed a waiting policy."

"At any rate, it is essential to find out with whom we have to deal, and that at once, in order to decide whether it is better to give chase or hold back. What rapscallion is this, whose face I have never seen, who does not belong to the palace, who does not live in the vicinity and who suddenly gains such an ascendancy over my daughter's mind that he elopes with her under our noses, without even taking the trouble to come and get her? He makes her go to join him! He waits for her and she comes to him! A girl that has never wandered beyond the palace lawns, here she is on the highways, in a roadhouse frequented by bicyclists, with a sixteen-year-old schoolboy, whom she never could have met anywhere before, throwing herself into his arms! It's amazing, Taxis, you must confess it! I despair of understanding it at all. But haven't you any clues?"

With a fleeting smile, Taxis replied in his precise tones:

"The day before yesterday and the day before that, a troupe of French dancing girls gave two performances at Court for Their Majesties of the Harem. The Princess Aline was present, concealed in her bathtub; this being her first opportunity to penetrate the mysteries of the theatre. During the entire ballet, she manifested the liveliest interest and it was possible to observe that her emotion increased every time that she saw a low creature named Mirabelle dance."

Taxis paused again, then took up his story:

"After the performance, the Princess had them remunerate this creature with a gift of currency, in the shape of a bank note contained

in a sealed envelope. I beg Your Majesty to weigh well these words in my narrative. To my mind, there is a correlation between this little act and the public misfortune that followed it so closely."

There was an embarrassing silence.

The King continued to smoke.

Taxis believed it the moment to drive home his argument.

"In short," he continued, "I accuse this ballet girl Mirabelle of having plotted a diabolical intrigue, with the purpose of dragging down to the bottomless pit a soul whom all the tender care of a devoted father had nurtured and preserved in the state of innocence. I accuse that abandoned creature of being the intermediary in the crime that has been perpetrated! The abductor's name—that we shall know later; it is immaterial; but that he was acquainted with Mirabelle and that she paved the way for his intrigues—that is what I am making every effort to prove in the course of my examination, if Your Majesty does not put any obstacle in my way."

Pausole raised both his hands.

"We shall never get out of this tangle!" he exclaimed in a discouraged tone. "The thing's getting more and more complicated. And what has become of these dancing girls?"

"They left the same day for Narbonne."

"What did I tell you? We shall never get out of this tangle! It is a perfect labyrinth."

"Pardon, Sire. Two culprits: therefore two simple legal inquiries to pursue. One culprit is in France; we shall telegraph the Place Vendome and, after the necessary formalities, we shall succeed in having her extradited. The abduction of a minor is a criminal charge that is covered by international treaty. That side of the matter offers no difficulties; and as for the other culprit, we have him, he is here. Say the word and I arrest him."

The King cast his gaze upon Taxis, who had remained standing.

"You are a dangerous man, milord Chief Eunuch: useful, but dangerous. If the Fates had put you in my place, I wouldn't give a red cent for the happiness of my poor people. You are a crocodile, Taxis. You have the fiercely glowering eye of a French senator. And then, too, you don't understand me."

He shook the ashes from his cigarette with a gesture of weariness.

"I shall reflect upon all this. Your report is instructive, and even if it does infer that possibilities are certainties, that does not absolve me from turning over the hypotheses that it suggests. I shall think about it at my good leisure. By tomorrow I shall come to some conclusion. Wait; calm yourself."

He arose and spoke more frankly:

"From now until then," he sighed, "I really must think of something else. This preoccupation is a terrible strain; a little longer and I shall be taken ill. Talk to me, my friend. Change the trend of my ideas."

Taxis, lowering his eyes, took a deep breath and heaved a sigh of emotion. The King's benevolent tone emboldened him. He thought the moment opportune to broach a subject that lay very close to his heart.

"Might I be so bold," said he, "as to draw Your Majesty's attention to my own modest person? And if my services, or at least my efforts, reap the august approval of him who alone is capable of judging their importance, will it be permitted me to express at this moment a hope with which I often delight to feed my solitary musings?"

"What means this rigmarole?" said Pausole. "No more preambles; come to the point."

"I am only a Commander of the order of Doves. Assuredly, let me hasten to say, my humble personal ambitions are satisfied; but my old mother, far away in her Swiss hamlet, would experience a profound joy and perhaps take a new lease on life if she heard that I were a Grand Officer. I may add that in my own humble opinion the high office with which Your Majesty has deigned to invest me merits an honorary distinction, of which I should never have thought, if the King's good pleasure had not already raised me to the highest rank in the palace hierarchy. I am speaking now, not for Taxis, but for the Chief of the Royal Household and for the sake of his authority! My request is entirely disinterested."

Pausole temporized.

"We shall see—a little later. For today, you have a delicate matter to set straight. If you succeed, I shall give you the decoration; that is a promise. Go on with your reports."

"The Princess—"

"Still her? Hasn't anything happened since last night that you persist in wearying my poor head with an event already thirty-six hours old?"

"So be it. I did not dare—"

"Very well, speak up! You have my permission."

"Sire, it concerns a vicious and abominable outrage, which, however, has it grotesque side. There is a wave of madness going through the palace. It is unbecoming for Your Majesty to be annoyed with such pranks; they are not a fitting subject for your thoughts, in view of the actual circumstances. I was on guard. I meted out punishment. The ring-leader in this escapade is awaiting judgment."

"What a deal of trouble you do take to state a simple fact! I'm listening, Taxis. Who is the culprit?"

"A page, Sire; the one most recently appointed to the service, the very same boy of whom I have so often complained to Your Majesty. He has capped his practical jokes by an unmentionable deed. I feel more shame in the telling of it than he in the doing."

"Well, what did he do?"

"It was this way—the Honorable M. Palestre,[15] the Minister of the Public Games, in spite of his age, still preserves a pronounced taste for ancillary amours; a fact of which Your Majesty is doubtless ignorant. I at any rate consider it wholly inexcusable. This weakness of an old gentleman, otherwise so respectable, has always been the laughing stock of the pages. The most mischievous of these young rascals determined to surprise M. Palestre at the moment when it was least convenient for M. Palestre to be surprised. He took up his post under the bed of the chambermaid with whom the Minister was carrying on his misconduct—your own chambermaid, Sire. Now when, by certain signs that I neither could nor would describe, he judged that his two victims should be in a state of distraction favorable to his designs, he issued from his retreat and threw a tennis net over the couple—"

"Ha! Ha! Ha!" laughed the King.

"He tied it to the foot of the bed, thus forcing M. Palestre and the chambermaid, in spite of themselves, to preserve the most licentious of attitudes."

"Ho! Ho!"

"Now, not content with being the author and the witness of this tragic scene, he summoned the whole troop of pages to the scene of the scandal, which was thus augmented by the number of spectators. The incidents that followed were of such a character that the unhappy servant has been confined to her bed for a whole week from nervous prostration. That is why you beheld a new countenance upon your awakening this morning. Sire, I am shocked that you display such sympathetic merriment upon hearing of a wicked deed that I should have deemed worthy of the most scathing denunciation preliminary to condign punishment."

Pausole protested:

"Oh, you're quite wrong, Taxis! You have a method of generalization that drives you to the silliest table of mathematical morals, in which their natural order of importance is perverted. The obscene is

[15] Appropriately so named from the Greek word signifying "gymnasium" or "wrestling floor." The incident of the net, as here related, will be noticed as similar to that given in the eighth book of the Odyssey.

even more distasteful to me than to you. Carnal pleasure cannot cohabit with laughter. Sensuality is more akin to grief than to merriment. Now, that principle disposed of, the anecdote that you have related is quite delectable."

"Your Majesty sees fit to rally me."

"Oh, not at all! It is an admirable story; in fact, almost divine, in that it actually harks back to the Greeks. Thus was the guilty Aphrodite surprised with the War God and enmeshed in an iron net. This classic recollection inspiring one of my pages gives me the utmost satisfaction."

"Classic? Sire, you mean pagan."

"Then observe that this young man, instead of a haphazard imitation of the Olympian tradition, aptly selected a tennis net to envelop the Minister of the Public Games! This proclaims an individual mind and independent ideas—"

"I agree. Two blemishes, methinks."

"Above all, I must laud to the skies the moral intent that pervades the whole scene. It is ridiculous and disgusting that an old man of seventy-eight should attempt to share the bed of a servant girl who may be his great-granddaughter. One never knows. If M. Palestre enters a complaint, he has only himself to blame for the pitiful posture in which these boys saw him. As for my chambermaid, she has got only what she deserved; the shame results from her act and not from her punishment."

"Then what shall I do with the guilty party?"

"Set him at liberty immediately and invite him to come see me in this very room, where I await him. He is the man of whom I shall ask advice in this perplexing emergency."

CHAPTER NINE

Wherein Pausole Makes Up His Mind

I believe Epicurus was a very wise philosopher, who loved Pleasure in repose or Pleasure in movement; according to the time and the occasion.

SAINT-EVREMOND

THE costume of the pages at the court of Tryphême dated from the Renaissance. It comprised hose of yellow silk, with a small sash relieved by two aiglets, a cap ornamented by the proud plume of a Guinea fowl, and a royal blue doublet.

It was in this graceful uniform that M. Palestre's fowler appeared, doffing his cap in salute and poising his legs with military precision.

"What is your name, you young knave?" demanded Pausole.

"Whatever you please, Sire."

"Now that is precisely as it should be," said the King. "I know nothing more impertinent than the attempt to make people repeat a name that may not please them at all. You have won my heart by your first word. However, tell me the name that you bear, but be prepared to change it at my request."

"Sire, my name is spelt G-i-g-l-i-o. Pronounce it in the Italian or French fashion, as you please—Djilio or Giguelillot."

"Djilio," Pausole rejoined, "is a poet; Giguelillot is a fool. I should like you to be both."

"So should I," said the page very seriously. "And I have the most ardent hopes of finally succeeding."

"Why do you wish to be a poet?"

"In order to see nothing, were it even a fly, with my neighbor's eye."

"You do not love your neighbor?"

"I wish him no evil. But still less do I care to be my neighbor, that is all."

"And why do you wish to be a fool?"

"If my neighbor calls me a fool, I shall at once realize that I do not resemble him."

"What if you really suffer by comparison?"

"That would be improbable."

"How are you to know that?"

"By his attitude. If he leaves me alone, he wins. The very fact that he attacks me proves I am the better man."

Pausole made an impulsive gesture.

"Have a cigarette!" said he.

And he held one out to him with a friendly hand.

"Do you judge by the same process when your neighbor is of the opposite sex?"

"Oh, of course!"

"Why of course?"

"Because women do not belong to the human species."

"I hope you don't tell them so?"

"I tell them nothing but good of themselves, but all the time I keep thinking."

"In what light do you look upon them?"

"As the best creatures in the world; the only ones that know how to return good for good or, for that matter, good for evil, as the case may be. I have nothing but gratitude toward them and yet I have never done a thing for them, except to flatter many and love one."

Pausole regarded him with a judicial air.

"Are you happy?" he continued.

"No. Nor you either, Sire, that is clear."

"Then why are you cheerful?"

"To make myself believe I am happy."

"And what do you feel the lack of."

"The same thing as you, Sire: a life of unforeseen, marvelous and startling events."

"Startling events, eh? I have too many of them."

"But you don't profit by them."

"Whom are you referring to?"

"To the person you think I am."

"I can't see how he could make me happy if I am really not so," said Pausole in a tone of surprise.

The page was about to reply, but not knowing precisely whether the King were asking for advice or explanation, he awaited enlightenment upon that delicate distinction.

"Come, be seated," Pausole went on. "You have spoken to me of a ticklish topic in which I am really absorbed, and you haven't told yourself that it would be better for you to appear ignorant of it. By that, you have shown that you put the laws of social intercourse above those of etiquette; and I approve of that, my little comrade. Listen to me: I am not of the opinion that old age brings good counsel. Experience avails nothing; the same event is never reproduced under the same circumstances. On the contrary, we are forced to admit that spontaneity is an advantage since, at the age of twenty, one is making his life and never looks ahead or behind. The moment's the thing. That is why, in defiance of custom, I prefer to hear your sentiments rather than to consult with the venerable M. Palestre, for example."

Giglio remained impassive.

Pausole, growing still more expansive, continued as if he were addressing an intimate confidant:

"Never shall I bring myself," said he, "to set the police of my kingdom in pursuit of that child. Nor is it the proper thing to have her escorted back to the palace by a special envoy; for if I separate her from the unknown whom she has so obediently followed, it is certainly not right to confide her to the care of a legate who would compromise

her just as much, without the saving grace of finding favor in her eyes. As for despatching a woman to take charge, that would be a pitiful plan. I shall not consider it for an instant."

"Why not go get her yourself?"

"I?"

"You!"

"I myself?"

"Precisely so!"

"What! I set out on adventures in search of a little girl who ran away across the country with a leading juvenile whom nobody knows?"

"Yes."

"My friend, you are abusing your calling of fool."

"Pardon, Sire, have I your permission to ask a question?"

"Well, ask it."

"Do you really want Her Highness to return to the palace?"

Pausole sank his chin in his right hand.

"Now that is a question that had never occurred to me," said he.

But, after brief reflection:

"Yes, I have a sincere desire for it. This escapade means nothing to her."

"You are certain of it?"

"Certain."

"Well then, since, on the other hand, you have just discovered that you could not send anybody at all in pursuit of the Princess; neither a man, nor a woman, nor a beast of a policeman; and since, on the other hand, you are resolved to beg her to return here, I see no other means of conveying the news to her than to go tell her yourself."

"You have a logical mind!"

"That is characteristic of fools."

The King arose, traversed the room with long and measured steps and opened wide his arms in sign of acquiescence.

"It admits of no argument," he said. "In fact, I should have arrived at the same conclusions if I had time to think of all that."

"Then—"

"Then," interrupted the King, who was growing visibly more animated under the influence of his page, "everything is at once simplified, and I have but one decision left to make; whether it is better to let the dear little girl make the seven months' trip that her letter mentions, or to go and talk to her myself and reconduct her to the palace which she should never have left!"

The page realized at one glance that, if he left Pausole to solitary

reflection, all this noble fire would be extinguished into a cinder of inertia.

"Sire," he declared, "you must go. That is the only course, not only for Her Highness' sake, but still more for your own. If you are no longer happy, as can be told by looking at you, it is because a man has destroyed the care-free future that you were storing up with so much wisdom. To deliver yourself from the effort of willing a single one of your acts, you have consigned your existence to the hands of a gentleman who understands nothing about it and who is putting it all awry. It is he who is disappointing you. It is he who is robbing you of a happiness that is always possible, always fresh with the dawn of each day. You are perishing under his routine; you are dying of monotony. Tomorrow, his calendar imposes Queen Denyse upon you. Do you love her? No, not a bit. And yet you will go through with it. You will continue to inhabit the same rooms, the same armchair, to see the same horizon framed in the same window. Run away from all that! There are so few days in a life; don't let every one of them be like the next."

"But who will advise me then, if I set out on this foolhardy enterprise?"

"Who? Why, chance, fancy! Let yourself be tempted by Fortune every day and be led by your lucky star. Her advice is easy to follow."

"What if my destination, like that of Melchior or Balthazar," [16] said Pausole, shaking his head, "should prove to be a tiny crib and a little baby—"

"What of it? You would love the child."

"You are right. And besides, we shall be there before that happens. The fugitives are sleeping but two paces off. There's no question of a long journey. We shall doubtless overtake them tomorrow."

"You are going? You are really going?"

"I am going. Come with me, my lad. It amuses me to watch you live."

They departed side by side. Pausole had put his hand on the page's shoulder and was walking with an energetic step.

At a turn in the corridor, they encountered Taxis.

The King stopped, his head erect:

"Milord Chief Eunuch," said he, "I have come to a decision. I myself shall go in search of the Princess Aline. Announce my departure for tomorrow morning and have my mule saddled at half-past ten. This young man will accompany me."

[16] Two of the Magi who followed the Star of Bethlehem to the crib of the infant Jesus.

Taxis managed to hold his tongue.

Pausole looked him up and down for a space, as if he were weighing his own audacity, then suddenly concluded in a honeyed tone:

"In fact, you shall go with us."

BOOK TWO

CHAPTER ONE

How the Fair Aline Saw the Dancing of a Ballet, and What Ensued

She smiled and said unto me: "Know, O Captain Moin, that I am a woman desperately smitten with a young lass. And between her and me has happened what has happened. And therein lies a mystery of love."

THOUSAND AND ONE NIGHTS, XV, 198,
DONE INTO FRENCH BY MADRUS

THE investigation conducted by the Chief Eunuch was successful in its results, but mistaken in its conclusions.

The fair Aline, in making her escape, had not needed the two accomplices imagined by Taxis.

A single one had sufficed: a single woman, to tell the whole truth.

Here is how she had fled:

We know already that, on the evening before the day when the Princess left the palace, a troupe of French dancing girls had come to entertain the harem with their twinkling legs and their powdered wigs.

For the first time in her life, the fair Aline was permitted to view a stage performance. It seemed best to Pausole to begin his daughter's theatrical education with a *soirée de ballet*, in the belief that the plot of a pantomime is not so easy to decipher, and consequently not so conducive to dangerous musings, as the action of a comedy. Furthermore, ballet dances always evolve in an unreal scenic atmosphere; they present characters that we never encounter in life, and it would be impossible, without incurring ridicule, to imitate the graceful gestures with which they rhythmically portray the desires of the flesh.

All that was excellently planned, but unfortunately the fair Aline was able to admire without the need of understanding. Through all the whirls, swings, kicks and patter [17] of rhythmic feet, the child saw but one thing; the vision of an enticing youth (who was beyond any doubt a woman masquerading as Prince Charming), receiving with each tableau the passionate and well-deserved homage of forty other women.

She found him handsome, elegant, magnetic. She compared his gestures with those of the functionaries that she encountered in the palace and she awarded him the palm for grace, beauty, spirit and tenderness. Her head drooped upon her shoulder, her lips parted in wonder, she gazed upon him with an expression of such profound devotion that the ladies of honor around her would have been perturbed, if they themselves had not been following the mazes of the dance with such passionate absorption.

After the performance, she inquired the name of this dazzling personage. They told her that the rôle was played by the dancer Mirabelle.

Where did this lovely lady live? On the outskirts of the park, they replied, in the servants' quarters; she would be there for two more nights before her departure.

How express to her the delight she inspired? By a present, was the ill-conceived suggestion of one lady of honor.

The fair Aline meditated.

Upon returning to her apartment and even before beginning her careful evening toilette, she asked for a bank note, with the purpose of enclosing it in an envelope.

A little later, she locked herself in her dressing room with the violet hangings, as if to devote herself to an intimate toilette that the lady of honor could not supervise; then, fully protected against surprise, she sat down at her table and wrote these simple words:

"Mademoiselle:

"You are very pretty. Would you like to talk with me? Tonight, at two o'clock, I shall be in the park, under the big almond tree, near the spring.

[17] The French terms are technical ballet jargon.

Jetes-Battus: one leg is folded and kicked out, producing a hop on the other leg.

Branles: the formal pace of the cotillion and the like.

Battements: one leg is raised and pulled back as though to kick the other.

Entretailles: changes of foot.

"Do not tell any one that I am writing to you. For everybody else, this message contains nothing but paper money. Please accept that and do not betray me.

"PRINCESS ALINE."

She then slipped her engraved note between the leaves of the letter, wrote the address:

"To Mademoiselle Mirabelle,"

and sealed the envelope with wax to prevent its being opened.

The same lady of honor who, with the simplicity of old age, had advised giving this present, proved quite willing to undertake further to convey the letter to the addressee. Let us assume that she was inspired first of all by a laudable desire to perform a charitable act; and secondly, by a no less lively temptation to penetrate the domain of the ballet girls at the hour of their nightly toilette. In fact, for an old spinster, the opportunity to preach to worldly spirits, while snugly nursing the salvation of her own soul, constitutes perfect happiness.

Left to herself and tucked in her clean little bed, the fair Aline felt herself seized by an insupportable emotion. At first, she attempted to calm herself by lying on the right side, then on the left, on her back, on her bosom; she sat up, she doubled up her knees, she stretched out, she flung her limbs apart, she curled up into a ball; but the fever pursued her with every change and she instinctively retreated to the edge of her mattress, as if to leave room beside her for a mysterious visitor.

Well before the appointed hour, she arose, put on her slippers, opened the curtains and watched the moon penetrate the whole long room.

The night shone warm and clear. Through the open window, Aline could distinguish in the distance, beyond the shadowy lawns and motionless woods, the white terrace of the buildings in which Mirabelle was reading her letter.

"What will she think of me?" said the child to herself in her revery. "Will she come? Perhaps not. Perhaps she is tired. Perhaps she is afraid at night. . . ."

To while away her vigil, she drew on her blotter a number of figures of a geometric character; circles, parallels, lozenges, spiral scrolls. She shaded them with painstaking concentration. Then, still by the light of the moon, she began the portrait of a handsome unknown who had three hairs, forty eyelashes and an eye much larger than his mouth.

But art failed to calm her impatience.

She returned to her cheval-glass, let fall her long white night gown and resumed the examination of her person at the point where she had left off upon opening the door of her dressing room to the lady of honor. All young and innocent as she was, she had read fairy tales, and as love is the sole theme of the good Perrault's [18] stories, she had very quickly learned at what moment of the rendezvous love attains its destined consummation. She knew that the Sleeping Beauty in the Woods received the Prince in her bed, that the curtains were drawn over the scene and that they slept but little, without any expression of censure from the author. Besides, little Aline, being possessed of the instinct for bestowing caresses as well as of the desire for being the happy recipient of them, did not doubt for an instant that her lover's favors were sure to touch, one by one, every part of her body, where it would be sweet to await them and delicious to retain them.

That is why she was eager to be worthy of the attention that she longed for but had never actually encountered. She sprinkled her skin with powder. She contemplated her image. From her shelf of perfumes she chose verbena, citron and new-mown hay, because the essences of plants were particularly suitable to a rendezvous under the trees. With these she bedewed, perhaps to excess, the little naked body that she loved so much.

She hastily donned a pair of embroidered stockings, together with a chemise; then the corset, still more hastily snatched from the depths of a linen closet. Over this she put an Empire gown of light texture and fastened the high-waisted sash with a safety pin that was concealed beneath a little bow. This stratagem produced the desired effect of prominently outlining her budding breasts; two little fruits that were growing every day more precious.

At last the clocks struck the quarter before the hour so ardently desired.

The fair Aline, donning a hat that suited the Empire gown, drew on a pair of long dark gloves which left her arms bare from elbow to sleeve.

She was ready.

Then, as the Chief Eunuch had so shrewdly deduced, she sat down in the open window, raised both her legs together, swung herself around and jumped.

As the window was on the ground floor, the jump was devoid of danger.

[18] (1628-1702). Who was responsible for crystallizing the world's fairy tales in their French form. We shall hope hereafter to learn these legends from the French tradition, which is charming.

She landed with both feet in a flower bed of fresh earth. The guards were posted along the walls of the park, but not in the interior. No one saw her pass.

To avoid making any noise and to keep in the shadow, she followed the lines of spreading trees, her footsteps falling on the soft turf at the edge of the woods.

But the same calculations had evidently instilled even greater precaution into the other party to the rendezvous, for under the big almond tree she found no one.

Piqued, she set out again and made a long, wandering detour. Then, vaguely disturbed and beginning to doubt whether the expected arrival would come at all, she concealed herself quite close to the tree and gazed fixedly in the direction of the white building.

Suddenly, a vision appeared.

Mirabelle, realizing that she would lose prestige completely if she displayed herself in her proper attire to this child, who adored her in the guise of Prince Charming, had preserved her make-up in going to this rendezvous, which delighted her more than the winning of a title would have done.

The fair Aline, in ecstasy, beheld the same young man approaching her from the depths of the park; the same young man adored of the forty ladies of the ballet, but far more handsome still, gliding in his bespangled costume through the soft rays of an enchanted moon, and fixing his eyes upon her.

CHAPTER TWO

Wherein Pausole, Not Content With Having Come to a Decision, Goes to the Extent of Carrying It Into Execution

You will find the women envious and hostile; and your beauty will no sooner win the love of Solomon than it will win the hatred of all the Sultans.

SCUDERY: IBRAHIM
OR THE ILLUSTRIOUS BASSA (1641)

Leaving Taxis and Giglio face to face, King Pausole returned to his privy apartments. where Queen Denyse was awaiting him; the

woman that had advised him to write a letter to Saint Anthony to recover the fair Aline.

The poor Queen, in spite of her careful efforts, had been unable to conceal, with all her cream and powder, four parallel scratches that disfigured her left breast.

She began the tale of her misfortunes.

Diane à la Houppe, when reconducted to the harem after her solitary awakening, had been seized with a fit of despair, which she sobbed out on a divan. Surrounded by jealous women, exasperated by their sneers, constantly twitted upon her physical peculiarities and her unrestrained passion, she had turned with eyes still weeping, with lips distorted, with hands clawing the air, and sought redress. But instead of exacting it from the women that were dancing a farandole around her sobbing form, she had searched through all the great hall for the sweet and innocent Denyse, to gash her poor breast and to take vengeance on her successor.

Pausole listened to this narrative with an ear ofttimes distraught. He had obtained Queen Denyse in a batch of a dozen adolescent girls offered by a loyal city, and if he had not returned her to her mother, it was because a feeling of pity had restrained him from shaming a girl before her friends and neighbors. But he did not love her in the least; he found her insignificant and prudish, and somewhat awkward, too. To reconcile upon her person the regulations of the harem with the principles of propriety, Denyse was in the habit of wearing a small lace loin-cloth, which made her look like a dressed-up savage and which, besides, as it flapped aimlessly and insecurely, produced the effect diametrically opposed to its actual purpose. Pausole, who likewise had his principles, applauded the nude but censured the diaphanous. Queen Denyse's costume shocked him to obfuscation.

He dined quite late and went out on the terrace to ponder upon the grave step that he had resolved to take. When it struck midnight, he remarked to his pious companion that it was now the Saturday before Pentecost and he felt that he should not yield to the sacrilegious inclination to dally in the lap of luxury on a day of fasting and watching.

With these words, he sent her back to the harem, to provide balm for the wounded spirit of Diane à la Houppe.

The next morning saw the dawn of a thrice solemn day. Pausole gazed at the walls of his room, his rugs, his curios, his familiar frames; he realized with a shudder that he would not see them again in the evening. Under the emotion of a first awakening, which is akin to a nightmare, he had a presentiment of all the misfortunes that lay in wait for seekers after adventure at every turn in the road.

His dwelling was one of peace, of repose, of tranquil happiness. Every hour was like every other. What aberration was impelling him to leave such pleasant riches? With a pastoral recollection, the verses of an idyl by LaFontaine floated through his dreamy memory and, imagining himself symbolized as a little pigeon stripped of its plumage, Pausole saw himself meet a tragic fate.

This mood did not last long.

A radiant morn flooded the room. The new chambermaid, grown bolder, spoke in a frank and eager voice, volunteered unasked information and even dared to put questions. His Majesty would have a fine day. The wind was coming from the North. There had been a bit of rain. The other chambermaid was very ill; the doctors talked of inflammation of the womb. Last night there had been a noisy dispute between the Chief Eunuch and the young page Giglio. His Majesty knew of it?

Pausole, beside himself, was on the point of threatening to subject her to the same treatment that her friend had received at the hands of the troop of pages; but not knowing whether he would strike her with terror or desire, he adopted the hierarchic method and quite simply requested her to go look for the Chief Eunuch.

Hereupon he set foot on the floor and wrapped himself in his dressing gown.

Well, Giguelillot was right; Pausole had no doubt of it. Peace bordered on ennui, repose on stupefaction, monotony on melancholy. This room, upon close examination, was merely tiresome. This horizon, whose subtle changes he had followed with imagined interest, had long since exhausted for him the narrow gamut of its colors. Only a petty mind could bound its curiosity by the fifteen statues on the terrace, by the thirty aloes in the hedge. There were other fig trees, other yellow stalks in Tryphême. The excursion would be rich in unexpected charms.

Thus was Pausole discovering the art of escaping from all regrets by changing the definition of happiness according to the dictates of circumstances.

The dramatic entrance of Taxis interrupted his reflections.

The Huguenot took his stand outside the door, as if he were ready to leave in case his request should be refused, and he joined the tips of the thumb and index finger of his right hand; not, to be sure, with the significance that the courtesans of Athens [19] gave to this little gesture but to emphasize the fact that he was delivering an ultimatum.

"Sire," he declared, "one question, and only one: 'Am I still Marshal of the Palace?' "

[19] The significance of the gesture can be well imagined.

"I do not understand," replied Pausole.

"One word will explain it. Am I the chief, the colleague or the subordinate of a page named Giglio?"

Pausole shrugged his shoulders.

"What kind of a damned fly is always biting you, Taxis? The question is out of order. We are going to depart in a few minutes. I am taking only him and you. I do not see what purpose would be served by my establishing the supremacy of one of my counselors over the other, inasmuch as both of you are at my side and relieve each other only at my command."

"Sire, we are going to depart, but we have not yet done so. Whatever may be Your Majesty's aversion to pomp and ceremony, your departure requires preparations and your absence precautionary measures. Now, the young page in question, animated by a purposeless zeal and pretending to be inspired by your secret preferences, is finding fault with all my arrangements and proposing others. I ask whether he is authorized to take this attitude, which is nullifying my authority and wounding my dignity."

"What's this? Another quarrel!" cried Pausole. "I refuse to be mixed up in it. This young man has talked with me. He is full of good sense. He has a clever, well-balanced mind. I do not intend to be deprived of his advice. You, too, Taxis, have your own qualities, which no one presumes to belittle. You are unpleasant, but indispensable, and nobody must nullify your authority. So settle your differences in friendly fashion and try to come to an agreement without my interference in the matter."

"It is impossible."

"And why so?"

"Between this lad's principles and my own, both of which Your Majesty seems to esteem of equal value, there is an absolute incompatibility. One of us must retreat or surrender. I await from your lips, Sire, the naming of the sacrifice."

The King, with an impatient gesture, struck a match, which flared as if it were the expression of his bad humor. He smoked for a few minutes in silence.

"Well," said he, "it's quite simple. You will command by turns."

"Ah!" said Taxis dryly.

"You will divide the day between you. From midnight to noon, you will have the upper hand, Taxis. Those are precisely the hours at which I shall not see you, my friend. You will watch over my slumbers and, if necessary, over my pleasures. Afterwards, from noon to

midnight, your successor will direct my journey and inspire my wishes. I believe that I have, by this means, found a solution that eliminates all danger of friction."

With dour eye, Taxis concluded in these words:

"It is written: 'I shall have the same lot as the fool; why then have I been born wiser?' "

He departed with a bow.

Three hours later, King Pausole, between his page and his Huguenot, preceded by forty lancers and followed by a mountain of baggage, took horse for the first time on the road to his capital.

CHAPTER THREE

How Fair Mortal Maids Encroached Upon the Mirror of the Nymphs

Hail forever, ye dampers of the consuming flame,
ye kisses moist, born of the cold, cold rose!
JOHANNES SECUNDUS

THE spring and the great almond tree were situated in the most remote quarter of the park. The fair Aline, when all alone, had many a time taken great delight in traversing the long promenades and visiting the silence of this secluded retreat. The water, from the yawning mouth of a satyr with leaf-grown ears, fell into a natural basin of red earth and green grass, where oleanders had taken root and were growing in thick clusters. A far cry was this from the mouldy and scaly basin in our gardens, where a useless spring waters a ground already softened by rain. It was a flowering cradle in the ruddy soil of the South, a nurturing fountain, a mother urn, in which life streamed through the swaying verdure, and the old satyr, true son of Pan, watched the water, the vigorous youth of the woods, fall unceasingly from his lips.

Above the horned mask, which the fair Aline took for the devil, were entwined two marble nymphs, who stood and peered down into the shadowed pool. At the end of every winter, the almond tree covered them with its little needles. At night, they once more became goddesses.

Beside these fertile and sombre waters, which were named the

Mirror of the Nymphs, the little Princess in her Empire gown saw coming toward her the true Prince Charming with bespangled jacket glimmering beneath the soft rays of an enchanted moon.

At the great distance from which she caught sight of him—even before his form took outline beneath the trees—he seemed like a pure, white star. Then she saw him grow and take shape. He was walking with an unhurried step, now and then plucking leaves from the branches and inhaling their fragrance as if they were flowers. He shone forth and was eclipsed by turns as he crossed the belts of light and shadow. Little Line had never felt so deeply stirred. Eager as she was to fling herself into his embrace, she retreated to the fountain and, with hand on lips, dared not utter a word.

"You called me; I am here," came the tender voice of Mirabelle.

Aline's eyes opened wide. She gazed at her Prince from head to foot, until her fascinated glance rested upon his own eyes.

His head was bare, his close-cropped dark hair floated around his ears. His profound gaze was fixed in a tender expression that had not yet expanded into a smile. She saw the beloved countenance hover nearer and nearer her own, until, as she was closing her eyes, two warm lips were pressed upon them.

The black shadow of the entwining nymphs concealed the young girls as they stood. Aline trembled. The two lips, slowly tracing their caress down her cheek, settled upon her mouth.

"Ah! . . ." she sighed at last.

Mirabelle drew away. This time, a smile, faint but very tender, traced its lines about her black bordered eyes.

She raised her brows and looked around her.

"No. We are alone," responded Line. "Stay."

But she immediately altered this to:

"Come with me."

A few paces behind the spring, there was a little Greek temple, with five Corinthian columns supporting a rounded dome. The columns were walled to half their height. A large circular bench steeped in the shadows of the temple's heart, was covered with cushions of varec,[20] and it was a spot so intimate that Line, the moment she was seated beside the dancing girl, felt emboldened to the point of saying:

"You received my letter?"

"You see that I did."

"Do you know why I asked you to come?"

Mirabelle was very careful.

[20] A variety of seaweed or kelp.

"To chat with me," she said.

"Why, yes. . . . And here you are, and now I have nothing to say to you."

Mirabelle took her hand. Aline felt, so she thought, that she trembled in turn.

"I wanted to see you quite close, too," she continued. "You are so pretty! . . . pretty as a young man. All through the ballet I looked at nothing but your eyes. And I envy you, if you only knew it! I do so hate to be blonde; I should love to be dark, like you—I really mean just like you—to be your sister. . . ."

Mirabelle judged it useless to protest.

Aline held up her lips of her own accord.

"Kiss me as you did just now, won't you?"

Their lips parted at last.

"How delicious it is!" she continued. "Who could have taught you that?"

"I found it out for myself," said the dancer.

"Oh, how nice! How old are you?"

"Eighteen. And you?"

"Fourteen. . . . Won't you do it some more?"

The game was a dangerous one for the young Mirabelle. Mistress as she was of her own acts, determined as she was to make no abrupt false move, to follow a slow course of strategy and subtlety, she suffered a moment of confusion of mind wherein she lost her self-control. She first fumbled with the girl's dress at the spot where the little breasts swelled out the soft, warm fabric; then, profiting by the unusual facilities that Aline's garments offered to sympathetic gestures, she risked certain searchings that testified, if not quite to her desire to give pleasure, at least to her curiosity.

Aline, instinctive and docile, lent herself readily to all. Mirabelle thereupon lost her head. Encouraged by the shadows, certain that no one could see the blood of passion flood her face, she abandoned herself to the mysterious shiver that she felt draw nigh, and made no effort to repress either her sighs or the quivering undulations of her body. She was already regaining consciousness when Aline, alarmed but striving to reassure, asked her:

"You are cold, my dear? You are shivering . . ."

"A little weakness," said Mirabelle. "It is nothing—I am used to it."

"Do you want to take a little walk?"

"Yes."

"Come. The park is deserted. We shall go wherever we please."

Aline let her skirt fall and got up to leave.

The pair were again disclosed by the moon's rays.

The green dress and the spangled jacket wandered thus for some time around the gurgling spring. One was emerald and the other was silver, but whenever they tried to admire their entwining forms in the basin, in an endeavor to imitate the marble nymphs, they saw that the night merged their colorings into the tints of woods and water.

Mirabelle said not a word. Her confusion and her desire, scarcely suspended, were reborn. She knew that she had lost her heart.

From that time on, she ceased to think of anything but the means of gratifying her desire. Assuredly, several hours still belonged to her, but to employ them in yielding to her present temptation would have meant to waste them ultimately. A romantic idea flashed into her mind. She reviewed it in silence and found it possible of realization, but so great was her cunning that she sought to suggest it before giving it full expression.

"Adieu," she said suddenly. "I shall never see you again."

The fair Aline grew very white.

"Oh, not yet . . .!" she begged.

"It must be."

"But I have not really seen you, I have told you nothing. You come, and then at once you want to leave. . . . I bore you perhaps. Don't you understand why I sent for you! I myself scarcely know why, but I am very happy when I take your hand."

Mirabelle folded her in her arms.

"Stay here, I beg of you," continued the young girl. "Stay, or else come back tomorrow at the same hour . . . I shall be waiting for you."

"Tomorrow? Why, we're leaving at daybreak."

Aline grew still more pale and the tears came one by one.

"It is true? . . . It is true you are going away? And when will you come back?"

"Never . . ."

"But I have only you to love; don't you understand? Yesterday in the theatre I realized so well that there was something between you and me and that we must be united and that you would be my sweetheart. I call you, I wait for you, we mingle our kisses, and then it is finished forever? If you go away, I am going with you."

Mirabelle's plot was unraveled.

"Well, then, let us go! Put yourself in my hands."

"Truly? You really wish it?"

"Come."

"With you alone?"

"Yes. I shall desert my comrades. We shall be for each other, and always alone."

"Oh! And where are we going?"

"To my country."

"No, no! We must stay in Tryphême."

"That won't do at all. Tomorrow you would be discovered."

"How?"

"By the King's orders."

"Papa. You really don't know him. It is a weighty matter to decide on pursuing me. By the time he makes up his mind, we shall be far off!"

*

CHAPTER FOUR

Wherein Pausole and His Counselors Manifest Their Contrasts of Character

Thou say'st I have lived as a scholar at times,
Then as warrior, courtier or builder of rhymes;
Many callings, thou chargest, my life have inspired?
Aye, 'tis sooth, mouthing monk; yet I ne'er have desired
To counsel a King—yea, as thou, hypocrite!

RONSARD

PAUSOLE, his page and his Huguenot, trotting side by side between the escort and the baggage, bestrode three animals that symbolized nicely the differences in their characters.

The King, who had spread beneath his light crown a veil of white batiste, to serve as a protection for his neck, was seated in a saddle which resembled an armchair, for it had back rest, pillows, fresh stuffed cushions, padded arms and a parasol. Two slender metal rods, invisible at a distance, supported the ball and sceptre at the height of his hands; but the ball enclosed a flagon of port and the sceptre a fan.

The mule Macarie, nonchalant creature, carried this flimsy structure with an air of distracted resignation; the same air that Pausole assumed under the burden of affairs of state. Her coat was white; the

tip of her tail and her forelock, a mouse gray. She stepped high, but slowly. Never did she sleep less than sixteen hours a day.

Taxis bestrode the black Kosmon, a gelded steed, without vices, without virtues and withal as stupid as any one horse can be. Kosmon had neither pedigree nor figure. His master, however, esteemed him highly, for he always maintained the same pace, disdained the meretricious fragrance that spreads from a young mare's posterior and felt so strong a sense of duty that he would have walked straight into ditches, if his rider had forgotten to turn his bridle in time.

Giglio had chosen from the King's stables a fiery red young zebra, with four white feet, black striped back and star-studded harness over his head. The animal's name was Himere; he was balky and capricious. His coat matched the page's costume; from the antenna-like plume to the little slippers on the third pair of feet, they gave the impression of composing a beetled centaur, with shards of flame and thorax of blue.

"See, Sire," said Taxis, pointing to the lancers, "observe the perfect uniformity and arrangement of our advance guard. The horses and the troopers are all of the same height; their lances and their helmets conform to standard measurements. I know the lives of these forty men. You will not find among them either superannuated veterans or young society butterflies. Each one carries in his wallet a copy of Osterwald's Bible, expurgated edition. I have drilled them in such a fashion that if I asked them right now to quote me a verse that would comfort them in the performance of their duties and would apply to the actual circumstances, they would all quote the same passage in unison: 'Give unto me to prevail over mine enemies, but deliver me from the violent man,' as it is written in the XVIII Psalm."

Giglio rose upon his stirrups.

"That beautifully drilled company of yours, with their lances in the air, is as silly as a harrow upside down on a road. It is neither strong nor martial. These fellows don't know how to hold themselves in the saddle; they are erect to be sure, but after the manner of a footman on the box or of a lady cashier in a restaurant. They hold their lances like candles and their bridles like napkins. It is enough to see them from the back to know what they are; at the first rifle shot they would streak for home with my zebra; but with a good deal less grace, I think."

"The poor fellows!" said King Pausole. "How hot their helmets must be! And their pikes—how heavy to carry! Why don't they take off their coats in this suffocating weather we're having today? At

least they have a flask of rum and some peaches in their knapsacks, haven't they? Taxis, it is unpardonable of you if you didn't think of that."

Taxis extended his wrinkled hand.

"I give them the pleasure of privation," he declared. "That is the greater joy. They know that in the meadows are brooks where one may drink and upon the roadside are inns stocked with casks, whilst their throats are dry, their tongues parched and their stomachs hollow. They taste the bitter delights of thirst. I who (alas!) have just slaked my thirst—I envy them their happiness, of which I deprive myself by a two-fold mortification."

Half turning in his saddle, the King looked at his minister. He examined him in detail, from his shapeless, tarnished shoes to his hat of soiled and much brushed felt. He observed the tight-fitting frock coat, the ribbon in the buttonhole and the cloth rubbed shiny by eight buttons. He noticed the square finger nails, the flat nostrils, the long thick hair, the straight line of the mouth.

Then, halting his mule while she obeyed nature's call and leaning back once more in a comfortable attitude, he pronounced negligently:

"Taxis, it's good for you that you are indispensable, for you're an ugly black-bird."

The morning was drawing to a close in a dazzling light. The shadow of the old plane-trees that lined the road was growing shorter and shorter. The dust from the white road was settling on the grassy slopes. Before the steps of the three mounts some lizards were zig-zagging like flashes of green lightning.

Beyond the ditches, to the right and left, the Royal Flower Gardens presented their rounded walls and their greenhouses irrigated by fresh water. There were cultivated thousands of rare species and unpublished varieties, which the ingenious mind of the florists created from day to day. Every morning they carried to the harem armfuls of moist corollas, delicate leaves and palm branches. The gardeners had inscribed upon registers black from erasures the varying caprices of all the Queens, and each one of them, upon awakening, received the flower of her choice in a little, long-necked vase.

As Pausole and his two counselors were passing the last greenhouse, the clock encased in its tower of mosaic sounded the four quarters and the twelve strokes of noon.

Immediately the page, with speedy heel, brought his zebra nose to nose with Taxis' horse:

"Milord Grand Eunuch," said he, "you know His Majesty's desire. The hour when I succeed you has arrived. Be so good as to resign the command to me."

"Get it from the King!" replied Taxis gruffly.

"I give it to you, my boy," said Pausole.

Giglio saluted, dropped his horse's head, rode up beside the escort and shouted:

"Half wheel! Assemble!"

The forty guards dashed up.

Then the page, settled easily in his saddle with legs extended and plume erect, addressed them in these terms:

"Comrades, the gentleman whom you see here, your commander of this morning, has put in your hands weapons for which you haven't the slightest use. The roads are safe, Tryphême is at peace, the King loves his people; there will never be any occasion for you to plunge your pikes in the broad back of a barbarian and spit him from shoulder to navel. That much is clear. Now, art requires that everything should have its purpose; whatever serves none is idiotic. So, then, you will please insert the iron tips in the crack in that wall and press on them until the wood breaks off in the socket. Execute the movement!"

"Sire! But, Sire . . ." supplicated Taxis.

"Let him alone," said Pausole. "It's an excellent idea."

The forty guards broke off the tips as ordered.

"Keep the staffs!" said Giglio. "And now follow me."

They entered the Flower Gardens.

The page traversed the avenues, inspected the rows and entered the greenhouses. He bade the florists display to him the flowers with long stems—iris, anthurium, striped lily, tiger lily, Pompona lily—and ended by stopping in front of some gigantic tulips.

"That's what we need," said he. "I want all of you to tie some rushes around these tulips and bind them to the end of your staffs. Then carry them along the roads with the same respect you would show the flag."

With this, he offered the King a rose and Taxis a crowfoot. For himself he took an arum.

The whole troop resumed their march along the gleaming road.

"Most admirable!" said Pausole. "But those fellows are thirsty and I'm sure they haven't had anything to drink."

CHAPTER FIVE

Wherein Mirabelle Unveils Her Naughty Little Sentimental Soul

The truth as to Salle the critics doth vex:
"Her lovers are many," says one, "I'll take oath."
A second asserts that she loves her own sex;
While a third is convinced she's anamored of both!
SONG ON MLLE. SALLE, DANSEUSE
AT THE OPERA—FROM THE ANTHOLOGY
OF MAUREPAS (1735)

RESOLVED to flee that very night, the two young girls returned to their respective apartments, there to make preparations for their little journey on foot.

The Empire gown ran across the dark lawns, mounted the stairs at the main entrance, followed the covered terrace, climbed over the open window of a salon and disappeared in the sleeping palace.

The spangled costume made its way along a brook, then through the clearing, and the two marble nymphs saw it vanish below a distant house, like a little star as it sets.

The costume did not set, but sat down—and very violently, too—on a chaise longue. Upon this were thrown buckled slippers, white stockings, even a chemise. Then the young Mirabelle, disclosed by the candle light as only a naked young girl, plunged her two hands into a wardrobe trunk, where, as a matter of fact, there were more jackets than lingerie.

She selected a shirt with flat collar, of the sort that certain pretty women still put on their sons to keep them from getting any older than sixteen. She drew on striped underdrawers, dark blue trousers, a large pearl-colored necktie, a white vest, but the broad-brimmed hat she selected was distinctly feminine.

Thus clothed, hands in pockets and eye over shoulder, she threw at herself, in the glass, a glance which, from a wink, quickly turned into plain ogling. Mirabelle had a merry eye.

She even murmured a phrase at once metaphorical and intimate in the Sibylline tongue known as argot, a phrase in which she betrayed that her masquerade identified her for a moment with a silly and ugly sex that was not at all her own.

For it would be vain to dissemble. Mirabelle utterly failed to sense

the attractions of the male of the species. His strength, his bull neck, his biceps like bottles, his pectorals like boards—no, it was evidently not for her that the gods had created their masterpiece. She loved neither moustache, nor beard, nor blue chin. Oh! That did not prevent her from accepting a lover, and even an unknown lover, when she was asked politely. When off the stage, she felt called upon to give herself up to the most recherché practices and here as before the footlights her conscience as an artiste impelled her to feign an exaltation that did not seize her at the actual moment.

These little individual ballets, in which she played so tender a rôle, did not in the least prevent her from detesting, more and more every day, the men who demanded such effort from her. She resigned herself to it, poor child, because the visits of admirers to dancing girls are preceded and followed by invariable formalities in which, by common consent, is found a great power of persuasion. But her conception of love assumed a technique still more delicate, and her conception of art was founded on symmetry.

Now, man such as she had known him up to that time, had most often shown himself as sentimental as a bilbouquet [21] (no one could express it better than does Gavarni),[21a] and on the other hand, it is regrettable but necessary to affirm that a lady and her cavalier, at the moment when they unite, form an anomalous couple, or rather let us say, ill-assorted.

These considerations, supported by the impulse of a natural bent, had led the little dancer to crowd her pleasures into a circle of intimates of her own sex. She had made a careful beginning among her young comrades, at first in the training school, later in the corps de ballet. She had never failed to receive a yes; by spoken word, by gesture or by glance, according to individual modesty. Certain ones accepted without intent to cultivate a passion of soul, but none knew how to resist the lure of a clandestine experience that was apparently harmless.

Six months after her début in male attire, her reputation was great, and that of her company too. She issued invitations. She even had her "day," when she gathered at her house, in very naked intimacy, ten or twelve of her familiars, who considered it useless to hide their abnormal tastes. And that made it scandalous enough to tempt respectable women.

[21] The plaything known as the "cup and ball" but also used of the weighted toy which always "comes up standing."

[21a] Gavarni. A Parisian caricaturist (1801-1866).

These declared themselves by messenger, by letter or by personal assault. They offered valuable, solid presents, and exacted only two promises; pleasure, which they called vice, and falsehood, which they called mystery.

Mirabelle, highly flattered, cast herself into the midst of adventures. Soon wearied of her former modest partners, who had after all deserved a less cavalier treatment, she leaped from stage to drawing room with the wings of a butterfly. Innumerable revelations still awaited her and she wanted them all. She had them. She knew the joys of adultery—the cramped quarters of a cab, the odor of the "furnished apartment," the hour too short, the assumed name and the letters care of the general delivery. There was nothing, even to the supreme emotion of being caught "in flagrante delicto," that Heaven did not teach her, perhaps indeed to warn her. A husband penetrated one day into a private dressing room where, although there was no man present —and no bed either—he declared himself "deceived." Mirabelle could not contain herself for joy; so conscienceless is crime.

But we have now had enough of generalities about this ambiguous personage. We shall refrain from going into details; indeed, they would be far from decent.

By this time we have succeeded in making it clear why Mirabelle on the stage had distinguished with an infallible eye the fair Aline's emotion at the charm of her dance; why her sharp-sighted gaze had become magnetic; why she had not been surprised at receiving two hours later a note for a rendezvous; and finally how, voluntarily letting her foot be pinched in the snare of a temptation stronger than prudence, she deserted her troupe in the character of Prince Charming, to abduct the daughter of the King.

Meanwhile, the young Aline had re-entered her apartment. She had put out on her dressing table a rouge case, a box of powder, a well-filled purse and several little toilette articles; in short, everything that the lady of honor enumerated to King Pausole in the performance of her sad duty of delivering the note that she had discovered.

This note Line wrote in two minutes. She scarcely hoped to obtain pardon, but she did not wish anybody to be worried about her own precious little health.

But these inward thoughts were vanishing under the radiance of her joy as stars before the moon; a joy so vivid that it could hardly be repressed into silence.

If the ladies of honor did not hear her leap, run, clap her hands and throw her Telemaque into the tub in token of emancipation, it

was perhaps (I hardly dare hazard the hypothesis) because these guilty guardians had deserted their neighboring chambers to woo elsewhere the gentle spirits of lassitude that cure insomnia.

However that may be, the fair Aline made her escape in almost noisy haste, encouraged by the mysterious manner in which her first departure had remained undiscovered.

She ran through the woods to the Mirror of the Nymphs. At first she saw no one there.

The water trickled and gurgled unceasingly. The leering mask and the pale nymphs twain beneath the darkening canopy of trees were the only inhabitants of this nook once more deserted.

Aline again sought the little temple, broke the silence, gently called.

Gliding dreamily, Mirabelle emerged from the shadows between the columns.

She had exchanged her silver costume for another. The deception was but momentary, for one immediately recognized that she was still prettier in these modern garments, and that her dark locks shone blacker above the big white collar.

She smiled not, but heaved a heavy sigh. Disguised as a lovelorn youth of fifteen years, she had assumed in the presence of her beloved the melancholy, mournful air that so becomes that manly age. Yet withal she was making no attempt to play a part. The mere weight of her emotion had flung across her brow a filament of sorrow. A deep sense of the gravity of the occasion, and of the memories that she would always have of this youth-inspired hour, stilled her little beating heart. She saw herself in the future, wretched beyond a doubt, peddling oranges in the rue Saint-Denis or pencils in the Cannebière; and that would be at the time of her life when both sexes, after long having vied with each other in finding her worthy of desire, continued to plot with each other to let her die of hunger. Instinct was already teaching her that women review, in a few luminous seconds, the far-stretching past crowded with shadows; and she knew that, when youth was gone, never to the last, beyond all moments of blessed oblivion, would she cease to behold the moon-lit, shadowed beauty of this night of exaltation.

Thereupon, she took the little Princess by the hand and led her into the darkened circle in the enclosure of the five Greek columns.

With still more sadness, she lived over the hour, already dead forever, when she had felt with such a shudder that she was pawning her liberty.

For a souvenir, she plucked from the cushions a little raveling of white and green cloth.

Nearer the spring, she garnered a fragrant flower and a flower without perfume and put them together in her handkerchief.

Finally, under the benediction of the young nymphs, so like in their nakedness, who stretched two hands over the waters and joined their bodies with the other two, Mirabelle slowly imprinted upon Aline's eyes a kiss that to her seemed deliciously fraternal.

"You really wish to follow me?"

"Oh, yes!"

Their lips united. Aline closed her eyes.

Mirabelle grew taut and murmured:

"Thou [22] lovest me?"

"Oh, yes, yes, yes!"

"I would.... Say it thyself.... Say unto me: 'I love thee, Mirabelle.' "

"I love thee, Mirabelle."

"Thou wilt regret nothing?"

"I have naught to regret."

"Thou wilt follow me everywhere?"

"Oh, not too far, please! But I shall go wherever thou shalt be. ... Thou art my beloved."

Mirabelle cast upon her a profound look and grasped her two arms.

"Dost know the meaning of that word 'beloved'? No. It matters not—thou shalt soon find out. Leave me not—swear to me thou wilt remain—a week—a whole week alone with Mirabelle...."

"A week? Why, much longer? What art thou saying?"

"Swear to me a week. I ask no more. If thou stayest seven days, I shall guard thee well for seven years."

"Why hast thou an air so sad?"

"Kiss me."

"Hold—"

"Thou hast sworn?"

"All that thou shalt desire."

But yet, Mirabelle gently shook her head.

She ceased speaking and lifted her eyes once again to the four white young breasts of the marble nymphs above.

"Let us go quickly," she said at last. "Where is the road? The gate?"

[22] It is impossible to convey in English the exact force of the French "familiar" address. I have consistently ignored it, except in a passage such as this, where the exalted sentiment seems to admit the "thee and thou." Actually, the two girls are merely dropping into a form of address that implies a sudden mutual consciousness of intimacy.

"Oh, the gate is guarded! Come this way. I know a route by which we should be able to get out of the park."

They set off at a rapid pace. Mirabelle, being a whole head taller, held her companion a little above the girdle. Her hand grasped the little rounded breast, enfolded it with five fingers, pressed a caressing palm upon it and extended a searching finger tip until it had found the nipple. Aline raised her eyes and smiled.

They made their way out of the park between two aloes, but across the fields and far from the road. In this spot, the embankment of hard, dry earth carried the impress of their steps. Mirabelle now paid no attention to concealing their trail, for the moon had set. Aline slowly guided her by the hand and soon they were in the moat.

Where to go? They knew not at all.

They passed along a field of maize, then some vegetable gardens, where were growing red pimentos, watermelons and sweet potatoes.

The day was dawning gradually.

Beneath the hedges of nopal cactus lingered mounds of fog, like snow banks.

"I am sleepy," said Aline, laying her cheek on her friend's shoulder. "How late it is! Where shall we find a place to rest? I haven't slept for so many hours!"

They discussed the whole matter while walking. Somewhere on the road there was surely a village with an inn; but how ask for a room before sunrise? They had neither carriage nor wraps nor baggage. Suppose the hotel keeper tried to question them? How explain briefly why, at an hour so late and yet so early, they had not yet gone to bed?

"Let us follow the road," said Mirabelle. "Over yonder I perceive an olive grove, where we can sleep in the shade while the day draws toward noon."

After a walk that seemed long to the nearly sleeping Aline but actually lasted not more than twenty-five minutes, they reached the entrance to the grove. In fact, while several olive trees lifted their dark, flat mass before the other trees, behind them thronged red pines and cypress, among which ran wild briar and soft grassy slopes.

Aline threw both her arms around Mirabelle, dropped a sleepy kiss on the edge of her left nostril and curled up her arms without even choosing the best spot. Immediately the little sandman scattered sleep upon her eyelids.

CHAPTER SIX

Wherein Pausole and His Companions Chat at Random and Are Halted by the Point of a Pin

Fair Clearista with apples is playfully pelting the goatherd. THEOCRITUS, V. 88

"IT pleases me," said the beaming Pausole, "it pleases me boundlessly to be preceded by forty tulips on the way to my capital! That armed escort went contrary to all my convictions and it was an evil inspiration, Taxis, that led you to take advantage of my distraction and impose it on me today. Why, people would have said, when they spied me behind that warlike array, that I was on my way to offer battle to my neighbor M. Loubet! I am no bellicose chieftain, most certainly not! Dealing death is not my forte; in fact, I understand that in my realm no other blood is shed than that of virgins, or of young pullets."

"Poor little pullets!" said Giglio. "I had rather assault fifty maidens than wring the neck of one tender white fowl. And yet the cries of maidens are far more shocking."

"Yes," said Pausole, "but one gets used to them."

As the heat was growing more intense, he opened his sceptre on its hinges and drew forth his fan—a Japanese one.

The Oriental artist, wielding a precisely controlled reed, with a realism that forgot nothing, had traced upon the fan a nude young lady, with elaborate coiffure and well-pointed breasts. Crouching face downwards, she held in her hand a screen, with which she veiled her left shoulder.

"The privilege of courtesans," continued the King, "is somewhat startling. Their general type, in the art of almost all peoples, has become the type of feminine beauty. And there is no escaping this either, since all other women refrain from competition. For a century and more, we can find mention of no more than four or five European women of quality who have disrobed before a painter or a sculptor and thus permitted him to reveal to others the pretty things that they conceal beneath—no one has ever discovered the reason! Everywhere, except in Tryphême (and in Japan, so the magazines say), a nude woman means a prostitute.

"Now, I could wish that courtesans might have at times more genius and talent than their painters, that they might attain to refinements of admirable delicacy, and that consequently, at the supreme moment when one experiences the effect of it, one would often feel as

much inclined to applaud them as to embrace them; but they are always mere mechanics, since their task is mechanical, and there is no manual labor that is not soon destructive to harmony of the body. They are even slavish mechanics, since they are ruled by our caprices; and there is no form of subservience that is not disastrous to beauty of spirit. Therefore, their monopoly of European art is an act of usurpation, and I congratulate myself on having raised the mental level of my subjects by permitting them to establish in peace the beauty of virgins, while our neighbors base their art on the belly of a few strumpets."

"You are an artist, Sire," said Giglio.

"No," replied Pausole. "I love nature just as the gods have made it, and I love so much to see it that I do not find the time to look at it through the eyes of others, as the collectors of pictures do. I am not an artist at all."

Hereupon, he looked at his page, as if he were expecting renewed approbation from him.

"Friend Gi——," said he, "but I really don't know what name to give you! You told me that I might pronounce your name in the Italian or the French fashion, Djilio or Giguelillot. Now, I feel that in saying 'Djilio' I do not place the pitch accent with the proper force. A Milanese would laugh at me the moment he heard me. On the other hand, 'Giguelillot' is a pronunciation as ridiculous as 'Chakespeare' [23] or 'Lohangrain'; I can't get used to it. Since French is the language of my people, let me turn your name into French and call you simply 'Gilles.'"

"Sire, my name is Gilles," declared the page. "Since you wish it so, my name has always been Gilles; I have never borne any other name—Gilles! Gilles quite short or Gilles Gilles; or Gilles, as you please."

"Gilles quite short is more lively, more foolish, more suited to your appearance."

"But you, Sire, what name shall you bear?"

"I?"

"I mean—in the eyes of history?"

"How so?"

"Sire, History is known as a sort of peasant woman in a badly draped red robe, seated on a Grecian throne and crowned with a laurel wreath, like a little girl that has won a prize. She has the breasts of a woman with child, the shoulders of a porter and the nose of Pallas

[23] The "Gallicized" or French mode of pronouncing English and German names, as if we were to say "Corneal" and "Goeath" or "Goaty," instead of retaining the native pronunciation of "Corneille" and "Goethe."

herself. She is also noted for a curious mania for writing the names of famous men on a bronze tablet which rests on her left knee; it is just for that reason that they feel called upon to name her 'History' (your artists can tell you about it better than I); for the same peasant in her badly draped robe, with the same pair of teats and the same Grecian nose, can be Science or the Argentine Republic or the Omnibus Company—all depending on the bit of equipment that she holds poised on the round of her hips.

"Well, then, when one is a great King, he 'appears before the bar of History,' who is attended by several embryonic males carrying scutcheons and symbolizing Finance, Arts or Letters, at will. You would never persuade an engraver of medals to the contrary. For this solemn ceremonial, the King's mere name is not sufficient. He is accorded a celebrated surname, which is generally supposed to owe its origin to popular invention. What surname would you have?"

"I'll think it over," said Pausole.

"When I lived in Paris, I knew a poet and dramatist who amused himself by giving historic epithets to the Presidents of his country. He had invented Thiers the Laconic, Grévy the Victor, Carnot the Just, Faure the Handsome; some others too . . ."

"Saint Pausole would satisfy me," said the King modestly. "Saint Pausole the Areopagite,[24] or Saint Pausole of Tryphême. After my demise, if the Exchequer is in not too bad a state, I should like my successors to make the necessary appropriations for my canonization. It's an expensive business this, to be a saint, they say. It is much cheaper to become a count. But I think they make rebates in favor of crowned heads and spare them many delays. I hope that the Sanctified Congregation of the Rites will not see too many obstacles to my entrance into the Seventh Heaven. To be sure, I have followed several cults, and I refuse absolutely to treat as vain idols the innumerable divinities whose nonexistence has not been proved to me. But I have also followed the Catholic faith; I have even practiced its virtues; I am sweet and humble of heart; I shall have striven all my life to make people happy, to soothe foolish complaints, to reconcile quarreling groups, to spread peace and love. These are worthy titles; and without having a soul haunted by ambitious dreams of Paradise, it seems to me that I should make a most exemplary specimen of saint."

Taxis started; but it was not a mark of opposition, as one might

[24] On the Areopagos, or hill of Mars, in ancient Athens, the court of the same name met and exercised jurisdiction over capital and religious cases. Here, too, St. Paul preached and converted Dionysius, surnamed "the Areopagite," about 50 A. D.

think. He had not been listening to the King's last words. His gaze had been riveted for a minute past on a little shining object that lay in the middle of the road.

"Sire," he cried, "a clue!"

And, having dismounted, he picked up the object, doubly precious by its nature and its origin. He examined it and gravely said:

"Here we have a little piece of golden jewelry—a brooch, in fact. This pin has engraved on the clasp a capital A with a crown of cornflowers, the emblem of the Princess Aline. Furthermore, I observe that the pin is open; therefore, it has fallen directly from the garment to which it was attached, and which could not have been a necessary garment, I conclude . . ."

"Taxis, you're a nuisance," interrupted the good Pausole. "We are not on the trail of Captain Grant nor of la Longue Carabine, and you are not going to unearth in the dust the traces of my little girl nor count the broken branches, like a scalping Indian. For my part, I shall assuredly not yield my hair to be twisted by an Apache chief on the highroad of my own dominions."

"It is nevertheless important . . ."

"To learn that my daughter has passed this way? You had no doubt of that, eh? We know the point of departure and the first stopping place in her little journey. Between the two there is only one road. She must have passed over it, then. Even if she had taken the most round-about route to go from her home to the inn, that would not prevent us from finding her at her destination if she is still there; and that would not enlighten us any further as to the direction that she is now following if she is continuing her course."

The tone that Pausole adopted in giving this reply was full of significance. This did not escape Giglio in the least; the King was in no great haste to reach his goal. And unless care were taken, they ran the risk of disappointing him by terminating too soon an excursion which it had cost him a thousand efforts to promote.

Giguelillot (the reader suffers no distress as we call this personage by turns Giglio, Giguelillot, Djilio or Gilles?)—Giguelillot, then, had a sudden idea; Taxis must be segregated!

"I beg pardon," said he with a serious air, "the pin was open as it fell, you say? In which direction was the point turned?"

He did not press further. Taxis would feel his pride impugned if he did not solve such a question all by himself. Nothing seemed to him more serious.

"One moment!" he growled. "I was coming to that. It is a capital point that I intend to establish."

Pausole looked at Gilles, who did not bat an eyelid.

On his knees in the macadam, Taxis searched for the exact spot where he had seized the pin.

"Here! I have found it," he said. "The imprint is very clear. The branch that terminates in the clasp is perpendicular to the axis of the road; but the point opens in the direction of the palace, opposite to that of the inn."

He rose again.

"This," he declared, with still frowning eye, "points to unexpected conclusions. The golden pin that I hold in my hand is one of the kind that women (so I understand) are accustomed to fasten at the top of the bottom (if I may put it so) of their backs. Its purpose is to close the immodest gaping in the skirt and to make fast to the girdle a garment that must not fall. They always place it (as I suppose, logically enough) with the point on the inside. Therefore, if such a pin becomes gradually detached and finally slips to the ground, as there is no evidence that it can defy gravity by performing any pirouettes—in fact, on the contrary, we must presume that it falls in a straight line—the point doubtless indicates on the ground the direction followed by the lady that has lost the trinket. Now, in the present instance, the point is turned towards the palace; therefore, the Princess Aline must have retraced her steps upon leaving the Hotel du Coq and is actually proceeding in the direction diametrically opposite to the one that we ourselves are following."

He raised two fingers and continued:

"But—that is not certain."

"Why, yes, indeed!" protested Gilles. "It is your own . . ."

"I can readily believe it; however, a presumption is not a proof. But as the Hotel du Coq is right at hand (it is the sixth building to the right in the village in front of us), the simplest thing is to begin our investigation there and immediately thereupon to decide in which direction we are to proceed."

"By no means!" exclaimed Giguelillot. "We mustn't lose a second. We must separate here. The King and myself will conduct the investigation within the village. You, milord, will be so good as to set out to the rear, explore the roads and woods, suck wind down your throat, scrutinize the horizon, scratch for clues in the sand; that concerns us no longer. Only remember that the King dines at eight o'clock—eight o'clock on the dot, Sir Chief Eunuch."

"I receive orders only from my sovereign."

"Who am I," said the page humbly, "if not his Will, his

Walküre,[25] my lord Taxis? 'Tis he who speaks through my lips."

"I won't meddle in it," said Pausole. "I approve on principle. Off with you, Taxis, since those are the instructions by my counselor of the day. You will have ample time to express your sentiments as soon as it strikes midnight. Until then, no arguments! The whole aim of my system is to avoid friction. Now show me that it's a good scheme."

Taxis cast a furious look at the zebra and its cavalier. Then he clutched in a trembling hand the chaste Kosmon's reins, led the animal to a hummock, clambered on the highest hump, executed not without effort what Mirabelle, in her choreographic jargon, would have called the "steps of the fourth open formation" and finally flopped into the saddle again.

He was already trotting toward the Flower Gardens when the King, beseeching the good Macarie to be so good as to start out again, asked in melancholy tones:

"So, my boy, we've come to the inn?"

That meant that he was to re-enter the plane of tragic events; question strangers; learn what at heart he had no wish to know; conduct an investigation into a vivid scandal; and at the conclusion of all that, be left face to face with the necessity of making a decision. His voice manifested a lively displeasure at the approach of the fatal threshold. Giguelillot banished this painful apprehension with a single word.

"The inn?" said he. "It's a bit farther on. The first house in the village is a farm, and if you please, Sire, we can drink some milk there before beginning our labors."

"Ah! Now, that's a noble idea!" said the King. "We'll go in! I certainly do please! We have a Sicilian sun on this road; I feel quite pastoral and I'm puffing like a bull. Let us go and see the woolly sheep! The beautiful eyes of the cows! 'The lambs whose wool is so soft as sleep,' as the Sicilian says.[26] Let us go and see the goatherd who is feeding his bearded goats—"

"And Clearista who is pelting him with apples!"

"And Clearista who is pelting him with apples!" repeated Pausole drunkenly.

[25] A harking back to the original sense of the word, viz.: an emissary of the Gods (who marks out the warriors to be slain).

[26] Theocritus.

CHAPTER SEVEN

How Giguelillot, After Several Reprehensible Adventures, Invented a Stratagem and Found the Fair Aline

The downfall of respectable women is often so rapid as to make one's head spin.

OCTAVE FEUILLET

THE farm into which Pausole and his page made their way, while the forty tulips mounted guard beneath the gateway, had been built by an architect who must have known Theocritus by heart, but had never absorbed any of his spirit.

The buildings and the paving of the courtyard, completely coated in ceramic tiles, were joined at the base of the walls by rounded corners where the tiniest bacillus, the smallest thallophyte,[27] the most microscopic microcosm or the humblest bacterium could not lead a peaceable existence or love and bring forth young, as they did in the times when Clearista carelessly slid along her lips a syrinx[28] infected with pathogenic germs.

The rustic odor of carbolic acid and the fragrance of copper sulphate escaped from the stables, in conjunction with the perfume of new-mown hay. In the rear of the courtyard, beneath a metal penthouse, thirty individual watering troughs were being filled with filtered water, each awaiting the pendulous lips of an ox; and each ox had his own bathtub; unescapably prophylactic!

"Ah, Sire! What sort of place is this!" exclaimed Djilio in despair.

"A plant to produce milk, butter and fat chickens," replied Pausole. "I find its appearance very pleasing and feel instantly reassured as to the repast that we shall enjoy here. This farm is precisely what the Greeks would have constructed if they had known what we know. It is clean and symmetrical."

The zebra reared up in the sun.

"Besides," continued Pausole, "the Greeks took a thousand precautions that we have only discovered in the past year and a half. I have read in the treatise of an Ephesian physician that they boiled their water, froze it again and reboiled it before drinking. They knew that river water is the worst of all, that wells are dangerous in the

[27] A species of rudimentary plant life.

[28] The Pan's pipe, composed of reeds juxtaposed and graduated in length.

vicinity of thermæ[29] and that midwives should wash their hands immediately before drawing water from the well. In short, what we call 'progress' is nothing more nor less than a return to the Greeks or a development of their ideas. The country estate that we are entering is closer to them than it appears to be. Hello! Here's the farmer."

An old man ran up, hat in hand, trembling, excited, proud, joyful —we leave the reader the task of working out all the epithets that describe an old rustic receiving the King and his page.

Himere and Macarie, being animals of royalty, were conducted to the choice stalls. Pausole leaned familiarly on his subject's shoulder, for he never knew how to make social distinctions, and Giguelillot, very wide awake, interested himself in the farm girls.

There came one, two, seven, ten, twelve of them; the ugly ones wearing petticoats and shawls, but the pretty ones without clothing, according to the fashion in Tryphême.

Giguelillot noticed one of them who, naked from her little sabots to the kerchief knotted over her black hair, seemed quite a dainty morsel to occupy the leisure moments of a day of rest.

While the King was genially questioning the farmer as to his preparations for the harvest and the fluctuations in the price of grain, the page approached the milkmaid, who was meanwhile examining him with a most engaging smile.

"You know how to milk cows," he said.

"That's the only thing I do know," replied she.

The tones of her voice were warm and lively.

"Well!" said Giglio. "Lead the way. We are going to fill a bowl of milk for His Majesty, who is thirsty, and for me, who imitates him with the spirit of a true courtier."

She ran on ahead, her breasts in her hands.

He caught up with her in a spick and span stable that looked like a circus stud.

"What's your name?"

"Thierrette, milord."

"Thierrette, your breasts are golden as two mounds of fresh butter. Take whatever milk you please to the King; my lips want none but your own milk."

"I haven't any," said the brunette with a laugh, "and I do nothing that would bring me any."

"You haven't any? I shall find out if that's true."

"Try it."

[29] The Greek and Roman hot-baths.

He made the attempt, on both sides, with a persistence that did not seem displeasing. He sucked with hollowed cheeks, like a greedy infant, while the nipples were drawn outward by his eager lips; but he elicited only long shivers and blushes of satisfaction.

"Nothing yet," he said at last. "I'll have to wait. Come to me; you shall give me some within a year."

"It's rather late if you are thirsty. Drink this first."

She took her seat beside a white cow and weighed with her hand the smooth and quivering skin of the teat. Drawing the thick soft udder between her thumb and two fingers, she darted the white stream of milk into the cup.

Giglio remained at a distance, expecting her to return to him; but she set off with slow, straight steps, holding before her breasts the porcelain cup in which the thick cream was quivering.

"I am going to take this to the King," she said. "Wait, your turn will come."

He did not wait an instant.

Scarcely had she left the darkened depths of the stable for the bright light of the gateway, where her black locks were shot with tints of blue, than the page had already departed through the other entrance of the great hall.

He traversed lighted corridors, airy vestibules, storehouses that looked like agricultural expositions and seemed to him to be arranged with a most perverse spirit.

Giguelillot, who felt no particular admiration for man's patient labor and treated the most serious things with a deplorable levity, maintained an uncompromising aloofness toward the equipment of the rooms in which work is done, as well as of those where no work is done. In addition to this, his convictions were just as firmly rooted as they were newly formed; and as he found a certain charm of the unexpected in a certain measure of disorder, nothing exasperated him more than "arrangement"; that is to say, orderly sequence.

With very lively zeal, he disarranged everything that he was able to move.

He threw the rollers into the reaping machines, the shovels and the steel pruning hooks into the ploughs; he crammed the slender pitchforks, the thin spades and the sturdy hoes into the boiler and chimney of an unfortunate steam engine. Looking upon the flooring as a mere field for ploughing, he dug it up with one blow of the pick.

And then the red sun appeared.

"Ah!" he cried. "There's a pretty effect."

He stepped back, half closed his eyes and watched how the hall

grew brighter, and where the light came in and where the shadow gathered; then, choosing with some deliberation another point in the central passage, with a second blow of the pick he produced a "riot of vermilion."

He continued in this wise, much interested in his little task, and for more than a quarter of an hour he strove to modify the ornamentation of the hall, without bothering himself about Owen Jones' rules. Several scythes, removed from their handles and disposed flat on the floor with restraint, precision and ornamental balance, spread out their long blue tongues and reflected the vermilion in a gamut of orange tints. Some arborescent lines of sticks laid end to end gave the composition a sort of solidity. Two sickles, joined at point and haft around a well of color, formed an artificial centre for the ensemble, a heart of ruddy clay, which was balanced at the opposite corner by a second centre, smaller but equally indispensable.

"Ha, ha!" he ejaculated. "That's not bad. Now the place is fit to enter. Things are in place."

Then, heartened by his twenty minutes' toil, he continued on his walk through the estate.

A fruit patch all red with strawberries and raspberries was disclosed in the near distance.

He entered it.

"Good morning, milord," said a little voice.

Behind the crimson screen, Giglio perceived the white line of a woman's body, relieved by golden tints.

Perhaps this one would prove more tender or less artificial than young Thierrette.

He did not stop to demand her name nor even to indulge in any fancied ornamental comparisons to figs, bananas and oranges.

Approaching, he burst forth:

"Rose, or Liliane, or Marguerite, or whatever be the floral name that you bear among your sisters, if I were master of this place, I should ask for no fruits except those of your body, velvety as a plum. Give me your oranges, your strawberries and your wild plums, and that pomegranate of a heart so prettily imprisoned."

On his knees before one of his fair readers, the young poet would doubtless have sought for metaphors more rare, even granting that there still remain unpublished any comparisons between the fruits of woman and the fruits of earth; but the maid of Tryphême to whom he addressed these gallantries had never heard anything that sounded so sweet to her.

Lowering her head with a child-like smile, she blushed, and, as her

first move was to go and shut the door, Giglio understood that he could continue his ballade up to and including the envoi.

He held the girl on her feet between his left arm and his blue doublet. With a hand that appeared to be demonstrating a horticultural collection to invisible spectators, he first touched the mouth, which became a peach blossom; then the breasts, which, following the figure, were two peaches encircling their kernels; then he essayed metaphors which came perhaps from Chenier, but certainly not from Lamartine.[80]

The custodian of the raspberries listened passionately to this oriental poesy. Incapable of opposing her humble and feeble reserve to the desires of a youth that she found a veritable genius, she let herself be led unresisting to a garden bench, divested it of its burden of fruit and felt it a point of honor to give generously of what he seemed determined to expect from her.

"When will you come back?" she sighed, after many other sighs.

Giglio replied imperturbably:

"Tomorrow. Tonight. Day after tomorrow. Always."

"But you have sweethearts?"

"Not a one."

"But you will have?"

"Never!"

"Swear it to me."

"I swear."

Reassured, she abandoned herself anew with open heart; then, more confident, she let him go.

The page crossed the courtyard.

Through the windows of the hall into which they had conducted the King, he saw Pausole in a large leathern armchair asleep beside the farmer. As he turned in another direction, he discovered Thierrette standing at the entrance to the hallway. With menacing finger, she forbade him to approach, but did not forget to laugh.

"Don't follow me!" she cried, as she fled.

He ran after her.

In his race, he mounted a staircase, followed a white corridor and dashed into a little room, bright and shining like the others.

She barricaded herself behind a linen rack.

"Villain! What are you doing in my room? If you don't get out, I'll call!"

Giglio the comedian, assuming the voice of a lady visiting a boy's room, uttered:

"How nice it is here! Oh, what pretty flowers!"

[80] Chenier as the classic, Lamartine as the romantic poet.

He laid his finger on the wall paper, where some improbable pansies drooped their cleft chins.

She made a pretense of getting dressed. He stopped her with his hand, and swinging his plumed bonnet in the other hand, he said to her with a thousand graces:

"Lovely Thierrette, I adore you."

"Do you mean it?"

"Too much so. I am mad about you. Don't you see it in my eyes?"

She saw all that she wanted to see and yet she asked:

"Shall you still love me tomorrow?"

"Forever."

"Forever is a long time, make it a little shorter and I'll believe you."

"Eighty years."

"Shorter still."

"Seventy-nine years and a half—I'm telling you from the bottom of my heart, Thierrette; if I offer you a long, long love, it is because I hope to live to a ripe old age and because I shall love you all my life."

Thierrette yielded. Her charming and unworthy lover had understood from the beginning why she had refused for nearly an hour the favor of opening her arms and stretching out. It was because previously she had not deemed it decent to accord this favor to anybody.

Was she right in letting Giguelillot thus be the first to take the place vacant beside her? The reader can have no doubts about it. Yet Thierrette was anxious, and on this afternoon in June, if she felt herself all at once accessible to a man's caresses, her body pliant and her breasts firm, it was because, in the secrecy of her chamber, her senses vanquished without combat all the resistance she had.

For lack of this moral energy, Thierrette displayed successively courage, then passion, then desire. The ensemble of these qualities far surpassed the modest level maintained by the young lady of the fruit.

First of all, she accepted without complaint the trials of the initial experience, even outdistancing them with a vigor that was admirably helpful; and gradually inspired by enthusiasm for the revelation that had just violently penetrated her, Thierrette made it manifest that she must never again be disappointed under any pretext, and that she could not suffer her luminous experience to lapse into a mere passing recollection. Giguelillot, a courteous prisoner, gave evidence of co-operation.

And yet, at the very moment when she was searching in his eyes and believing herself sure to behold there the flame of a love as violent as her own, the little page was already distraught and was thinking of something quite different.

He was saying to himself, not without respect but also not without frankness, that he was wasting his time in regrettable dalliance; that he was not only the favorite page, but also the counselor of King Pausole; that in this capacity he had above all to counteract the influence of the baneful Taxis; that to this end it was not sufficient to send this serious-minded fellow six kilometres to the rear and twiddle his fingers at his shadow, but that he had perforce to act while the other was wandering, to carry on the investigation without him, to marshal the progress of events and, on the Huguenot's return, to confront him with an irreparable situation, while assuming an air of deep distress.

His reflections had infinite time to reach their conclusion and even to bear fruit in the form of a happy idea, for the youthful ardors of Thierrette took count neither of the passing minutes nor of the approach of twilight.

The happy idea that came to him involved a stratagem that appeared at first somewhat complex, somewhat feeble and far-fetched, but none the less capable of success.

He baited his trap thus:

"My dear," he said suddenly, "I fell in love with you at the first glance, but now I could never bear to leave you even for a single morning."

"Oh, no! Don't leave me!"

"You know that I am the King's page. My costume makes me recognized everywhere. How am I to get out and hide myself? Listen to me. You wear clothes in winter time. Where are your garments?"

"Why?"

"Give me a skirt and shawl, a kerchief to cover my short hair and a wide-brimmed straw hat of the sort that you wear in the fields. Also, give me two buckets of milk to carry and let me out in that rig. I'll wait outside until they've searched through the whole farm and the King has gone off without me; then I'll return whenever you say the word, and we shall not leave each other for the rest of the night."

"That's true," said Thierrette. "We can't see each other here. In the daytime, this floor is vacant and I have nothing to do today because the King is at the farm; but this evening—if we should be caught here!"

She got up.

"Dress yourself, quick! The sun has already set."

She helped him, handed him the skirt, fastened sleeves of fine linen over those of the blue doublet, knotted the shawl, puffed it out in front, wound the silken kerchief around his crown, put the big straw hat in place and said:

"Now go! The milk buckets are in the first room on the ground floor. Take two. It is almost night. I'm sure that nobody will recognize you. This evening I shall sneak out all alone to the little olive grove to the right on the road to the palace. And you?"

"I will be there."

"Every evening?"

"Every evening."

"Oh, how wonderful you are!"

She took him into her arms again, and Giglio had great difficulty in pretending to be sufficiently obtuse not to see that this farewell kiss was designed to produce consequences.

He left the room, softly descended a staircase that seemed somewhat rickety and found the little dairy where the evening's draught was waiting, still steaming and all foamy.

Stooping down, he seized the handle of the first bucket, tugged, struggled, strained with his shoulders, but was utterly unable to succeed in lifting the bucket with its load of milk and cream off the ground.

A syllogism of the simplest sort—the only kind of which his wearied mind was capable—demonstrated that, "one" being contained in "two," if he could not lift one bucket, he would be still less able to walk off with the pair.

Quite calm and always nerved to decisive expedients, he tilted the tin spout over the sill of the open door and spread a milky way upon the dark blue flooring.

In the same manner, he emptied the next bucket and replaced the lids, taking care to let the foam whiten the edge and trickle down the sides. After that, he raised the empty cylinders with the ease of an athlete.

"For my purpose," said he, "the crown of foam is amply sufficient."

He strolled impudently up to the curtainless window through which he had surprised the slumbers of King Pausole. The King was still asleep, nose a little lower and beard twisted.

Night was falling. In the Midi,[81] in spite of what Voltaire says, the days in summer are not so long as they are beyond the woods of Auteuil. It was not yet eight o'clock when Giglio, the peasant woman, buckets in hand, passed through the forty guardsmen who still presented their withered tulips beneath the gateway.

At the moment when he reached the road, Taxis rode up red and dusty.

"Heigh!" called Giglio, "Heigh, monsieur!"

[81] Mediterranean France.

Taxis failed to recognize him, for he counterfeited a voice to match his clothes and gait.

"What is it? What do you want?" he cried.

"Are you lookin' for the King 'ere?"

"None of your business!"

"Of course not. I was telling you—because if you're looking for 'im—bein' as how he's gone back to the palace—"

"Has he!"

"And I'll tell you, he was angry because you were not here. But that's none of my business either. Good night, sir. It's a fine evenin' this evenin'. Hope we have a bit more rain."

Taxis made a gesture which signified:

"How thoroughly annoying!"

He turned the docile Kosmon's bridle and trotted back over the road for the second time.

Meanwhile Giglio, with even, well-poised steps, was following the little village street. His arms were as taut as if twenty litres of milk had been weighing down each of his closed fists. He passed the darkened houses, he avoided all wayfarers and, in order to add a decisive bit of evidence to the reality of his new costume, he leaned far back, as if he were a girl carrying the fruits of her fault.

He entered the Hotel du Coq, which proved to be only a small inn surrounded by an old garden. The entrance was through the kitchen and, as the roast was being served, neither innkeeper nor servant girls had time to give him more than a cursory glance.

After his first greetings, to which scarcely any reply was made, he explained in a stupid voice:

"I am new at the farm. I'm bringing some milk for the little lady and her gentleman, who are taking dinner in their room."

"Go on up. It's on the first floor [82]—the door with two panels," said a busy servant.

"You mean the litlte lady in the green dress?" he repeated calmly.

"Yes, I said so. Get out of the way!"

Giguelillot heaved a sigh of satisfaction. His meditations in Thierrette's arms had not been ill directed.

Among the various hypotheses that presented themselves in the haze of doubt, he had put his finger on the true one; the fair Aline, confident of the King's apathy, had not left the scene of her first night of love. This established, it was not necessary to be a great scholar to deduce that she was after all concealed in the intimacy of her chamber,

[82] In the European sense, of course—the American "second floor."

that she was there taking her meals in secret and that, in a road house this peculiarity was sufficient to point her out.

He was starting for the stairs when the cook stopped him and, pointing to the two buckets, said:

"You're not going to carry all that upstairs? It's a load for twenty-five people."

"Never mind. It's not heavy. The lady will take as much as she wants."

"Well, you're late, anyhow. They finished dinner ten minutes ago. The table's cleared."

"So much the better. This will do for tonight."

Without getting in the least excited, he mounted the stairs with the same heavy, swaying step, found the door with two panels, knocked his two empty buckets together as if through carelessness, tapped on the door and cried:

"Madame! The chambermaid!"

CHAPTER EIGHT

Wherein the Fair Aline Takes Her Tub About Four O'Clock in the Afternoon

> *The femmes de chambre of my late mother, and a few young ladies whom I was permitted to see; such were the past-mistresses in iniquity that taught me evil at an age when I was incapable of doing it.*
>
> "THE TRIUMPH OF CELIBACY," BY A YOUNG LADY OF HIGH STATION (1744)

IN the grove of olives and red pines where sleep had overtaken her, the fair Aline slept some ten hours, from dawn to dewy eve.

If she did not murmur upon awakening: "Where am I?" as does Sweet Innocence in fairyland, it was because at her side, silently propped on an elbow, Mirabelle was gazing at her with a watchful tenderness that was by this time almost conjugal.

"It is you?" she said. "And we are alone? Nobody has found us? Good morning, Mirabelle. Did you sleep well?"

No, the dancer had not closed her eyes. Accustomed to sleepless nights, she had spent the one just past in a vigil of desire. With the first hour of day, she had crouched on her knees before Aline's face to

cast her shadow over her. But later, with the changing light, a cypress —long, dark and opaque—proved willing to assume the same office. Thereupon Mirabelle had departed to pillage some figs, and when the fair Aline had finally emerged from her dreams, the pair set about eating them.

The repast was meagre and the shady spot was growing warm. Over the myrtle bushes they could see the blue-clad reapers in the golden grain and some passers-by on the road.

"You see," said Mirabelle, "we are not alone at all. We can't stay here. Do you want to walk to Tryphême? The city is two leagues off; that is not far. We can hide much better there than in the woods."

Aline clung to her shoulder and they set off through the meads. A little farther on they had to pass through the first village. The street was white and deserted. An inn presented itself on the right.

Its freshly painted, straw-colored façade, its shady bowers, its garden, its old trees, suddenly tempted Mirabelle.

At this hour of the day the peasants were working in the fields. There was not a soul in the neighborhood of the open doorway; if they slipped in rapidly, not a single witness could betray them. At any rate, this was the reason, or rather the feeble pretext, that prompted her to obey instantly the wild haste of her desires.

"Come in here," she said.

"Wherever you desire."

They were given the finest room. Aline at once demanded a big tub and a new sponge and a basket of cherries and a fan and some lemon juice and some ice—much ice—and hot water—much hot water.

She obtained these very precious articles, then shot both bolts. Mirabelle followed her with intent to embrace; but Line clasped her two hands, smiled prettily in the midst of a little moan and explained in a tiny beseeching voice that she was hot, that they were alone, that nobody would scold them, and so they could just as well make their toilette together and get "all nice and naked."

Mirabelle shivered.

Aline's innocence disconcerted her. Inured as she was to all the expedients of the city's debauchery, to resistance that has to be overcome, to corsets that yield hook by hook, to warm voluminous skirts, to receptive underdrawers, the dancer was no longer capable of comprehending the state of mind of this child who was demanding nakedness as a playtime costume, without any of the transitions in vogue on the divans of the salon.

The females who, in the green room of the theatre, in cabs or in vestibules, had successively taken it upon themselves by their intimate

conversations to fashion her young soul, which was exposed to their influence alone, had gone about it in such a way that Mirabelle conceived her sex under two inevitably opposed aspects; women of chastity and women of the devil. Her conception of the feminine character admitted nothing between extreme modesty and naked passion. Early in life she had been offered by an indigent aunt the choice between virtue and vice, without any further insistence that she should embrace virtue. She had thereupon learned all the vices, in order to attain distinction as soon as possible in one of the two parallel paths that, to her mind, thus represented the moral future of a pretty child. That there was a third path and that one could be naked without having in one's eyes the flame of aboriginal passion (as our writers put it), Mirabelle, being a good Frenchwoman and a reader of romantic leaflets, did not yet suspect in the least, for all her eighteen years. For her, a woman's bearing uniformly implied the dumb-show of the Statue of Beckoning Modesty, with its double meaning; to be unprotected was an open invitation; to offer no defense was a wilful provocation.

While listening to the fair Aline and seeing her eyes so pure, Mirabelle said to herself:

"It is the custom in Tryphême; but what a singular country!"

She was the first to shed her garments, but with gestures that by turns halted or hurried over the buttons. She did not once dare smile and, in surprise at her confusion, she actually did not know what to do with her arms when she had nothing more to take off.

Standing nervously, her hands clasped around her neck, one leg trembling and her body relaxed, she bit her lip, twisted her pliant neck and constantly shifted her gaze.

Meanwhile, seated before her with chin on hand, Aline was completing an examination of her with prodigious interest.

Mirabelle burst out impatiently:

"I please you?"

"You resemble—do you want me to tell you?—you resemble a statue of Narcissus down in the park. But Narcissus is a gentleman—You are the first girl that I have seen this way; I've never had any girl friends, you know, and I only see papa's wives from far off. I find you much prettier than them."

Indeed, and apart from a simple detail that we need not insist upon too closely at the moment, one could at a pinch have taken Mirabelle for a young man. It was not without excellent reasons that she played such rôles. So ambiguous was her form and her bearing that, to mimic leading juveniles with physical fidelity, she had no need to don doublet and hose. Short "panties" were sufficient.

She was tall but slender, with lean hips and no disfiguring fat. Her alert limbs, trained to the dance, displayed their strength by their finely drawn, complex muscular tissues, which rippled on the surface when she drew her knees taut. Her torso was more slender still.

On the pale and delicate skin of her bosom, two dark little points were the only indication of her breasts. Her brown hair, short and curly, fell from a single parting to the right and waved across her brow.

This type of beauty is not exactly one to inspire the lyric souls of Hindu poets; but Mirabelle, who hardly read the verses of Bhartrihari, quite readily felt herself individual and even "piquante," according to the style of compliments that she received after midnight. Hence she was not taken aback at hearing her new-found friend declare, in the train of many others, that she resembled a boy. Recalled by this little phrase to her accustomed habits, she promptly went and sat down on the fair Aline's lap.

Aline had not yet cast off her green gown. Mirabelle desired to remove it herself, and this slow undressing was punctuated by caresses that Aline found gallant to the last degree, without, however, daring to return them.

She gaily threw her stockings in the air, as another girl might have thrown her bonnet over the wings of a windmill, squatted tailor-fashion in the clear floating water of the tub and shivered with delight, as she wriggled her hips.

But abruptly, stricken with doubt and leaning her hand on the well-squeezed sponge, she raised her head and demanded:

"Really and truly, Mirabelle, you are not a gentleman?"

CHAPTER NINE

Wherein Pausole, Having Shaken Off the Melancholy of Régime, Tastes the Bitter Dregs of Caprice

She is like to those waters o'erflowing their banks,
Disdaining fair Reason's too thinly spun thread,
And, during the night and in dumb, silent ranks,
Invading thy home whilst thou liest abed.
LOUYS DORLEANS (1631)

SEEING that night was falling and that King Pausole was still indulging in his refreshing siesta, the farmer told his daughter to attend

upon the King's awakening, while he himself retired to his room to don the black coat of his distant youth and supervise the arrangements for the banquet that he felt it necessary to improvise.

Little Nicole, the farmer's youngest daughter, was a young creature consumed by longings. Her four sisters, at intervals during twenty years, had chosen husbands of different classes, which progressed in proportion to the increasing solidity and size of their father's fortune. The eldest daughter had acquired, we might even say seduced, a young exhibitor of trained monkeys, who, after having had the kindness to bestow a child upon her, had gone still farther in the path of his concessions by giving her himself forever.

The second had espoused a bailiff; the third, still harder to please, a procurer for high society. The fourth was a prefect's wife. After this regular rise in official and social standing, Nicole was unwilling to suffer any retrogression.

When she beheld the King enter her ancestral estates, Nicole had no doubt that her fate had arrived, in the person of a crowned head with robes of purple.

Scarcely had Pausole fallen asleep than she plotted to remain alone with him. Her efforts were at first unsuccessful; but as the hours passed and the royal nose drooped more and more toward the royal beard, the slumbers of the illustrious visitor took on an aspect of eternity that relaxed precautions. The farmer made his escape, leaving Nicole on guard.

The child felt her heart beat wildly; it was the hour of her destiny.

Ah! What to do, and how to play the rôle that Fortune assigned her?

She knew not the etiquette of Courts save through poems and dramas, of which every year she received a donation from her sister, the prefect's wife, as a New Year's gift. That was something at least; and though one perhaps does not speak to the Prince of Wales in the language of H. R. H. the Princess Maleine, of Blanche Triboulet or of Herodiade, one is not fully ignorant of royalty when one is versed in literature, thought Nicole.

And she set about proving it.

Snatching an artificial rose from a painted porcelain vase, she approached the King, kissed him on the brow, extended her right hand and recited in her prettiest voice:

"O King. From Dreamland come! Awake! Behold!"

"Hum!" snorted Pausole. "What is it? What do you want?"

"'Tis I! Beware!" brayed the child. "The maiden fair with rip-

pling hair and body bare, the debonair, without compare! 'Tis I! Beware!"

"My child," said Pausole, still hardly awake, "you must never rhyme two adjectives together and still less four or five. Apart from that, it's a very pretty tale you are telling me. But who are you?"

She became slightly confused, then went on rather more quickly:

"I am the Star that rises first. I am She whom you fondly believe is at rest in the tomb, but who issues forth! Peace has forsaken my breast and passion weighs upon me. Never do I weep and never laugh!"

The King, turning in his armchair, opened his mouth in terror.

Nicole hurried on faster and faster.

"I have garnered this flower for thee upon the hilltop. Oh! I feel the supreme moment drawing nigh! O dream of my nights, fond desire of my days, I despaired to behold thee, but ever hoped! Look upon thee I must, look upon thee again. Ah, take thou this heart, which beats only—"

"What the—!"

—"for you! O master, never without awe can I e'er contemplate the august majesty emblazoned on your brow; for fair though be a youth, a man mature is noble. Yea! I touched my lips to thy dear cup, still filled with kisses soft as zephyrs; thus I was assuaged. Pausole, take thou thy lute and look upon me. Fair am I: exalted dawn, as when a flock of doves trips o'er the fields, with flower in hand."

"What are you talking about!" roared Pausole, in a voice that finally silenced her.

But at the same moment, as the girl stood with mouth gaping in terror, Pausole perceived behind the window a swarm of lights that flitted hither and thither; he saw torches approaching, people running, arms extended and a sort of gigantic sheep lower its teetering head from the top of the window down to the ground. The door opened violently and Diane à la Houppe entered.

"Ah!" she cried. "I was sure of it!"

Poor little Nicole took refuge behind the King.

Pausole, giving the table a resounding thwack with his broad hand, broke forth:

"Thunderation! By all the gods, what does this mean? Either I'm still dreaming or I've gone mad! Taxis, where is Taxis? Gilles, Gilles, Djilio, Giguelillot! Where is my minister? Where is my page? Where am I, for that matter? and what bandit cave has conjured up this ambuscade?"

"Ah, Sire! You are in my arms!" expounded Diane à la Houppe.

"The devil take all women and courtiers!" swore the King, beside himself. "Taxis! Why doesn't he come? Taxis! Taxis! Giguelillot! I shall never get out of this alive! Where are my guards, my soldiers? Why did they break their lances? That was all very well in the daytime, I must say! That Giguelillot is a worthless fellow! Taxis was a hundred times right when he tried to head him off! Taxis! Now, where is he hiding? They have all deserted me! I am abandoned to a horde of mad women! Mad women!"

In very truth, amidst an uproar that was growing louder and louder, Diane, grasping Nicole by the arms, was administering to her a pair of slaps that sounded like a ringing rhyme. Hands were striving to separate them.

"Taxis! Taxis!" repeated Pausole.

And he too entered the combat, scarcely recognized by the farm girls who had rushed up at the noise of the dispute. In the doorway people were swarming and uttering a confusion of advice and exclamations. From the courtyard came sharp cries, mingled with little Nicole's whimpers, with the barking of all the unleashed dogs and with the sepulchral bleating of the huge beast ridden by the Sultana in her flight; when, above all the shouts, was heard the farmer's plaintive voice as he squealed:

"A camel! A camel! A dromedary in my house!"

CHAPTER TEN

How Giguelillot Penetrated the Fair Aline's Bedchamber and What Ensued

Lives there a modest woman?
Who conceals her form and her intimate garments too?
NUGÆ VENALES (*Knick-Knacks for Sale*) 1644

BEFORE revealing through whose agency the preceding scene of confusion was untangled, we must naturally pick up Gilles at the point where we left him, according to the fundamental rules of romantic tradition.

He was presenting himself, you will remember, in a peasant woman's garb, at the fair Aline's door, and alleging a fictitious excuse borrowed from household procedure.

"Come in! Come in!" said a voice.

He penetrated and looked around with great composure, but—

Neither in the bed nor anywhere in the room was a soul to be seen.

However, a green dress, a pair of man's trousers and several undergarments, of which we forbear detailed description, were hanging on the wall and thus indicated the presence of at least two people.

Raising his voice to a falsetto pitch, he spoke very calmly:

"Monsieur is not here?"

"Why?" replied the voice.

"I have a brief message for monsieur."

A mocking laugh issued from the bathroom; the small door was half opened.

"Well, say it! What is it?"

"May I not see monsieur for a minute?"

The mocking laugh came louder this time.

Then ensued a moment of silence, as if from anxiety, and some subdued whispering:

"You are alone?" the voice went on.

"Yes, madame."

"Lock the door. I am coming."

Giguelillot locked it and, for greater security, put the key in his pocket.

Thereupon, not bothering to clothe herself before a chambermaid, the fair Aline calmly came forth. She was holding a bunch of grapes between her hand and teeth and this was her entire costume.

"Monsieur cannot see you," she smiled. "Give me the message."

Although he would have proclaimed himself exhausted by Thierrette's favors, before this apparition the page sensed within him the rebirth of all the fires that once inflamed the soul of Pyrrhus,[33] but, evidencing on this occasion an exceptional reserve, he judged it dangerous to prolong an examination which would have proved harmful to his other plans.

He returned to his masculine tones:

"Madame, I deeply regret having seen Your Highness—"

"A man! A man!" cried Mirabelle, rushing into the room with a most aggressive air.

"Ah! We are discovered!" bewailed little Line.

And she lost consciousness in the arms of her "lover."

Gilles, doubtless much astonished but none the less prepared for

[33] The son of Achilles and leader of the sack of Troy. The fiery warrior's heart affairs were numerous. The reference here is presumably to his instant infatuation for Andromache, Hector's widow.

surprises of this sort through the experience of his own intimacies, opened the bathroom door and assured himself that no lover was visible except this young girl with close-cropped hair; at once everything was explained.

He made two gestures aside.

One said:

"Everything is clear."

And the second:

"How very amusing."

Then, while Mirabelle, by dint of her attentions and caresses, was reviving her little accomplice, whose pallor was quite heart-rending, Giglio closed the door of the inner room and shed skirt and shawl, as well as kerchief and straw bonnet. He arranged his hair, donned his toque, brushed his blue doublet thoroughly, stretched the legs of his yellow hose, adjusted his little flies and washed his hands in warm water.

Once more presentable, he came out and bowed.

Aline uttered renewed cries of distress:

"Oh heavens! A page of papa's!"

Mirabelle had risen with lightning in her eye. She was visibly restraining herself from launching at the intruder the whole quiverful of curses (she herself would have said "shovelful"), with which the rich vocabulary of the life behind the scenes abundantly provides the ladies of the ballet in time of battle.

But she restrained herself admirably, for, instead of bursting forth, she seized Giguelillot by the wrist with a trembling hand and, dragging him into the bathroom by main force, she clasped him with a passion of which he instantly saw the ulterior motive.

She folded him in her arms, she moulded her warm and naked body to the delicate fabric of the doublet and implanted on the page's lips a kiss of the "soul" variety. Then she set forth to him in succinct terms that he might make whatever use of her he pleased, without regard to the bounds of respectability and as often as he wished, if he were willing, in return, to show himself charitable to two unhappy women who were devoted to each other, not to denounce their retreat, not to intrude upon their amusements and to enjoy the use of one sufficiently to make him forget the other.

"Well!" said Giguelillot. "You have a fine opinion of me! It only remains for you to offer me your rings, together with an 'art work' smeared with bronze paint, and the picture will be complete. Come, calm yourself! And now, beg my pardon. Better still, join your

hands, drop your eyes and say: 'I beg pardon, sir, I won't do it any more.' "

Mirabelle kissed him again, but this time on both cheeks.

"You won't tell?"

"I never dreamt of it."

"But you are a page of the King's? You are sent by him?"

"It is not customary to dress pages as farm girls when confiding official missions to them. I assure you, it is not so written in the statutes; indeed no."

"Then why do you come here?"

"Because you make your way to prison in half an hour if you don't make your escape now."

"Ah! I said so, I said so! And nobody would believe me! But whom are you doing this for? Which of us are you saving? I can't be the one—you don't know me. It is she?"

"It is evidently both of you. Otherwise I should have concocted a plan to separate you. Trust me. Do what I tell you and do it quickly. Time presses for all of us. I am warning you at the last minute and I risk being surprised in this room every second. That would ruin my career."

Three little knocks on the door suspended the conversation.

"What can you be doing in there?" asked Aline anxiously.

Mirabelle opened the door and came out.

"He comes to warn us, darling, to save us. What think you? We are already pursued."

"By whom?"

"By the King," said Giguelillot. "He set out this morning with the Marshal of the Palace and myself. I have despatched milord Taxis on a wild-goose-chase and I left the King asleep at a farm in the village. But Taxis is bound to return, the King is bound to wake up, and you will be caught in a trap, Your Highness, in less than fifteen minutes."

"Quick! Mirabelle, we must get dressed! My dress! My stockings! Where are my stockings?"

The page stopped her with a gesture.

"No, no! They have your description; they know both your costumes. You must change; that is elementary common sense."

"But we have no others!"

"Pardon me! I have brought one. In the country where we live, one dress is enough for two people."

He quickly dived into the bathroom, emerged with the dairy maid's

costume and without more ado passed the long skirt about the bewildered Aline.

"We're in a hurry," he said. "I'll do the dressing."

The skirt dragged on the floor; he lifted the waistband well above her breasts and tied the strings down around her waist. All this was soon concealed by the little rose-colored Spanish scarf, which he fastened in a quick knot in the middle of the back.

The disguise was completed by the broad-brimmed straw bonnet.

"Your turn now, mademoiselle—?"

"Mirabelle."

"Ah, of course!"

"Why did you smile?"

But Giglio had no time to explain his impertinence.

He made Mirabelle sit down, lifted her cropped hair, put four pins in it, fixed on the top of her head a little round empty box that bore a perfume label and had been lying on a disordered table; and finally he coiled the kerchief of orange silk all around.

"There!" said he. "I have dressed your hair; you are ready."

"Is that all?"

Giguelillot assumed the voice of a dressmaker from Batignolles:

"You should not put on clothes to go out, madame, you would make yourself conspicuous."

"But, you see," protested Mirabelle, "I am not a woman of Tryphême! I was born in Montpellier, rue de Petit-Saint-Jean. I shall put on my jacket or a dress, if you have one to give me, but I shan't go out like this, my young friend."

"But that hasn't seemed to distress you during the last quarter of an hour."

"Oh, well! With a man in the room, it is quite natural. If there were fifteen of you, I shouldn't go hide myself. But outside, on the street, before anybody at all—"

She leaned against the wall and buried her face in her hands:

"Oh, how ashamed I am!"

Aline went over to her.

"Do you want my costume? I can go out quite naked; that doesn't bother me!"

"No, no!" said Giglio. "Somebody may recognize the Princess. She is the one that needs disguising, and the country hat with that short skirt is none too much; she must keep them. You, on the contrary, nobody knows who you are. The police imagine you to be a young man. Throw them off the trail still further, if they recommence the search. They have been ordered to abandon it, but every-

thing may be changed by tomorrow morning; I am responsible for nothing between midnight and noon. There is barely time to save yourselves. Each of you must take in her hand one of the two buckets that I brought. You will go out without making any noise, but openly and calmly. Anybody you may meet can report to the police that at nine o'clock they saw two dairy maids pass with their milk; that they didn't observe the face of one, while the other was tall, dark and naked. I defy anybody at all to discover, under that description, the little blonde Princess Aline and the unknown man they are looking for."

"How well thought out!" cried Line, clapping her hands. "And how kind you are, monsieur! I am going to kiss you, if my friend permits."

"No!" said Mirabelle quickly. "We haven't time. We must get off at once."

"One moment!" said Giglio. "Whereabouts in the city of Tryphême are you going? Where do you intend to sleep tonight?"

"At the hotel."

"What nonsense! Why, the domestics will have six hours to find out all about you!"

"But we can't go into private houses nor sleep on a park bench."

"That is not the point. You must take the second street to the right on the avenue du Palais, then the first to the left, cross a small square—you will remember all that?"

"Yes, yes—"

"Then continue in a direct line to the rue des Amandines. Ring at number 22. It is the establishment of the Tryphêmian Union for the Rescue of Children, an excellent institution which receives minors of both sexes when they make declaration that they are being brought up with too much strictness."

"And we shall be left at peace there?"

"Evidently. That's the object of the Society."

"Are there any boys there?" asked Mirabelle.

"Three departments: one for girls, one for boys and one mixed. You will make the choice. They will ask you further whether you prefer the dormitory or a private room. They are very obliging in that establishment."

"But what if they ask our names and addresses?"

"You will refuse to give them. They are accustomed to children's not daring to tell where they come from, for fear of being returned to their family. I know these kind old people; they will do all within their power to protect you, even if they find out who you

are. Don't forget the number: 22, rue des Amandines. And now, quick, quick! Off with you!"

They departed in haste, Mirabelle shaking the page's hand and Aline throwing him over her shoulder a long look of farewell, in which there was more than gratitude.

Giguelillot was left alone. The square marble clock struck half past eight.

"I am late," said he to himself. "However, there is no longer any reason for haste."

He examined the room.

It was in great disorder.

A large couch, which had no doubt seemed an object of suspicion, was covered over with a clean but ragged cloth, in the middle of which were piled two pillows. Although the table had been cleared, one banana was lying ready to hand in a compote of faïence. Across the glass door of the closet a little sentence traced with the point of a ring testified to an extreme and repeated happiness. In a corner, Giguelillot discovered the ornament to the clock, a group of "Paul and Virginia," doubtless removed by Mirabelle as being a bad example.

Upon lifting this work of art, he saw the white envelope of a letter. "To His Majesty King Pausole," read the address.

"Hello!" he murmured. "She was writing to him."

The envelope was not closed. Giglio, having become the confidant and accomplice of the fugitives, unfolded the letter without hesitation, read it, sealed it and put the document in his wallet.

At the moment that he was meditating the best means for his own escape, his eyes fell on the garments hung on three hooks.

He could not abandon them.

In case of investigation, that would attest too clearly that the fair Aline and the unknown had changed costume.

Destroy them!

How?

Hide them!

Where?

Put them on somebody else, that was the best way out! It was the Saturday before Pentecost. Tomorrow, the day of the grand festival, two little peasants would no doubt be delighted to parade around in this blue jacket and this green gown. Hence, a false trail, a lovely false trail!

Giglio removed the cloth that covered the broad couch, packed the garments in it, went out on the balcony and with a vigorous arm cast the whole pack over the wall of the neighboring yard.

Then he slid down a post into the garden, glided into the shadow of the hedge in the rear, searched for an opening, found none, made one and was outside.

Assuredly, Thierrette was already awaiting him in the little olive grove, the same grove to which Mirabelle had led the fair Aline a day or so before.

Giguelillot, sufficiently distracted by the recent remembrances of his two protégées, did not feel any desire to rejoin the poor Thierrette, but he could not be cruel enough to compel her to vain waiting through the long hours of the night, as well as to deprive her of the satisfaction for which she manifested so warm an appetite.

As he was meditating upon this question, he found himself once more at the entrance to the farm. And thereupon, finding the forty guardsmen still erect beneath the gateway, he cried to himself:

"Ah, ha! Taxis is my warrant that 'here are no superannuated veterans nor young society butterflies.' Well, it's easy enough to prove! What ho!"

The guards ranged themselves in front of him.

"What ho!" repeated Giguelillot. "Which one of you wants to pass the night with the prettiest girl in the village?"

"I! I! I!" they cried all together.

"Everybody accepts?"

"Yes! Yes!"

"Good. Go to the olive grove on the right-hand side of the road. You will find there a dairy maid, named Thierrette, if I recollect aright. Tell her that my duties claim me this evening, but that I send her forty lancers with a bouquet of tulips. On your way! And if she resists, pay her the honor in spite of herself."

As they were already galloping off, Giguelillot cried through the night:

"But respectfully, and one after the other!"

BOOK THREE

CHAPTER ONE

How the Harem, Forsaken, Raised the Standard of Revolt

Why should man blush at exposing one part of his body rather than another! WESTERMARCK

THE harem not only gave vent to an outcry, but to a tempestuous outcry, when Mme. Perchuque, the first lady of honor, came on the stroke of noon to announce that the King had gone on a trip.

"On a trip? He's sick!" said an irreverent voice.

"His Majesty is happily in flourishing health," replied the old lady, with a nod of her black bonnet. "And God grant that he long be so."

"But why is he going away? Somebody must have changed him toward us."

"Ah!" cried Diane à la Houppe. "He's gone off with a woman!"

Mme. Perchuque, elbows at side, raised her hands and her eyes.

"An adulterer? Oh Lord! Can you think such a thing, ladies? The King, with his deep respect for Your Majesties, is incapable of committing such a depravity. He has left the palace for the purpose of searching for Her Highness the Princess Aline, who mysteriously disappeared day before yesterday. He is attended by a page and accompanied by M. Taxis."

At these words, pandemonium broke loose.

"Taxis is gone! Taxis! No more Taxis!" repeated three hundred delirious voices.

"Why, then, we're on a holiday!" said Queen Gisele as she came from the cloister.

"To the Gardens! To the Gardens!" cried some.

"No! To the theatre! We'll play charades."

"To the Banquet Hall!"

"To the Pages' Quarters!"

Terror stricken, Mme. Perchuque rushed to the door and barred it with her thin body.

"Ladies! Ladies! What incontinence! In very truth, what aberration!"

"Let us pass, good Perchuque—"

"I cannot!"

"And why, if you please?"

"Because milord Taxis has deigned to delegate to me the duties of his office, together with its responsibilities. I conjure you, ladies, to realize my feelings. If I show myself unworthy of the confidence that is placed in me, it will end the position that I occupy at your feet. I shall be driven from the palace, degraded, perhaps exiled—"

"So much the better!" came the reply. "Perchuque, we refuse to recognize you any more. Since you are taking Taxis' place, you're nothing but a low-down street-walker and you're going to pay for him."

From the midst of the hall came a cry:

"Listen!"

"I demand the floor," said a joyous little voice.

And above the carpet of black and yellow and auburn formed by the crowded heads of the women, they could distinguish the child-like features of the future Queen Fannette, whom her companions treated as a younger sister and whom the King refused to recognize at the age when she would herself have granted it.

Perched astride the glowing shoulders of her bosom friend Alberte and crossing her undeveloped shanks over the breasts that she envied, she was waving her right hand in the air and snapping her fingers.

"The floor! I demand the floor!"

"Fannette has the floor!" the meeting acquiesced.

They faced her.

"My friends!" she cried. "They treat us like children—"

"It's shameful!"

"When we, poor innocents, were taken from the boarding schools of our girlhood, we thought they would set us free; but we have only changed jails."

"That's the truth!"

"Prison for prison, I'd rather have the first. Down there they

gave us tasks to do, I know; but as we didn't do them it was only the more pleasant. Down there they forbade us to play husband and wife in the dormitories—but as we did it just the same—"

"Yes, yes! It was lots of fun."

"Down there, we had, above all, days of freedom, weeks of leave, months of holidays; here, instead of that, we pass our whole lives in tears and confinement, without accomplishing a thing!"

"It's a gross injustice! She is right."

"Very well, then; this cannot go on. Whenever one of us happens to ask for a twenty-four hours' furlough, she is always offered the same choice; a discharge or a cell. Let's strike and we shall see whether the King will discharge three hundred and sixty-six women like us!"

The vote to strike was passed by acclamation; but Fannette had not finished. Still erect upon the shoulders of Queen Alberte, who voiced her share of the bravos, Fannette continued with a pretty gesture:

"Perchuque, will you let us pass?"

"I cannot, I cannot," repeated the old lady, harassed by doubts and fears.

"Well, then, we're going to pass by force, but you're going to be severely punished first, you old stork! We're going to hang you up by one foot to the statue in the fountain, with your skirts falling over your face to hide your blushes, and we'll take possession of your white 'panties' for a standard of revolt!"

Mme. Perchuque proved herself a heroine.

"A sacrifice to duty, eh? So be it!" said she. "I shall die of shame, but not in vain shall M. Taxis have reposed his trust upon my aged head."

Several women would have wished to spare the poor old grandmother a treatment so devoid of the respect due to old age: but mobs and children are always implacable.

In the midst of an ever-rising hubbub, they did indeed hang Mme. Perchuque by the left foot to the central statue; her black gown quickly cast a merciful veil over her apoplectic features; and her venerable "panties" fastened to the points of a halberd descended the grand staircase; while, in their train, a rose-hued mob pounded the heels of their slippers on the hundred resounding steps.

But when this mob, shouting continuously, arrived at the great doorway, Taxis was on the threshold and a sudden silence fell from his gaze upon the arrested multitude.

"What does this mean?" he bawled.

That was enough. Immediately, scattering through the halls,

fleeing along the corridors, straggling up the stairs, the army was swept away in tempestuous rout. Hardly seven or eight young women, those who always maintained a front against the Chief Eunuch in moments of crisis, held their positions with an air of bravado; but fear clutched them, as if they were expecting what followed.

Taxis drew forth a soiled notebook.

"I shall take a few names," said he. "You, madame, and you. And you. These will be punished for the rest. I flatter myself that my report to the King will be without mercy and will call for due penalties."

Meanwhile, Diane à la Houppe, instead of wasting her time in discussion with the man, had profited by the general confusion to gain a neighboring room, to question a servant, and to learn that Taxis had returned alone and that the King had not left the first house in the village. Running at once to the stables, which were now bereft of guards, she essayed her escape by trusting to the beast that she habitually mounted for her airings.

Hardly had Taxis begun his inquest in the harem than the young Queen was being sped over the highway by the lengthy strides of her camel.

CHAPTER TWO

Wherein M. Lebirbe Makes His Entrance on the Stage and Wherein Philis Utters a Faint Cry

One beauteous girl, with eyes of green,
Did smile, and shrug and gaze at me.
SAINT-AMANT

GIGUELILLOT had followed with a sparkling eye the charge of the forty guardsmen upon the little olive grove, when a slender and polished old gentleman, clad in a bygone fashion, was discovered in front of the wearer of the bonnet and blue doublet.

"Milord," he asked, "you are a page to the King?"

"Sir, I have that distinguished honor."

"Quite so. I am M. Lebirbe, president of the League Opposed to Licentiousness in Private, which has obtained recognition as a public utility through royal decree of July 1, 1899. I inhabit a nearby residence which is popularly called in the village the Château, not so much by reason of its own importance as by comparison with the

modest dwellings surrounding it. This mansion is assuredly not worthy of offering a retreat to my sovereign; but I have ascertained that His Majesty has halted not far from here en route to his capital; I observe that it is growing late, I doubt that the King will care to set out again at this advanced hour of the night and, without having the temerity to address an invitation to him, I should nevertheless like to convey to his attention that everything under my roof is in readiness to receive him and his suite, in case he should deign to pass the night in my home. The apartments that I should make bold to offer him bear the title of 'The King's Chambers' and have thus since their inception been awaiting this eventual visit, which I took delight in anticipating, in the knowledge that King Pausole has a distaste for lengthy stages and that my residence is midway between his palace and Tryphême—"

"Have you any daughters, monsieur?" interrupted Giguelillot.

"Yes, milord. But may I ask you how that question—?"

"That is the trade mark, the guarantee of a house of solid respectability and propriety, monsieur Lebirbe. That is my invariable test."

Thereupon, with a familiarity, positively benevolent, he took the old gentleman's left arm and urged him onward.

"Lead me on," said he. "You arrive at the precise moment at which I am charged by the King to procure him a place of repose. Though assured that you have in all respects made the best possible arrangements, yet I take it upon me to accompany you, in order to make on my return the personal report that is demanded of my vigilance."

They passed through the enclosure of the courtyard at the moment when Giguelillot was completing the framing of his sentence, which made an excellent impression on M. Lebirbe's mind.

On the porch stairs, Mme. Lebirbe and her two daughters were anxiously awaiting news.

"Well?"

"I am in high hopes. This young nobleman is a royal page and is coming to pass upon our preparations."

Having thus presented his young companion, the old gentleman in turn introduced his wife, his elder daughter Galatee and his younger daughter Philis, who turned her head modestly aside but looked curiously out of the corner of her eye.

Galatee was tall and of attenuated frame. She seemed to be a little over twenty years of age. Her hair, of a drab yellow color, was coiffed severely but not without taste, and she held herself stiffly erect in a gray linen gown that expanded into a broad white collar.

Timidly squeezing her sister's arm, Philis presented the contrast

of being nude—unless you should care to consider as a rudimentary costume her big garden hat, her hair rippling down her back and her sash of scarlet moire, which was knotted at the side in an enormous bow. Her big eyes told of no more than fifteen years. Her young breasts, all rosy, had but recently budded, twin provocations alike of trouble and delight. Her gaze never quitted Giglio.

"Will you please permit me to precede you?" said M. Lebirbe with renewed bows.

"Yes, monsieur!" said Giguelillot.

At the turn of a narrow corridor, the page, who was bringing up the rear, passed both his hands under Mlle. Philis' arms and clasped them over her breasts. Drawing her to him, he placed a silent but soulful kiss behind her ear.

"Ah!" she cried.

"Did you hurt yourself!" asked her father.

"I ran against something sharp. It's nothing. Don't stop."

Giguelillot that very instant conceived the most favorable opinion of all the preparations that had been made for King Pausole's reception. He decided that the bedroom was sumptuous, the bed truly royal, the finishings in excellent style and the pictures worthy of an art gallery.

No doubt, to testify to a still more intimate sympathy with the family of his hosts, he extended his little investigation even into their private apartments and succeeded in ascertaining that the bedrooms of the two young girls were well apart from each other and provided with folding doors, a thing that he had not dared hope for.

From that moment his decision was unshakable.

"I shall tell the King," he proclaimed, "that nowhere could he find a more fitting reception than in your home, monsieur Lebirbe."

And with these words he retired, pursued by a sunburst of smiles.

CHAPTER THREE

Wherein Is Discovered a Horrible Crime

I remained stretched out on the grass, bereft of all my faculties and burning with a thousand desires. COUNTESS DE CHOISEUL-MEUSE (1807)

THE little left breast of Philis was so pregnant with poesy that Giglio, when alone on the road, felt himself rhythmic as an Alexandrine.[34]

[34] A form of poetic verse consisting of six iambic feet.

"I have five minutes," he said to himself. "Just time to make a sonnet."

And without losing an instant in his search for the subject of a poem (wasting time was not his forte), he swiftly raised his eyes to the friendly stars.

In the West, Venus was glowing—Venus, the pearl of the sea, shining like a corner of the moon, with the brilliance that she displays in the cloudless Southern nights. Facing her, in an arc of the sweeping circle of which she formed the centre, Sirius, Pollux, Castor, the two brilliants of Capricornus and the three of Perseus seemed to gravitate around her flame. Giglio, imagining mysterious lines from the planet to the stars, decided that with this celestial oriflamme he would first of all make a fan studded with nine gems (this for the first triplet), then the eight doves that drew the chariot of Aphrodite Urania[35] (that for the fourth verse).

"Now," thought he, "the rhymes for the quatrain—lux, Pollux, nux—no, if I added dux, that would make it sound like a Latin exercise. Let us introduce Capella in the second strophe; that's a fine word; rhymed with Campanella—followed by a return; then a preterit; that will do it. For feminine rhymes—

"Twin stars of Capricornus, Perseus' three."

"With that rhyme, 'twill be quickly built."

But he cried out suddenly:

"Ha, what's this? What do you want?"

Two little bare arms were held out before him.

"It is I—Rosine. Don't come in. I think they want to kill you at the farm."

He recognized the young person whose fruits and flowers he had rhapsodized on a garden bench in a bower all red with strawberries.

"They want to kill me? Who does?" said Giglio with mild curiosity.

"Everybody!" replied Rosine. "Some terrible things have happened and they're putting it all on you. Come over here, behind those palm trees; I'll tell you the whole story. Sit here beside me."

The page was solicitous for the welfare of his yellow hose and he was not tempted by the grassy slope that was offered him. He waited until Rosine had first taken her seat, then he perched himself quite comfortably on the farm girl's goodly lap and passed his arm around her neck in most blandishing pretense of the greatest tenderness.

"Well, now, tell me all about it. What has happened?"

[35] Venus in her manifestation as goddess of the heavens.

She acquainted him with the whole tale—all at once, without troubling herself to any great extent with the beautiful clarity of the French language; a quality that doubtless had small place in her literary theories.

Some one had brought a camel, broken into the tool house, smashed the mowing machines, ruined the pitchforks, dug up the floor—it was a catastrophe! The dairy, too, was in the most deplorable state; the milk poured out, the buckets stolen. On the camel, there was a beautiful lady, a very beautiful lady in a big basket like an arbor made of rugs—

"She found Nicole on the King's knees. Nicole swears she is innocent, but the lady says she saw her.... There you are! It's plain as day. The child is quite capable of it. She has known too much for a long time, that hoyden has; she always has her nose in books and she tells you love stories as if they had happened to her.... As soon as the lady came in, she flew into a devil of a rage, and the King, too, and everybody was shouting—you missed it! Nobody ever heard the like. And the worst of it is, there's a victim; the dairy maid was murdered!"

"Murdered?" repeated Gilles, growing somewhat pale.

"Murdered."

Then, being a peasant of the city's environs, who reads her little newspaper every morning, she added:

"Robbery was the motive of the crime."

"What kind of a story is this?"

"Ah, monsieur. There must be wicked people, after all! The villain strangled that poor girl to get her clothes; just four things—a kerchief, a shawl, a winter skirt and a hat. Somebody plainly heard her groaning late in the afternoon, but no one dared go up. It was the gentleman from the palace that went in first—the same man that locked up the lady—"

"Oh, my head!" groaned Giguelillot. "What lady? What gentleman from the palace?"

"A gentleman all in black with a flat hat."

"When did he arrive?"

"In the midst of the battle. He settled everything in five minutes. He is a minister, I think, a man who has a very serious air. Without him, they would never have straightened things out."

"What things?"

"Why, about the lady. He shut her up in the bread pantry, with a candle and a big book like a prayer book—to console her, so he said. Then, when all that was over, they came and told him how the dairy was upside down. He asked for the dairy maid. They couldn't find her

anywhere and they didn't dare go look in her room, on account of the groans they had heard. But he—that didn't scare him! He went up right away. And what did he see? Why, seems that some one killed her in her bed. Half of the bed clothes were on the floor and the rest were full of blood. It's a flagrant crime, so he said. But they can't find the body. Must be the assassin threw it somewhere. The gentleman from the palace is going to drag the wells."

"And it's me they're accusing of this dastardly crime?" interrupted Giglio, who at last was seeing the light.

"Yes, the murder and everything else. The King is watching for you to send you to prison. The gentleman from the palace was even saying that they ought to revive the tortures for you and burn you alive at the stake."

"A dainty dish of Servetus[86] to pass the time—"

Giguelillot rose and assumed a dramatic attitude.

"Very well, Rosine; you don't know what real courage is, eh? The hero of old, the gallant knight, the indomitable paladin, the ferocious brigand, the lion, the lion! You don't know what a real lion is like, eh?"

He shook his mane, struck his chest and uttered a roar that hurt his throat.

"What are you going to do?" said the terrified Rosine.

"Defend myself in person. I am going to the farm!"

"But they will tear you to ribbons! Oh, I won't let you go—!"

Giguelillot hugged her to him with some dramatic mutterings, then disengaged himself with a single backward leap.

"Remember!" said he in a vibrant voice. "Always remember that thou hast clasped in thine arms a man for whom death is but an idle word! Adieu!"

As she faded into the foliage, Giguelillot went off with an airy step, lit a cigarette and resumed the composition of a second sonnet on the heavenly sector that claimed his interest.

He abandoned the idea of chariot and of fan; the astral centre became a peacock's eye and the eight others formed the aigrette above it; then he placed the aigrette on a woman's brow; her hair grew and grew and became the very fringe that topped it; and millions of pearls were swimming there.

[86] A Spanish physician who was burned for heresy at Geneva in 1553.

CHAPTER FOUR

How Giguelillot Appeared Before the King and What Words Were Pronounced for and Against His Worthy Cause

She wore a fine chemise:
Her legs were, oh so white!
And wondrous things they did
Far from the whole world's sight.
And when the game was ended,
They both arose in turn:
And went each one his way,
Never to return.

GERMAN POPULAR SONG, 16TH CENTURY
(Macaronic; alternate Latin and German lines)

GIGUELILLOT did not return at once to the King's presence.

He slipped into the stables through a window, for fear that his arrival at the main entrance would be watched for. As he passed the zebra Himere, he gently stroked the muzzle of the little animal, who snorted with pleasure.

As the poor beast was stamping restlessly in front of an empty manger, Giguelillot grabbed all the good fresh hay with which Kosmon's rack had just been filled and without more ado, he passed it from left to right.

This Kosmon always exasperated him; and the animal paid dearly this evening for the honor of belonging to a Huguenot cavalier. The little page did not stop at pilfering his feed; he found the big shears under a spike and clipped all the hairs from his tail, which thus presented a wretched stump that resembled a badly barbered emblem of Priapus,[37] he shore off almost the entire mane, leaving a few wretched hairs hanging here and there; finally, with the implements used at the farm to brand cattle, he formed and imprinted on the old horse's tarnished coat the figures 1572,[38] in which he thought that the Calvinist infidel would see at once a curse, an insult and a threat.

Satisfied with the brands by which he had decorated the living pedestal of Lord Taxis, Giglio followed the long corridor which led to the bread pantry.

[37] The Græco-Roman god of fertility. His emblem was the membrum virile.

[38] The year of the massacre on St. Bartholomew's Eve.

As Rosine had told him, the unfortunate Diane à la Houppe, in her floury cell, was pining away almost on top of the moist dough. He did not recognize her in the least, as the pages, for reasons unnecessary to mention, were not as a rule invited to take tea with the Queens. But as soon as he saw her in the light of the candle placed on a little table, he deeply regretted not having met her before she entered the harem. Diane, all unknowing that she was spied upon by two eyes fastened to the panes, had adopted an intimate attitude which made careless display of her quite individual charms. She was reclining in the Oriental fashion, her hands clasped behind her neck, her back sunk in cushions and, doubtless to enjoy the cooling air after a day of enervating heat, she had spread wide her legs in the form of a diamond, with the soles of the feet juxtaposed. It was her custom to sleep thus. Giglio, though still filled with quite recent memories, felt a sudden impulse of the spirit toward new conquests and withdrew, not so much to effect a temporary quenching of his ardors as to plan (it must be told) the chances of immediate and secret success.

His brow as unruffled as if he had not been the target of all the royal artillery for the past hour, he gracefully walked, without knocking, into the throne room, where Pausole, still trembling, was finishing a wretched dinner.

"So here you are!" ejaculated the King. "And you dare come back?"

Taxis, who was nibbling his food at the lower end of the table, rushed for the door to barricade his exit; but Giguelillot saw his intention; he himself locked the door and handed over the key to the minister with the words:

"Here it is, monsieur."

Pausole stood up, dug his fist into the tablecloth and raised an accusing finger:

"So here you are!" he repeated. "I must say, your effrontery even surpasses your crimes! Ha! You cajole me into an insane journey, you snatch me from my palace to dump me in this farmyard and you desert me for six whole hours, without guards, without support, without advice, in the midst of a revolution! You post a mad female at my pillow, you strangle a peasant girl, you pillage the farm, you give my soldiers French leave and abandon me to the butt of the mob's fury and the ravings of some woman escaped from the harem—all your fault! And at the end of this accursed day of vandalism, murder and treason, you appear, bonnet in hand, with a sinister smile! So, you didn't expect to find me alive, eh?"

Sire," replied Giguelillot, "in the first place, I have no wish to

make indecent haste to prove my innocence, for the issue in hand does not concern me, but you, and your well-being, a hundred times more sacred to me than my own interests."

Pausole sank back into his chair.

In a calm, respectful voice, the page continued with these winged words:[39]

"Your Majesty's liveliest wish at this moment is a bed in which to rest. This gentleman here does not appear to concern himself with this vital question. I have taken upon myself, in his place, the honor of today superintending, in the neighboring château, the preparation of spacious apartments provided with thick curtains and roomy beds that are in all respects worthy to receive the King."

From Pausole's frowning brow, one wrinkle disappeared, then two.

"Secondly, Your Majesty cannot forget that he has undertaken this pleasure trip with the aim of recovering H. R. H. the Princess Aline and reconducting her to the palace. In this mission of state, we were possessed of but two rather nebulous clues. Her Highness, 'coming from a small olive grove,' had been recognized at the 'Hotel du Coq.' I have despatched the forty guardsmen to the small olive grove to collect further clues there, if possible, while I myself, in absolute secrecy, instituted an investigation within the hotel. The Princess has already left it, but I bring from there information of the greatest value; no less than a letter in her own hand. Here it is."

Opening his wallet, he drew forth a letter and deposited it before the King, whose bearing was undergoing a steady transformation.

"I had thought it advisable to remove the guards," continued the page. "Your Majesty never asks for them and never has need of them, so deeply is he loved by his people. If there has been any scandal and confusion today, it is because monsieur the Chief Eunuch, whose sole duty it was to insure good order in the harem, had evidently made inefficient arrangements, inasmuch as one of the Queens has succeeded in escaping, in the most transparent disguise, to come here and raise not only a mob, but gossip as well."

"Monsieur!" cried Taxis. "I summon you to prove—"

"Come, come! Let him speak," said Pausole. "The little page is defending himself from a serious charge. His story sounds quite plausible. I want to hear it. You will reply: 'that's the magistrate's province'; but it is our duty to listen to the argument for the defense, especially when it is expressed with the frankness and moderation of this case."

[39] A frequent phrase in Homer.

"I have nothing further to say," replied Giguelillot, "unless Your Majesty interrogates me upon the details of my investigation."

"But the murder!" insisted Taxis violently. "He takes good care not to mention that. A dairy maid named Thierrette was strangled in her bed by the hands of this page, just as the sun went down!"

"That's hardly probable," said Giguelillot, "for she was in the best of health at nine P. M. Just now, she is in the olive grove and the guardsmen (your guardsmen, Taxis) are using her as a medium for allaying their carnal appetites, during this lull in our researches."

"My guards! What a base calumny!"

"Go see; you will be edified."

"That cannot be!"

"But it is."

"My guardsmen are married."

"Doubly so this evening."

"They are above the flesh."

"Yes. I didn't dare put it that way."

"That's a low jest."

"Like their present attitude."

"But the blood! The blood that was spilled and still stains the victim's couch?"

"The King told you this morning, monsieur, that in the land of Tryphême no blood is spilled but the voluptuous blood of virgins or that of young pullets."

And as the King's defenses broke down in a sudden hearty laugh, Giguelillot, lowering his eyes, uttered this conclusion:

"Aren't we on a farm? It must be a young pullet!"

CHAPTER FIVE

Wherein Each One Is Treated According to His Deserts

Helen "Oh fa-tal day! Oh fa-tal day! Oh fa—"
Paris "—a—atal day!"

MEILHAC AND HALÉVY

"I RECALL," said Pausole, "the first point in your plea. You have had a comfortable resting place prepared for me and you are watching over my welfare; that is the act of a true statesman. During this

terrible day, I begin to perceive that you alone have directed all your efforts along the proper lines and that my misfortunes have come from another quarter.... Hold your tongue, Taxis, hold your tongue! You're a tactless brute. You're an algebrist, so your mind is misdirected; you're a Protestant, so it's narrow; you're a eunuch, so it's envious. You're nothing but a false alarm. Go and indemnify the poor farmer for the entire damage done here, which has all been blamed on poor Gilles. It's a question that will be settled at the proper time, tomorrow or the next day, and it doesn't interest me in the slightest, I do declare. Occupy your energies with the duties that I am leaving behind me; there is the Queen that escaped from the harem; take her back—"

"Oh, Sire!" said Giguelillot, "shall you be so cruel?"

"Eh! What do you expect me to do with a woman on a secret expedition?"

"Don't humiliate her. She loves you. Let her follow you and say nothing."

"Why, a moment ago, you were busy lamenting that she had rejoined me!"

"I am sorry that she has succeeded in escaping and thus upsetting your period of rest; but the thing is done. You must accept the fact, were it only to impose silence on scoffing lips."

"But this is not Queen Diane's day," interposed Taxis. "I object to any favoritism that upsets my régime."

"What does Your Majesty decide?" asked Giguelillot, without too much irony.

"I don't know now," replied Pausole. "I wish you would stop this habit of all the time presenting me with tiresome matters for decision. Who is my counselor at ten P. M.? You are, Gilles. So act as you wish and be assured that I shall approve, my friend, for there are perhaps as many good reasons for pardoning as for punishing her. I had rather submit to your judgment than pull straws. Go and speak in my name; I have confidence in you."

The page bowed, secured the key and hastened off to deliver the unhappy Diane, not without the intention of dropping her a hint that he had had the honor to plead for her.

His plans were quite simple; two hours later, by all appearances, Taxis, upon recovering power at the stroke of midnight, would upset his predecessor's decision; but the Queen would have had time to install herself at the château, Giglio would secure entrance to her room and Diane would perhaps prove ready to give out of gratitude all that she could offer in her eager thirst for immediate vengeance.

Upon returning to the King's side, she preserved a silent and

wounded mien. As she seemed to be expecting an expression of regret, the King held out his hand, but he put into it a species of affection that shrank visibly from being received with transports.

"Houppe, you will not return to the harem this evening, as I threatened you at first. I am passing the night in the village and you are, too; but it is none the less true that I am still displeased with your jaunt, as well as with all the disturbance it caused me. Come; we shall set out on foot. Taxis will take care of our mounts and my page will take your hand. Meanwhile, my boy, hand me my crown."

Giglio took the purple mantle and the light crown from the hook; Pausole put them on, arranged his hair and pronounced the order for departure.

Four young girls, carrying torches and walking ahead of the King, with no veils but those of the night, slowly covered the twenty-five paces that separated the farm from the adjacent château.

Diane à la Houppe brought up the rear. The page was escorting her with hand held high and at a respectful distance.

She kept her eyes on the King for some time; then, as he never turned around, she cast them on the page. After a thoughtful examination which lasted several minutes and took in the young chap from top to toe, she said:

"What's your name?"

"Djilio, madame," he replied, and thought it well to heave a melancholy sigh.

"Djilio?" said the Queen. "Now, that's a pretty name."

CHAPTER SIX

Wherein M. Lebirbe and King Pausole Perceive With Surprise That They Are Not in Harmony on Every Point

Venus, in conjunction viewed,
Methinks a clear incentive hath
For men and women, both quite nude,
To go together to the bath.

PROPHECIES OF MAISTRE ALBERT (1527)

PAUSOLE was received at the gate by the courteous M. Lebirbe.

At the same instant, Philis turned away from the window in anger:

"Now you see, mamma, it's a sell! You made us put on dresses and the King comes with a lady that hasn't any; we're bound to be ridiculous!"

"I asked your father, my dear! It's he that told me to dress you up."

"You're a child, Philis; oh, what a child you are!" Galatee remarked simply.

"Now what have I said that's so childish?"

"You have to have a dress before you can put it on," explained the elder sister.

But Philis failed to understand and, as the King was coming in, all three lifted their skirts with their finger tips and curtsied respectfully in the doorway.

After the first words of marked respect, the mistress of the house suffered herself to be led away by Diane à la Houppe. They had relatives in common and between armchairs they renewed recollections.

In another corner, Giguelillot was chatting with the two young girls on a sofa well apart. His voice, at first raised, became more discreet, then sank into a whisper and soon nobody heard a word further except, at moments, a stifled laugh.

In the embrasure of a window, M. Lebirbe was declaiming:

"Sire, the League Opposed to Licentiousness in Privacy, a newly formed league of which I have the honor to be president, is a power for public morality and cleanliness. I know that it has your sanction—"

"Yes, of course," said Pausole." Yes, of course; however, please remind me of its aim. I do not recall it at the moment."

"Its aim, its sole ambition is to prove worthy of its lofty motto, which is couched in three words: 'Example—Publicity—Unity.' "

"Those are beautiful words," said Pausole. "But how do you interpret them?"

"Your Majesty is by no means ignorant that in Tryphême the opposition party affects to cling to obsolete principles, especially in matters touching clothes and intimate relations. Among the members of this party, all the women, even the prettiest, dress themselves up to the chin to go out in the street and never consent to gratify a man's admiration except in the privacy of a closed room and in company with the lover of their choice. That is the act of an egotistical, miserly and depraved soul."

"Agreed," said Pausole.

"The men of this same party are combating the spread of our influence with desperate obstinacy, in their struggle for what they call

'the decency of the streets'; but as the instincts of the flesh are no more silent in them than in their opponents, they go off and hide their lives in the houses of ill fame, where love is debauched and metamorphosed into veritable ordure."

"They do wrong," said Pausole. "But what has that to do with you?"

"Sire, we conclude that, in acting in this fashion, they are not only false hypocrites, but (if I may put it thus) monopolists. In our age, it is no longer permitted that an art amateur may acquire a gallery of paintings and keep the enjoyment of them to himself alone; every man that possesses three Rembrandts must admit the world to his home or become the object of attacks that no one can doubt are well founded. Well then, the same reasoning that has given rise to this custom ought to engender in men of good sense a superior and philanthropic consciousness, which should restrain them from shutting up within the walls of their homes all the charms added to woman's beauty by their inherited idleness and all the adornments to love within her arms provided by art, luxury and public view."

"My sentiments, too."

"This party, which usurps the name of the 'good party' and succeeds in passing itself off as such among many outsiders, submits an unholy example. Put a dress on a young girl and by that very act you awake, in the young men that meet her, feelings of unclean curiosity that they are by the same means forbidden to satisfy; this arouses incitement to vice. I recognize that this form of perversity is becoming more and more rare in Tryphême. In almost all families, the women order their first dress only at the beginning of their first pregnancy. But there are, I repeat, certain houses in which they dress even the little girls—truly the height of malicious depravity. This example, once laid down, bears its fruits; it is much discussed; frequently it is followed; a deplorable vacillation leaves the nation's morals hovering between two extremes; one no longer knows what fashion demands and as for myself (shall I confess it here?), I do not even dare present my own children in the rigorously pure 'attire' that it is my mission to proclaim. The aim of our society is to put an end to this incertitude by unifying both morals and consciences."

"And how do you propose to do that?"

"By two means. The first is propaganda. The resources of the League are considerable. We have leased for twenty years a huge plot of ground that forms part of the Royal Park at Tryphême; there we have erected a stage in the open air under the trees and on this we

present ballets, as well as some unpublished pieces that draw crowds and are written to exemplify our doctrines."

"That is to say?"

"That is to say, they are written in conformity with life itself; with realism as well as beauty. When the scene represents a discussion on material subjects in a notary's office, the actors are costumed in a manner suited to the environment; but when, in the midst of a love duet, the songstress shrieks: 'O Passion! Ecstasy! Intoxication!' she is nude, according to the logic of things; the contrary would be inept. And when the ballet represents to the spectators a Venus, three Graces, twelve Slave Women or sixty Bacchantes, there must evidently be no more concealment of the person than you expect of the same characters in a painting, for it is inconsistent to have two æsthetic standards for a single subject; one for pictorial and the other for theatrical art."

"So far we are agreed."

"Furthermore, through inexpensive books, newspapers and pictures, we spread unceasingly among the people the taste for the nudity of the human form, with the double emotions that it inspires; in the mind on one hand, in the flesh on the other; for it is eminently possible thus to separate into two distinct and individual elements the single creature exalted by love. These books that we circulate refrain from commenting on the subjects described by the majority of popular novels; to wit, they refrain from commenting on the best means of picking a lock or of clubbing a white-haired old lady to death; and if we must go into details, we prefer to introduce the working girl to an unfamiliar source of pleasure, rather than to use up six columns in teaching her how to make counterfeit money."

"What if this pleasure proves sterile?" said Pausole.

"If a passing joy is sterile, what matter? The female body contains approximately eighty thousand ovula and is hardly capable of conception more than eighteen times without danger. Now then, assuming that this figure of eighty thousand is absolutely correct, it is evident that, by nature's own laws and the Creator's design, there is conferred on a young girl, some time in her twelfth year, a fund of seventy-nine thousand nine hundred eighty-two potential pleasures which are at once sterile and permissible. It cannot possibly be said that the enjoyment of these is a waste, since they are by nature incapable of bearing fruit. The important thing is to hold woman to the natural bent that impels her to passion. Whether her desires be monogamous or polygamous, she will conceive some day and bequeath to posterity lives that will justify her own existence. But it is clear that all this will be changed if we propose

to virgins unable to find a husband some foolish ideal of solitary living and abnegation which means for them a fatal and damnable sterility that is contrary to nature."

"Continue," said Pausole. "I am curious to see where you're going to land."

"I hasten to add that, if we propose the habitual but wisely moderated pursuit of all the delights that recompense lovers, the women that undergo conception as a result, if not as an end, are the ones by far the most frequently described in our popular pamphlets. Now, these women, whatever physicians may say, are the ones that still enjoy universal popularity. It is easy to supply the proof of this; when our League was founded, the excess of births over deaths in Tryphême was not greater than four per cent. Today, it is nine per cent, and this is the third year of our campaign. In order to arouse and to subsidize (if I may put it thus) a fruitful emulation among the lower classes of society, we have instituted assemblies from which courtesans are excluded as professionals, and in which, every spring, we crown the young girls who, by their individual efforts, have carried their physical beauty to the highest point of perfection and who, by their inner talents as well as by the warmth of their kisses, afforded the most praiseworthy example every night in their neighborhood."

"All this," said Pausole, "comes under the head of propaganda. But you made mention of two different media, if I understood your words aright. What is the second of the two?"

"I am coming to that," replied M. Lebirbe. "Our propaganda, through public shows, books, newspapers, pictures and the prizes at the annual assembly, is addressed, I need scarcely say, principally to the young girl. She stakes a great deal in adopting our cause; the pangs of pregnancy and child-birth terrify her and we need not seek elsewhere the deep-seated reason for her reserve toward the other sex. At the age of fifteen, a daughter of the people takes service and runs errands; if she becomes pregnant, she loses her position, and, indeed, she loses her lover, too, in the majority of cases; and if she is really attached to either position or lover, by the seventh month she has nothing left but misery, despair, and physical suffering. Well, we desire her to confront all that, expose herself to it and triumph over it! Our country demands it; she needs sons. Of course, we do not talk to our pupil in that fashion; she could reply with perfect justice that the country would be no richer if she gave it a child, but that she herself would be much poorer; and we should never be able to make her understand that her reasoning was fallacious, so we must flatter her with quite a different

hope. What we tell her and what she understands at once, is that the supreme pleasure of the rich belongs to the poorest as well; that love, for the sake of which some men amass fortunes and others dissipate them, does not attain any greater perfection as it mounts in the social scale. As soon as a working girl learns to love, she can boast that she is ignorant of all the joys of life but the most intense—and that one, she embraces and holds!"

"Of course, yes!"

"That is why our ambition is satisfied when we know that, after having read one of our pamphlets exploiting these arguments, the seamstress or the milliner, upon quitting her shop in the evening, enters her lover's bedroom and there learns the meaning of life—thanks to us! For we know that thenceforth her hours of toil will be filled with memories and lightened by hope. We know that her whole day will not be entirely weighed down by a task without recompense; that her bed will not seem so hard and her room not so cold in winter, if she winds her naked limbs around a cherished being. And thus may she be enabled to advance to the ultimate goal of childbirth as soon as nature invites! But whatever be the form of sexual indulgence that tempts her choice, we seldom deem ourselves happy if she learns it at our school, for it is essential that the leisure classes share with the poor not only their too great fortune, but the too well guarded secret of their mysterious pleasures, in which the multitude claims its due share."

"I should be very glad to learn," said Pausole, "what your second means of—"

"First to sum up," said M. Lebirbe. "In combating licentiousness in private, in casting discredit on clandestine haunts and on foul-minded dotards who vilify the glory of perfect nudity only to seek its insipid semblance between corsets and black stockings, we are making inspired efforts to re-establish the ancient classic ideal of the nude, we are advocating life in the open, freedom of intercourse; we are teaching the art of love by direct example and precept; in a word we are fighting for the acceptance of a moral ideal of publicity of passion throughout the territory of Tryphême!"

"Nothing could be more agreeable to me," said Pausole, "but what means do you advocate?"

"Our means? We have adopted two. The first, as I told you, Sire, is propaganda. The second would be legislation."

"Legislation!" exclaimed Pausole.

"Yes, primitive legislation. Our energies are being hurled against foes that are intractable. The young and the people at large are with

us; but we can do nothing, or almost nothing, against a certain coterie which exercises an undeniable moral influence and resists us foot by foot. It is against this coterie that I beseech you for armed assistance, Sire; against them and for yourself, in the cause of the immediate victory of your most cherished ideas. So first let me speak to you of a law that we are feverishly anticipating and which you could pass this very evening: a law for compulsory nudity among the young."

"No, no, no!" declared Pausole. "My dear sir, Tryphême is not Topsyturvydom; it is a superior land, I hope at least, but I have not freed my people from so many bonds as I have, only to load them down with other chains. To insist upon nudity on the public streets! Why, don't you see, monsieur Lebirbe, that would be just as ridiculous as to prohibit it!"

Then, measuring off his first words with fist rhythmically descending into the empty air, Pausole slowly pronounced:

"Monsieur, man requires that we grant him a life of lasting peace! Each one is master of himself, of his opinions, of his dress and of his acts, provided he does not trespass on those of others. The citizens of European countries are weary of every hour feeling upon their shoulders the hands of an authority that becomes unendurable by very dint of its continuous presence. They still submit to the law's addressing them in the name of the public welfare, but when it claims the office of protecting the individual from himself and in spite of himself, when it assumes control of his private life, his marriage, his divorce, his last testament, his reading, his entertainments, his sports and his attire, then the individual has the right to demand of the law why it enters his home without a personal invitation."

"Sire—"

"Never shall I lay myself open to such a reproach from my subjects. I give them advice; that is my duty. Some do not follow it; that is their privilege. And so long as none of them puts forth a hand to snatch a purse or rap a nose, I have no call to interfere with the life of a free citizen. Your work is a worthy one, monsieur Lebirbe; strive for its growth and universal acceptance, but do not expect me to lend you policemen to shackle the people that do not think as we do."

*

CHAPTER SEVEN

Wherein Are Told Tales of Travel in a Very Remarkable Land

> *"'I will recite you a few sonnets, and am sure you have no doubts as to the subject matter.' 'No,' replied the shepherdesses, 'it will be of love.'"*
>
> REMY BELLEAU

AT that moment, a joyous little cry almost ecstatic, came boldly from the rear of the room:

"Mamma, mamma! What luck! Monsieur is a poet!"

"A poet, Philis? Can that be true?"

"A poet!" repeated Diane à la Houppe. "Oh, please recite us some verses!"

Giglio came forward, bowed and answered deferentially:

"Madame, the mere expression of your wishes is sufficient to make me break my vows; for the fact is, I had taken a solemn oath never to recite my own verses; but while I realize that you are incapable of giving any orders displeasing to the King, I should like to feel sure that I am not annoying him by disturbing his conversation."

"You will not disturb him in the least, monsieur Djilio; look at the King; he is listening to you."

"Yes, recite your verses, my boy," said Pausole. "This is the psychological moment for breaking off my conference on internal politics; for M. Lebirbe and I were beginning to disagree though still courteous to each other. But be sure and select a short poem—one that you know thoroughly by heart, for lapses of memory make a painful impression on me."

"Sire," said Giglio modestly, "I have my complete works upon my person."

His hand went to his belt, unfastened the button of a small leathern pocket resembling a cartridge case, and came forth with three small volumes in 32 Jesus.[40]

One was published by the Mercure de France, in a limited edition of a hundred and eighty-three copies, of which four were printed on flame-colored satin, nine on wrapping paper of the delicate hue of goose manure, seven on antique lobster-tinted blotting paper and the re-

[40] The paper size of the books.

mainder on wave-lined India paper. This volume was named "The Opal Manikin."

The second had been deposited in the Fischbacker library; the author's portrait, reproduced by the mysterious process of photoengraving, adorned the title page which bore the title: "Tears of a Soul."

The third was issued by a Jewish publisher. On the cover, a very merry young widow, with her veil over one ear, was raising her black skirt up to the waist; probably to demonstrate that she had no undergarments; and the title was so scurrilous that it would perhaps be wise not to mention it.

(For after all, this novel is being read only by the ladies.)

Giguelillot, in apparent hesitation, looked at his hosts, the King, Philis, Galatee and Diane à la Houppe. Then he restored the first two dainty volumes to his pocket and opened the third at page 59.

"What a pretty volume!" said Diane à la Houppe. "It is entitled—?"

"Yes."

"Charming!"

"Yes! Just that?" asked Philis.

"Well, what more do you want?" exclaimed Galatee.

"Oh, that says everything!" sighed Diane.

Casting him a veiled glance, she added:

"That is a word whose meaning you have fully learned, monsieur?"

"Never, madame. It is used only in poetry."

"How do you express it in prose?"

"You say: 'No.'"

"And that amounts to the same thing?"

"Fortunately, it does."

"So it is a convention?"

"A point of delicacy."

"Why?"

"Indeed, madame, it is impossible to find out. A very old custom among Christian peoples demands that a man cannot encounter a lady without being obliged to offer her a furnished apartment, with flowers, powder, hair pins and emotions. The lady always answers: 'No.' If the gentleman takes his departure, she understands that he has been merely polite; if he insists, she rebukes him for annoying her: while if he declares that her refusal will mean his death, she yields to all his demands to save the poor fellow's life. There you have, madame, the meaning of a 'no.'"

"I shall never say that word," smiled Philis teasingly.

But Pausole was beating with his hand on the arm of his capacious easy chair.

"Come, read your verses, my lad! You must never give women an answer. A man's questions are those of a pupil; he asks about the things he doesn't know. But a woman's questions are those of a teacher and only on subjects that she knows by heart."

"Now, monsieur," put in Galatee, "tell me the meaning of modesty?"

"Apropos of what do you ask that—that pupil's question?" said little Philis with a laugh.

"M. Djilio seems to believe that women say 'No,' at first from discretion and then from compassion unless compassion in this case means impulse. I ask him what he knows about our modesty and I hope that he will give me an answer."

"'Modesty,'[41] mademoiselle (we are in school, are we not?), 'modesty' is a derivative from the Latin and signifies 'shame.' In other words, after a lady has made an impartial examination and ascertained the exact value of her charms, modesty is the feeling that she experiences when she has to disclose to others what she would rather lament in private. Nothing could be more natural."

Philis and Galatee consulted with a look; but while the elder made no move, the younger slipped out silently, piqued in her honor and fearing challenge.

Pausole was holding out a hand toward his page.

"Gilles, show me your book," said he. "Now, what's the thing I see on the cover?"

As the page was handing him the volume, he burst forth:

"Oh, how ugly! Can you publish verse under such a trade mark as that? M. Lebirbe was this moment saying to me that incitements of this sort are addressed to a class of doddering old men whose hypocrisy and bestiality we both hate."

"In Tryphême," replied Giglio, "that may be so. But in France, where the old men supervise morals and make the laws, those incitements are addressed to the entire nation. The retroussé[42] is the national costume of the French. It is worn everywhere; at public balls, at cabarets, at the theatre, at the Elysée and even in every-day life. In cari-

[41] The French is "*pudeur*," which is the direct descendant of the Latin "pudor," signifying "shame." No English word of similar derivation would fit the sense. "Modesty," of course, is from the same root as "moderation," etc.

[42] An untranslatable word, but permissible as an English derivative. Its literal sense is "tucked up" or "turned up."

catures from abroad, the retroussé designates France, as distinguished from the English lion and the eagle of Germany. If I have caused to be engraved on my book a lady completely clad in black except around the upper portion of her legs it was intended to indicate on the spot that I was speaking of Parisiennes.[48]

"What a singular custom!" said Diane meditatively. "Why please the old men and not the young bloods?"

"The Parisiennes want to please everybody and they have a very particular regard for gentlemen of advanced years. This regard takes on a different expression according to the individual woman and the time of day."

"You don't say! How curious, these customs of barbarous countries—!"

"Among the lower classes, a woman expresses her deference for an aged man by kicking her foot up to the level of her eyebrow. This gesture is generally accompanied by a sarcastic or insulting exclamation; but the septuagenarian is enraptured. If the scene takes place at a public ball, policy and tradition demand that here too the woman exhibit voluminous underwear, much imitation lace and soiled lingerie. The habitué of the Moulin-Rouge, or of the Paris Casino, has a fondness for shapely thighs and little sense of the difference between lawn and cotton; the more lingerie there is (regardless of quality), the happier is he. If, on the contrary, we are in a cabaret, or on the streets at evening, or in the bosom of the family, it is no longer deemed proper to fascinate the septuagenarian by this inverted salute from the ground upwards, so no lingerie need be worn at all. Ethnologists merely affirm, without explaining, these contradictions in French taste."

"You have lived in that country?"

"I was born there, madame."

"Oh, pardon me! I thought you an Italian. But pray continue. You were saying—? I am deeply intrigued."

"Among the bourgeois, the gesture is different. On the sidewalk, for example, a lady observes that she is pursued by a member of the Upper Chamber, for whom she can feel only a filial reverence; this she indicates to him by a maneuver quite difficult of accomplishment; she lifts her skirt and pulls it tight, in such a fashion as to bring her posterior charms into relief and at the same time to display the calf of the left leg. This is not in the least interesting, but the septuagenarian is enraptured."

"I do not understand—"

[48] The French form seems to preserve a flavor that would be wanting in "Parisian women."

"Nor I either. Among the so-called upper classes, the retroussé in the décolleté style is more in favor. As the old fellow is standing and the young woman seated, she leans forward with arms clasped and shoulders rounded; the posture is wonderful, but it causes the corsage to bulge out from her body; the old gentleman's eyes dart a look inside, and when the lady's breast is so obliging as to display its outlines, its merging tints and its point (especial object of curiosity), the septuagenarian is beside himself with joy."

"But what do the young men think of all that?"

"The young men? Most of them think as their grandsires do; they pursue the ultra-retroussé, that's all. The old men can't protest, because—"

"But the ladies?"

"Oh! Why, the ladies are quite used to it! And then, it's the fashion; it is impossible to go contrary to fashion. I heard M. Lebirbe just now saying to the King that actresses in amorous rôles appeared on the stage naked and sang: O Ecstasy! Intoxication! But at Paris, monsieur Lebirbe, nobody would understand that at all. The uniform of courtesans is a black waist and black stockings, with or without underdrawers; formerly, she kept on this uniform even in bed, so excellent writers tell us; but nowadays, it is only worn until she gets inside the room; and that's a point gained, but do the audience in lower class theatres know it? For them, all nude women represent the same character, the only one they have ever seen in the illustrated papers, namely, Truth standing in a protecting attitude over M. Dreyfus. If she were represented on the stage, there would be a demonstration."

"Ha! Ha!" said Pausole. "You're exaggerating a bit."

"And I think he is making it up," said Diane in an uneasy tone. "Such customs cannot possibly exist anywhere."

"Please God they did not!" sighed M. Lebirbe. "But they have actually reached here, madame, and are hiding their madness in the privacy of our homes."

"In Tryphême?"

"In Tryphême!"

"Not in your own home, at any rate," said Diane with a smile.

Philis was just re-entering with no concealing veils except those that nature herself was beginning to bestow upon her. Behind her, a butler in nut-brown livery was carrying a tray of lemonade and orange sherbet.

She sat down beside her sister in a causeuse [44] with two seats and Giglio found his attention distracted.

[44] The so-called "conversation" or "tête-à-tête chair," in which the two seats face in opposite direction. The English expression seems ugly.

Galatee had put up her hand and was assuring herself that her coiffure was in order.

Philis was smoothing down with her finger a bit of superfluous powder on her thigh.

"Well!" cried Pausole, "we're not getting anywhere, my lad! Come, read your verses; every one is listening. But choose something more conventional than the outside of your books. You are speaking in the presence of two young girls."

"Oh! Sire, we know all about things; mamma has no objections," said Philis.

At this, Mme. Lebirbe broke her silence to expound this aphorism, which she had certainly found in some book:

"When girls understand intuitively, it is impossible to teach them much. . . . And when they do not understand, it is impossible to teach them anything."

But just as Giglio was re-opening his book, the last stroke of midnight sounded.

The ever-punctual Taxis was announced.

CHAPTER EIGHT

How Taxis Strove to Follow the Example of the Fair Thierrette

Everything that tends to put men in a state of mutual dependence through the bonds of pleasure contributes infinitely to giving their characters the impress of tenderness and humanity that is so necessary to the happiness of society at large; correspondingly, it has been observed that men warped in body or mind are the most unsociable of all mortals. FRÉRON (1776)

THE Huguenot, eyes closed and mouth open, greeted the assembled company with an air at once obsequious and arrogant.

Diane à la Houppe sank sideways on her chair and pointedly turned her back on him. Placing her right arm on the back of the chair, she gently raised her left toward the page and said to him:

"Why don't you read?"

"Madame," replied Giglio, "there is not one of my verses that could not be put into the hands of young girls, for all my poetry speaks of just those things that interest them the most. But they were never written for Taxis, and inasmuch as Taxis is present, I beg your permission to avoid giving him any pretext for scandalmonging."

"Woe to him whose tongue spreads scandal!" said Taxis lugubriously. "But scandal must be spread! But a scandal must be spread!"

"Who is this gentleman?" murmured Philis.

"He's an unkempt creature," said Galatee.

"Did you see his hands?"

"Oh! And his neck!"

"His teeth!"

"His beard!"

"And his necktie! Oh, his necktie!"

"How ugly he would be naked! It's a good thing he wears clothes."

Meanwhile, Taxis was approaching the King.

"Sire," said he in a loud voice, "I have the honor to beg you for a private conference. There are some interests of the gravest character. I make bold to remind you that, from midnight on, Your Majesty honors me with his confidence and I claim a hearing."

"We shall retire," said M. Lebirbe.

"No," said Pausole, "stay here—"

"In that event, I must say nothing," said Taxis.

"Oh, what a bore!" repeated the King. "What a bore! Can't you make your decisions on your own hook without bothering me at such an hour?"

"Your Majesty gives me a free hand?"

"Of course."

"It is enough."

He strode toward the page.

"I arrest you, monsieur!"

"Heavens!" cried Mme. Lebirbe.

"One moment!" said Pausole. "You are mad, my friend; I shall be obliged to dismiss you, if you conduct yourself with such rudeness toward my best page, in the house of the most worthy of my subjects. Madame, I beg of you to forget a scene that is regrettable and fills me with revulsion! Taxis is a hard-working official, often useful, but possessed of an excessive zeal and a brain confused by I know not what extravagant Chinese moral code. He begs your pardon for the words that he has just uttered here."

M. and Mme. Lebirbe, however, panic-stricken by this scandalous

affair, were insistent that the King should be given the opportunity to terminate the dispute by being relieved of their presence; accordingly, they withdrew, together with their daughters.

As soon as they had closed the door:

"My friends," said Pausole, "I am tired of separating you and deciding in favor of one or the other. Settle your quarrel between you, only make it short."

He thereupon crossed the salon and sat down affectionately beside Diane à la Houppe.

Giglio, his hands clasped behind his back, was making an effort to restrain himself.

Taxis, remaining at a distance, let fly this ringing apostrophe:

"So, monsieur, it is a matter of principle with you, is it? You have taken upon yourself the task of marking out every day an unfortunate girl, a servant or a peasant, and delivering her up to be outraged by a mob drunk with debauchery and lust?"

"Outraged?" said Giguelillot sweetly.

"Yesterday, you bound a poor chambermaid of the King's to her bed as a target for the brutal attacks of twelve blackguards! And tonight you take a peasant girl and cast her into the woods with forty satyrs?"

"Forty men chosen by yourself, monsieur Taxis! Forty anchorites culled from all quarters of the compass! And see what they become as soon as a woman is confided to their care! Ah, how weak is the flesh! How weak indeed is the flesh!"

"The spectacle that you forced me to witness will never depart from my memory. Never, perhaps, has such an orgy been enacted in the face of Heaven since the monstrous age of paganism and, if I had been forewarned, I should have believed myself transported by a diabolical dream into the gutters of the Suburra [45] or the brothels of Capua! The wretched girl had all four limbs spread out in the most critical position, in the midst of five or six troopers who were debauching her, I know not how, but all at once, and the rest of the band was singing a hellish song as they danced in a circle round the victim."

"Well, was the victim struggling?"

"No, she was stoic! In agony, I have no doubt, in agony of soul at the assaults to which she was subjected, and still more at the ribaldry to which her eyes and ears were witness, she let naught of it appear. Her heroism was indeed that of a martyr. Under the assaults, she turned the other cheek, she unceasingly demanded new tortures. Had she some sins to expiate? I know not; but in the convulsions of her

[45] The slum district of ancient Rome.

agony, the sublime child rejoiced. She even proudly cried out her joy to me!"

"You see," said Giguelillot, "the ladies can never be surrounded by too many admirers."

At this, Diane à la Houppe sighed deeply.

But Taxis was stamping in anger and shaking frenzied fingers.

"Laugh!" he cried. "Enjoy yourself! Your laugh is a sinister one, young man! You are wicked and lascivious. You have the soul of a Borgia! Of a Richelieu! Of a Heliogabalus—!" [46]

Giguelillot took one step and interrupted:

"Monsieur, I have a boundless admiration for Heliogabalus and I am charmed that you consider me like him."

"Ah!—"

"But you make your historical comparisons in a tone that does not please me in the least—"

"Monsieur—"

"And since the King authorizes us to settle our quarrel between us—"

"However—"

"I demand that you apologize to me—"

"Never!"

"Or that you fix with me, without intermediary or delay, the terms of a—"

"No, never that!"

Taxis, who was of a temperament prone to flare up but withal timorous, was retreating at every word. He collided with the door, opened it and tried to vanish, but—

Giguelillot was following him and seized him by the arm.

In the room that they entered together, Philis and Galatee, beside their worthy parents, were awaiting the issue of the conference whose strange outbursts smote painfully upon them.

"Madame," said the page, calmly and respectfully, "it is certainly unbecoming of me to terminate a private dispute in your presence, but you saw the beginning of it altogether in spite of me, and so, with your courteous permission, I should like to introduce you to my accuser, Mr. Taxis, the Chief Eunuch, of whom I am demanding satisfaction."

"Monsieur," he pursued, "I despise you with all sincerity; you are stupid, ambitious and servile; you have neither tact nor courage—"

"Would you insult me?"

[46] Emperor of Rome 218-222 A. D. The page's admiration is founded on the Emperor's fame for the wildest debauchery. Perhaps our hero was not aware of the pronounced sexual aberrations of his prototype!

"I don't think it is possible."

"I shall make an official record of that charge."

"Now, as I was saying," continued Giglio with a smile, "you are lacking in both courage and dignity. Nevertheless, I am ready to accord you the honor of a meeting—"

"But I don't ask one!"

"I offer it to you."

"I decline."

"You refuse to fight?"

"Monsieur, the Eternal God has written in letters of fire on the summit of Sinai this commandment: 'Thou shalt not kill.' Christ repeated it. Paul taught it to the Gentiles. And you expect me to touch a weapon of murder! No, monsieur! Little do you know me! I desire to follow the noble example set me this evening in the little olive grove. I, too, beneath assault, turn the other cheek! I make apologies to you, sir! I make public apology! I shall emerge from the combat victorious, with my pride. See! I bow the head and I feel my heart comforted."

*

CHAPTER NINE

How Giguelillot Understood the Duties of Ancient Hospitality

> *It is customary for young girls to permit caressing touches up to a certain point; but the prevailing moral restrictions do not permit me to tell you what that point is.*
>
> FISCHER-UEBER DIE PROBENACHTE, etc. (Nights of Trial) 1780

DIANE À LA HOUPPE and the King, under the guidance of their hosts, reached the apartments which had been awaiting the honor of a royal visit for so many years.

Perhaps Taxis had intended to separate the espoused couple; but the confusion that assailed him as a result of his quarrel made him forget even the fundamental rules of his established policy.

The outcome thus took the joy out of the calculations of the little page and left him quite taken aback. Matters grew worse when, upon entering with Pausole the room in which she was about to pass her third night of conjugal joy, Diane cast glances of forgiveness and grateful love upon her husband.

The result was that Giguelillot felt himself bitten by the little serpent of petty jealousy. This woman that they were abducting from him (for it was nothing less than an abduction) at once assumed in his eyes all the charms of seductive fascination. Perturbed as to his own interests, fearful of interring his memories in the grave of stark reality, he resolved to create a diversion.

Being a practical and determined youth, he carried his weapons on his person.

The accoutrement which contained his artillery was a necessary adjunct to adventures and wily stratagems; it was an indispensable tripartite wallet divided into three pockets of varying importance.

The first contained:

A corkscrew.

Six corset laces.

Smelling salts.

Knock-out drops.

Three varieties of powder: white, flesh and brunette (in small boxes, pocket sizes).

Three fresh sticks of rouge.

Pins: white, black and round-headed.

Hair pins of various shapes.

Safety pins.

A small barrette.

A hand mirror.

Several pharmaceutical preparations.

Lastly, divers objects of a curious, if not actually common nature.

The second pocket enclosed the three volumes of verse in which Giguelillot had entered, in the form of dedications, titles or acrostics, four hundred feminine prenomina or pet names of diminutive animals, arranged in alphabetical order to facilitate proper selection under emotional stress.

"Read! Read—these elegiacs—to Miquette!—It was you, Miquette! I loved you madly! And you never knew it!"

The last compartment was the most precious of the three.

Giguelillot there preserved a collection of thirty billets-doux, containing simple declarations or declarations requesting a rendezvous. These billets-doux matched every character by their variety and every contingency by their contents; one can never think of what to say in these emergencies! The varieties included the tender, the respectful, the passionate, the literary, the bashful, the grossly improper, the despairing and the practical. Some said: "Do not desert me!" Others: "Well, yes, if you insist, I love you!" Still others: "Kill time by walking

around the block three times before you come." Some were almost illegible from the flood of tears that had drowned the ink.

As soon as one of them had passed from the case into a hand ever curious, and trembling if the document were momentarily withheld—Giguelillot would re-copy it from memory for a future occasion and the collection would suffer no loss thereby. The envelopes of various colors, arranged in a known order, readily recalled the subject of the letter without the necessity of opening it to verify the selection or the carefully vague wording.

In the urgent crisis of the moment, Giguelillot drew forth blue billets-doux numbers three and four, which developed the delicate shades of this theme: "I adore you. I must yield to the mad desire to visit your room tonight. Open unto me, be it only to dismiss me!"

Then, before saying good night to his hosts, he contrived to slip the envelopes into the hands of their respective daughters, in order to have two chances to one of forgetting Diane à la Houppe.

He went up to his room, opened his trunk, took out some toilet articles and spent some time in beautifying his appearance; more from a polite sense of duty than from vanity, for to tell the truth, he was neither conceited nor bashful when he conversed with himself and self-compliment gave him as little pleasure as self-depreciation.

If several women had bestowed happiness upon him, it was not in the least, thought he, due to his manly charms, but it was because he had displayed great enterprise; and the occasions on which he had been able to mould circumstances to his own ends were few enough, in view of the fact that two sexes, destined by nature to unite, speedily forget their imaginary scruples against fulfilling their mutual obligations.

Within an hour, the last sounds of wakefulness had sunk into silence; Giguelillot, cautiously unlocking his heavy door, stole out into the long corridor, noiselessly ascended a marble staircase.

It was evident that Philis had not had sufficient experience to play amorous rôles; she was waiting for him on the top step.

"Sh!" she said. "Oh, how happy I am! Come quickly!"

They entered the room. She turned toward him:

"You are in love with me? How can that be?"

Giguelillot had not the heart to play his customary rôle; besides, it was absolutely useless in this case. He took the little Philis, blushing and smiling with pleasure, in his arms and imprinted one kiss upon her eye and another upon the corner of her mouth, but all in a spirit of playful comradeship.

"You are very sweet," said he.

"Really?"

"Why, yes!"

"What is sweet about me?"

"Don't you know?"

"Nobody ever told me—"

"Well, this, and this again! And that, and this, all of you!"

She began once more to laugh, then spoke in a pensive tone:

"But other girls are nicer than I."

"Oh, you're wrong!"

"No, I'm not, I'm sorry to say. I have a cousin who comes to breakfast with us every Sunday, and when she takes off her dress in my room to sit down at table, I feel like beating her, she's so much prettier than I. That's a wicked wish, isn't it?"

"Oh, you are ridiculously modest!" said Giglio tenderly. "Why, what do you imagine your figure looks like?"

"Why, like a wax match—"

"Because you have a rosy head and a white body?"

"No, especially because I'm thin. You can't say no to that."

"Yes, I shall say no right now. You thin? You are slender, just as you should be. Young girls of fifteen that look like buxom China dolls sometimes find husbands because their double chins produce the illusion of bigamy; but as for lovers, that's a different matter; they are too big a load to carry off."

Philis, who had a ready laugh, voiced her merriment, then asked quite seriously:

"You've had experience in carrying off girls, I suppose?"

"A whole boarding school."

The child looked at him with admiration:

"Oh, tell me all about it!"

"I can't; it's a great secret."

"Well, leave out names, then. Where did it happen?"

"In France. I can't tell you any more."

"Were they tall or short, these girls?"

"Both."

"How many of them altogether?"

Giguelillot sought for a figure at once extraordinary and credible.

"Thirty-one," he replied.

"And not a one scolded you? Oh, I understand that, of course! You're such a handsome boy! I said yes, the same as they, you see.... And yet, perhaps they knew what they were doing in following you, while I—I don't know at all—or almost not at all."

"Really?"

"My sister always refuses to tell me when I ask her about it. All

that I do know, I've learnt from my cousin. But she doesn't tell me the most important thing, I'm sure of that."

"Tell me what she did tell you."

Philis smilingly hesitated.

"You will make fun of me if I do."

"Certainly not."

"I've got it all twisted up, I'm afraid. And besides, I can't remember all the words. And what's worst of all, you'll find fault with me; so there now!"

And counting on her fingers, so as to forget nothing, Philis enumerated her little store of knowledge, in a soft, slow and careful voice, at times raising a frightened eye, like a faltering pupil who fears the fatal zero.

Giguelillot listened with a growing esteem. As soon as she had finished, he clasped his hands and said:

"But, pardon me, mademoiselle Philis, what is it that you imagine you don't know?"

"I don't understand what is wrong about it," she said simply.

She explained:

"It seems that it is a very shameful thing for a girl to receive a young man in her room. Is it true that she does wrong with him?"

"Why, no, no!" said Giguelillot.

"Oh, yes! Papa forbids it. He never lets young men come here and if anybody asks him why, he replies that he has daughters. All that I just told you seems to be nothing but a lot of games that don't hurt anybody; so that can't be what is forbidden."

"Of course not. And I'm quite sure that M. Lebirbe is protecting you against 'certain' young men; those that don't know how to play —you know what I mean. But if he learned that you were playing with me—"

"You? Why, good heavens, you especially! I don't know what you said to him this evening, but you might be the devil, he was afraid of you. He put a servant girl on a mattress in the corridor between my sister's door and mine. You know my sister sleeps down there at the end of the hall. She has a horror of domestics, Galatee has, and she doesn't like to be watched. She gave the girl some money and begged her to go and sleep in the servants' quarters, as usual. What luck, don't you say? Without that, I couldn't have seen you."

This confidence possessed a lively interest for Giglio. He had gained a double success. He looked at little Philis and was seized with scruples toward her. He felt that, being awaited by her elder and being resolved to make her acquaintance, he scarcely had the right to

lead the younger into irreparable imprudence, and hence it was better to assail the more responsible of the two.

So, he discreetly confined himself to giving the little Philis some explanations that she asked for, on a certain point about which she was curious. He also imparted to her some advice, some recipes for day-dreaming and some simple instruction, but he refrained from suggesting anything to her of which she did not already know the rudiments.

He was even so reserved that, at the moment when she begged him to try with her a fateful experience, he replied that once in the grip of a serious illness he had taken a vow never to commit the final act, no matter what preliminary moves he indulged in, and that furthermore, it was commonly agreed that such acts of violence were only a delusion and a snare.

Two hours later, he took his leave and pretended to descend the staircase, but immediately returned with noiseless steps and lightly tapped twice on Galatee's door.

The girl herself, clad in a closely wrapped dressing gown, opened the door. She carefully closed it, leaned her shoulders against it and said in the coldest of tones:

"Monsieur, I know all that you did this evening in a room of the Hotel du Coq—"

"What's that!" cried Giguelillot in stupefaction.

"And I have decided not to keep silent about it if you approach me without permission. Now, listen carefully. I have something to say to you."

*

CHAPTER TEN

Wherein Giguelillot Receives from Mlle. Lebirbe a Proposition That at Once Gains a Smiling Acceptance

But I sleep alone. SAPPHO (W. 52)

"ARE you threatening me?" said Giguelillot.

"I am warning you."

"Well, what did happen, to your knowledge, in this little hotel room which it is alleged I entered?"

Galatee took from a drawer a pair of long military binoculars.

"I get bored," she said. "I pass all my days in my room and, having no particular things to think about, I simply dream. When pay-

ing my English teacher, I succeeded in procuring several forbidden novels; I am very fond of them, but I know them by heart and I have lived through them twenty times all by myself. I know all that André Sperelli says upon Helene's lips, all that Henry de Marsay replies to Mme. de Maufrigneuse and M. de Maupassant has embraced me so many times that I am strongly tempted to dismiss him. So then, I take a seat at my window and with these glasses I look through an opening in the blinds at what is going on at the Hotel du Coq."

"Ah, I see!"

"Yes, many things are done there by people that believe themselves unseen, but even that gets monotonous. I was fifteen years old when I began to look at this changing spectacle every evening. At present, I am tweny-three. During the first two nights, I gained rapid instruction. During the eight years following, I discovered nothing that I had not already seen, or readily imagined. And yet, these people seem happy; happier than I, you may be sure."

"Ah!" said Giguelillot in a different tone.

"For months past I had not seen anything so interesting as what happened during the last three days behind the windows of the largest room. Those girls were delicious! I pretended a headache and I stayed here propped on my elbows the whole time, to follow their least movements. I used to get up again at night to see if they had not relighted their candles and thus on one occasion, at four o'clock in the morning, I surprised one of their waking spells. When I returned to my own bed, I couldn't sleep either—"

She passed her hand over her brow.

"I was very angry at you for intruding on their privacy and causing them to depart. But your disguise and theirs and the care you took to throw their clothes out of the window prove that they were guilty of some wrong and that you are their accomplice."

"Exactly so."

"You admit it?"

"At once; I have no hesitation."

"Then you're not really afraid of me?"

"Not in the least."

"And why not?"

"In the first place, because your soul is far less sordid than you yourself believe. Secondly, because I, too, am armed. Brrr! Tremble! I have a thunderbolt in my hand!"

"Will you please let me see it?"

"Here it is: M. Lebirbe, your respected father, mademoiselle, had stretched across your threshold a defenseless young slave girl, with the

purpose, no doubt, in case a vile seducer should make his appearance, of causing the poor girl to serve as his prey and to offer herself as a sacrifice to preserve your honor."

"That was not precisely his purpose, but how do you know it?"

"From stories of mystery and romance."

"Go on."

"You put gold in this child's hands—"

"That's a bit too keen! She told you?"

"—and you begged her to return to the servants' quarters and find the valet or the scullion, as she chose, instead of passing a weary night with no reason beyond mere obedience to her master."

"And then?"

"Then? Why, as a girl doesn't ordinarily send her guardian away except when there would be the strongest motives for watching her, and as my presence in your room, on the heels of this maneuver, immediately proves an understanding between us, you may beat your breasts, cry out, accuse me of every crime; nobody will believe that I am here without consent, mademoiselle, if not at your invitation."

"And you intend to take advantage of that?"

"To the very utmost."

"You are not at all gallant."

"What a deadly error!"

"Indeed! Explain yourself, if you please. You have already given me this evening a definition of modesty that is not in the dictionaries. Continue my education. Tell me now what gallantry means. I am listening."

"In the sense in which you take the word, mademoiselle, gallantry is a dramatic situation, quite familiar but withal subtle, which permits a man to insult ladies with impunity by giving them evidence of a respect that they themselves have the folly to demand. It is, besides, an excellent means of disguising, beneath a most agreeable exterior, the compuction that seizes most men at the moment when they find themselves alone with the object of their long cherished desires. As I am very far from experiencing these sentiments, which are unworthy of you, and as your charms leave me no leisure to moderate those that do agitate me, I shall forthwith be very 'gallant,' but in a sense exactly opposite to the one in which you understand the word; for that very word can likewise signify the contrary of what it seems to say."

"And what if I should tell you emphatically that I hate you?"

"All the more reason for me to be gallant."

"Indeed!"

"Yes. To yield to your wishes would necessitate my departure, which would mean to renounce you, and I should thus lose all hope of making you change your mind. If I should seize you by force, perhaps I should still have a chance—"

"And meanwhile, you are doing nothing of the sort."

"No, no. I was just talking to you as they do in books. I haven't the least desire to be disagreeable to you."

He sat down, picked up the black binoculars and twirled the screw by its mechanical appliance.

Galatee, perturbed and somewhat gasping, was gazing at him across the room and seeking to penetrate beneath his exterior.

Failing in this, she picked up the flounce of her dressing gown, examined it, held it out, turned it over, looked at the light through the lace—

The chill would have lasted much longer if, in the midst of the silence, Giguelillot had not been seized by on access of warm-hearted merriment that proved very contagious.

"We're acting well," said he.

"Are we?"

"Very talented, we are!"

"What a child you are!"

"Pass on to the next scene. O say, isn't it lovely!"

"What do you know about it?"

"I suspect the climax."

"This is not a comedy."

"It's a charade! I have it! I gave you for my first a 'billet-ducks;' [47] my second was a 'cold chill,' and my whole is the celebrated stanza of Paul Robert:

> If thou wilt, a dream we'll trace:
> We'll mount upon a cold duck's back!
> Thou tak'st my hand, I thee embrace—

"Are you willing to act out the third verse? I am all dressed for the part."

And he twirled his cap on the end of his finger. Then, rising suddenly:

"As a matter of fact, why did you let me in?"

"I don't dare tell you now—"

[47] The atrocious pun is a feeble effort to echo the French. "Poulet," signifying "chicken" or "duck," is also colloquially used to mean "love letter."

"Oh! Were your intentions criminal?"
"No."
"Then—highly improper?"
"Yes."
"Tell me all about it in a nice soft voice."
"I don't dare."
"Tell it in pantomime."
"It's too complicated."
"I'll help you."
"To the very end?"
"Yes."
"You promise that?"
"I promise."
"All right. I'll trust you."
"Now, let me guess."
"Oh, you couldn't ever. Don't even try to!"
"It's beyond my imagination? You're sure of that?"
"Yes."
"Mercy me! What can it be?"
Galatee made no reply.

To avoid losing countenance under Giguelillot's curious and smiling eyes, she seized the binoculars in her turn and tenderly fingered the familiar tubes.

Then, standing at the open window, she directed the instrument upon a small wing that jutted out from the hotel.

"Oh, fie! How sordid!" said Giguelillot. "I wish you please wouldn't look at such things, mademoiselle."

"Do you say that because—? Do you want my place? I offer it to you."

"Thank you, no."

"You're making a mistake. I'm having a perfectly delirious time. Why do you refuse?"

"I'm not old enough for that, yet."

"But you mean that I am!"

"Perhaps. That form of amusement is all very well for bald heads and virgins, who both have the same reason for finding it interesting. As for me, I solemnly assure you that I find it profoundly unpleasant."

Galatee resumed her post of observation. Then, with an impatient gesture, she said:

"But I need you! Come here at once! It's a phantasmagoria that is going on down there. A moment ago there was one gentleman

and two ladies; now I see one lady and two gentlemen. Nobody came or went. Explain the thing, please, please!"

After half a minute, Giglio gave this diagnosis:

"One gentleman—with a lady, that's good!—who is ugly—followed by a second lady—that's bad—who is pretty—"

"Oh, dear me! What can—?"

She broke off, as a sudden blush mantled her cheeks and she said simply, shaking her head:

"Yes. I see clearly that I don't know everything."

As if this declaration gave her the necessary boldness for expressing what she really meant:

"Well, this can't go on!" she said. "I must speak out to you and I want you to understand everything, because I need you. It's very improper; don't look at me that way! And perhaps it will take a long time; don't let your mind wander."

"On the contrary, I am keenly interested."

"I am twenty-three years old, monsieur, and unmarried. I lead a stupid life, like all young girls."

"Yes, yes!"

"You understand me. I see that. My father has the broadest ideas on domestic life and education—"

"But naturally, he doesn't apply them to his own daughters?"

"Why naturally?"

"Because that's only human."

"Is that the way you look at it? As for me, I find it inconsistent—"

"It is human and therefore inconsistent; doubly human. We are agreed."

"Don't interrupt me again. If you do, I shall forget all that I have to tell you before—"

"Before speaking frankly?"

"You're beyond endurance! I know I'm right in what I am going to tell you; but I am sure you will refuse to see why, and you will scold me."

"I already know very well why you are wrong—"

"Before I've finished telling you! You don't understand me!"

"I understand you in advance and I wish to spare you the pain of completing a conversation that embarrasses you very much. A man that I know, who passes for a wit, never more than half finishes his sentences, because an intelligent interlocutor understands the purport of them from the first words and, if it be an argument, his

opponent, having no need to listen pending the conclusion, would have too much leisure to prepare his rebuttal on the spot."

"Well, then, act out my part yourself. I must at least know whether you have understood me."

"If I have—. But in your position, I should not think otherwise than you do. And I should thus be wrong. And that is what I should like to tell you in a word, which, of course, will do no good. I expect that."

"Tell me."

"Here you are. You are twenty-three years old, you are pretty, you passed from childhood some ten years ago, you wept a great deal when you were fifteen, sixteen, seventeen and so on; you used to read palpitating novels in which persons of your own age, often even a little younger, passed dishevelled nights in company with lovers more than perfect; your binoculars have proved to you that these novels were not fairy tales, and when you compared yourself to the women that you envy, you recognized by certain signs that you were as capable as they of making men happy and winning happiness for yourself in return."

"Oof!" said Galatee. "I had rather I hadn't said all that. Don't look at me that way! You disturb me."

"On reading my letter," continued Giglio, "you didn't believe for an instant that I loved you, or rather, you hoped that I didn't love you—"

" 'Hoped' is right. That is it exactly."

"—And as you had seen me at work in my rôle of costumer, you counted on me to help you get away in disguise, with all the resources of my noble talents. For even if no policeman should arrest you, you did not wish to leave any scandal behind you. You prefer to disappear, escape in such a way that you could not be traced—"

"And without knowing what I was asking of you, you promised just now that you would help me to the very end. Don't forget that, my dear."

Giglio took her hand and said to her quite affectionately:

"You are doing wrong."

"No, no."

"You don't know the life that you are rushing into. Everything in that life happens in the same way as it does in the family and elsewhere; that is to say, happiness is divided into two portions; almost all for the men, almost nothing for the women. That comes, they say, from events that happened long ago concerning an apple and a

serpent. Women are on earth to be unhappy; often without any reason; but when a harlot takes to tears, I tell you she knows why."

"Won't you tell me?"

"Because she is playing with a love that never ceases to elude her. Because for twenty men that she loathes, she chooses one that she loves—and he has only one desire, and that is to get away from her as speedily as possible. Because there is no comedy more tragic and more laborious to play than the drama of tender emotions."

"But at least she knows life, this woman! She is not a useless thing, a recluse in spite of herself—an existence without aim, without joys, without freedom!"

"Can you prevail upon your father to put you on an allowance and let you live without any restraint, as he would do without hesitation if Heaven had willed that you should be a son?"

"He would never consent."

"The man is ruler! The man is always ruler!"

"But it certainly would be just."

"Become a boy, as the lady you were looking at just now, and M. Lebirbe will find it quite natural for you to come in wearing evening clothes about ten or eleven in the morning; with dark rings under your eyes and wobbly legs. Even if you were a bit tipsy, I'm sure he would look on it with an indulgent eye."

"Oh, you're not serious!"

And the girl smiled sadly.

Giglio resumed:

"Nothing that I have told you about a life of pleasure has convinced you, has it?"

"Not in the least."

"I thought so. At what age did you first desire to run away?"

"I don't know—always—"

"So this is not merely a passing fancy? You have thought it over, you know what you want and you are sure you want it?"

"Great heavens, yes!"

"These women that you were watching in the pretty outlook that your father has given you; you envy them? Look once more."

And while she picked up her glasses and focused them on the distance Giguelillot took thought on how glad he was that he did not love this girl in the least and thus was free to talk to her as he intended to do.

"I envy them," said Galatee.

"Both of them?"

"Both alike. I wish I were the maid at the hotel. I wish I were

the little beggar girl who is at this moment asleep in the ditch beside the road. Somebody will strangle her presently, but he will possess her first."

Giglio nodded.

"I have nothing more to say, mademoiselle. So if you want me to help you get away from here, I am quite ready."

"What! You are willing?"

"It is perhaps absurd; I don't know anything about that. In any case, that doesn't concern me. You certainly have the right to express a wish after ten years of reflection. I have said what I had to say to you. Now, if you are determined, I won't press the point any longer. Besides, I am playing my proper rôle of young rake by casting confusion into the midst of families and upsetting a father's plans. Then, too, I believe that I even promised to obey you? All that falls out admirably."

Galatee grasped both his hands.

"Oh, you are kind! And I welcomed you so crossly, too! Pardon me if you can. I love you with all my heart. Listen. What time is it? Ten after four. The servants never get up before half past six. We have more than two hours to ourselves. I permit you not to dress me right away."

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CHAPTER ELEVEN

How the Plans of Pausole and the Dreams of Diane à la Houppe Proved to Be in Exact Harmony

'Tis better, they say, on banana leaves
To lie with two men at a time
Than sleep alone.
Annamitic[48] popular song
(Translated into French by Dumoutier (1890)

PAUSOLE stood in his room, crossed his arms and shook his head.

"What am I doing so far from home?" he said in a loud voice. "What is this expedition that I have plunged into? Here I am on the highways, I, if you please, making ready to sleep in a bed offered by chance, without any of my usual comforts or familiar surroundings. What folly is this adventure!"

But Diane, who had many reasons for wishing that the adventure

[48] A dialect of Cochin-China, similar to Cantonese.

should meet with his approval and should last as long as possible, drew the King toward a huge armchair and crouched at his feet.

She combated the complexities of life with a mind of perfect simplicity. It would be a distinct error of judgment to call her a woman of brains, but she was an intuitive expert in regulating her policies on the basis of the psychology of love; the sole department of wisdom in which she had gained enlightenment. No advice but hers could have induced the King to delay his departure at the time when it was her desire to prevent his leaving at all. Now she was impelled to prolong the excursion and especially to play a part in it herself; in other words, to win a pardon for her importunate pursuit, which had violated all rules.

On this last point, she thought that silence would be of more assistance to her than penitence, for excuses recall the offense more certainly than they extenuate it, and they provoke resentment even at the moment when they elicit words of pardon.

So, Diane forbore offering excuses of any description. She relied solely on the happy influence of her personality to soothe the King's spirit, and she lifted up to him a placid countenance, unruffled except by the flash of a dark-glancing eye.

"How comfortable I feel here," she said, "and what perfectly adorable memories I shall recall in days to come, whenever I think of this room, so delightfully unfamiliar! Just see: our host has arranged everything in accordance with your personal tastes. There is cool, refreshing air within these walls. Here is a low divan; there is another higher and softer. Oh, this one is nice and wide! And there is one that gets the balmy breeze from the big window! Here are lemons and sugar; and your favorite dry port! I brought some with me for fear they would all forget it."

"Did you really?" said Pausole.

"Do you want some now?"

"No. It is enough for me to know that it is within reach of my hand. But I should have wanted a litre of it if it had not been in sight just before bedtime."

"Tomorrow morning you shall have your Spanish chocolate. I gave orders for them to make it black and to avoid all lumpiness, for the Groom of the Kitchens could never have been trusted to supervise it properly."

"You did exactly right."

"I requested especially that the château preserve the silence of the grave, until you should see fit to proclaim your official awakening."

"Yes, yes, that's very important."

"Your own chambermaid is here. Tomorrow, as soon as you wish me to ring, it is she who will appear, and I have instructed her to hold her tongue; she bored you terribly this morning, I hear. Finally, I asked Mme. Lebirbe to get you two hair pillows, because I know you object to feathers."

"Ah! This is perfect. Let me kiss you, dear Houppe. Come over on this low divan. These seats are really very comfortable, and that reconciles me to the strangeness of this room. Tell me: you talked a great deal with Mme. Lebirbe, didn't you?"

"Oh, yes. We are distantly related. Her sister, who married a doctor, was papa's mistress for three years. Mme. Lebirbe reminded me of that at once."

"She is a widow, this sister of yours?"

"No. She first had a child by her husband and then two sons by father."

"I don't like that," said Pausole. "Why didn't she get a fair and open divorce?"

"Because father was married, too; and mamma wanted her own way in everything. Polygamy was impossible with her about. I remember well, whenever papa brought home mistresses, there were endless frightful scenes. He could never keep one more than a week."

"You take after your mother," said Pausole, "for really, it was a savage clawing you gave that poor Denyse, whom I saw this morning—"

"And dismissed, Sire! Oh, how happy I was when I saw her return to the harem! I shall always remember the delight I felt then —but tonight's delight is far sweeter."

Pausole laid his hand on her shoulder.

"So, you lead a very sad life in the harem after all, dear Houppe? I see that back of all your words."

"Oh, yes! A very sad one all last year; a very happy one for the past two days."

"It's too bad, but what can I do? I have no wish to put you under constraint, dear girl; neither you nor any of my wives. If I have the harem guarded so closely, it is because I personally have a distaste for being deceived. But I hold none of you by force—"

"Can you say that to me? Do you then love me so little?" said Diane, very pale.

"No, Houppe, I do love you, really, and it is just for that reason that I am ready to give you your liberty the day you ask me for it."

"I shall never ask you for it."

"Don't you clearly foresee that you are dooming yourself to unhappiness?"

"Yes, but that will go away for one day every year."

"It's too bad, too bad," repeated Pausole.

Diane, dissatisfied with the point to which she had brought the conversation, was already asking herself how she was going to persuade the King to consent to see, in her, three hundred and sixty-five different women; but the good Pausole was revolving in his mind some scruples of quite another sort.

"Perhaps," said he, "I ought to go further still—that was my previous intention. Hm! What a delicate matter it always is to harmonize one's own happiness and one's own liberty with the liberty and happiness of others! It is an impossible ideal, and always bound to end in a question of sacrifice. And then comes up the question of determining who is to be the sacrifice. Now, I am quite willing to decide that question against myself, if it is to be considered as a matter of equity—"

"Against yourself?"

"Why, yes! I feel that I am responsible, by condemning these young women to absolute continence during almost their entire youth, for making them purchase too dearly whatever satisfaction the mere title of Queen can give to their affections, or more frequently to their vanity. They adapt themselves to circumstances. I know that. But it is none the less contrary to nature, and I have often asked myself whether I ought not to set loose the whole corps of pages in the harem night and day and shut my eyes on what would very probably happen. I haven't made up my mind on that; but I haven't rejected the idea, either. They are nothing but beardless children, of whom no man in his senses could be jealous. And even if I do foresee that their pranks would occasion me some anxiety, at least I should resign myself to it as being the least shocking solution of all, and I should feel the satisfaction of having given a small measure of joy to my little voluntary prisoners, who are beating their wings around me.... Houppe, it is getting late. I had a long ride on muleback, and I am tired. Let us sleep."

Toward six o'clock in the morning, a ray of sunlight, already warm, awakened Diane à la Houppe.

Pausole was sleeping on his back, nose in air, his mouth a yawning crater.

She turned over, spread her legs and stretched herself, with hands clenched and bosom thrust out; then she fell back, with frowning brows.

Was she still dreaming? Almost certainly so, for to her mind,

no doubt still haunted by the King's last words, came the following vision:

The door, left half ajar to preserve a current of air during the too humid night, was slowly swinging wider. A page was entering, at first timid and cautious, then gaining assurance, then boldly advancing. Two gentle hands passed deliciously over all her warm, moist skin. A soft caressing cheek lightly glazed her left breast. Then a warmly passionate smile blossomed forth and awoke an answering fire within her. She murmured (in the voice of dreams): "Take care—," and she imagined that he was replying: "Nothing wakes the King, madame." Then, as she was turning over on her left side, the better to cherish this dream that she was fearful of interrupting, it seemed to her that the page assumed toward her the rôle of husband far more than that of loyal servant. She trembled thrice, lost all consciousness and fell from the height of her dream into black oblivion.

BOOK FOUR

CHAPTER ONE

How Diane à la Houppe Explained Her Dream and Thierrette Her Ambitions

In general, you will find that women prefer to take as a lover a fop rather than a man of substance, a libertine rather than a man of character. . . . This preference on the part of women owes its vital impulse to sexual traditions which conceive it as a more interesting experience; while it owes its mental impulse to that innate sense which leads every mortal to seek out his nearest identical counterpart.

WOMEN IN THE SOCIAL SCHEME AND IN THE SCHEME OF NATURE (1787)

THE bells of Pentecost rang with a loud peal half past nine in the morning, and Diane, who had forgotten to warn the bellman, awoke for the second time.

Had she really dreamed?

At first, she had no doubt of it. The dreams of Diane à la Houppe readily entered the realm of the voluptuous and the imaginative. They had suggested to her many wild fancies, which ofttimes left her pensive through the entire day and which she never pondered without a sense of respect, for she would have been incapable of interpreting them in her waking hours. The remembrance of them marked milestones in her monotonous existence. It was a plain index for her when she said to herself that such and such a little event had taken place before the dream of the drum major or after that of the negro boy between two governesses. She was likewise on the point of resolving to classify the dream of the

page in the train of many others when, having discovered some reasons for uncertainty, things that could not have happened to her through the sole medium of the mind, and finding herself, on the other hand, unable to accept as a reality an event so fantastic, she was plunged in the depths of perplexity.

Pausole, whom the brazen clang had finally wrenched from the sweetness of his heavy sleep, sat upright and shortly afterwards clambered down from the bed.

It was the hour at which he transacted business.

He needed a counselor.

He called for Giglio.

The little page did not respond at once, for he had slept but little after a rather trying day. First Rosine, then Thicrrette, then Philis, then Galatee and finally Diane à la Houppe had each in their turn been the recipient of all that he could offer them in the way of energy, perseverance and doughty deeds, but he had not passed through all that without feeling a little dizzy and weak. So, when he did appear in response to the King's summons, after not more than two hours and a half of sleep, he was twenty minutes late and Pausole had left the room for the bath.

Gilles entered and his ill-bred smile at once betrayed to Diane that he had evidently shared her dream after all.

After a moment of confusion, she decided to play an active part in an adventure in which she had hitherto had so little responsibility and which smacked of the exploits of a second-story man rather than of an adulterer. From her bed she made the page a sign to approach, encircled his right leg with a naked and languishing arm and said to him, slowly and softly:

"Brigand! Robber! Gamin! Infectious little microbe! Gallows-bird!"

He replied in a voice that might have come from a five-year-old angel child:

"Pardon me, madame."

"I hate you."

"Yes, madame."

"Who taught you such tricks?"

"Little sister—"

"Never try again—"

"I shall not do it any more."

"At least—not so rashly."

"Very well."

"And not with anybody else."

"No, no, no! Never, never, never!"

Diane clapped her hands with a laugh and continued almost immediately, but in a more serious tone:

"I hope that we are not going to find our friend the fair Aline this evening?"

"Ah! You don't want to?"

"I'm in no hurry."

"All right."

Then, to please the young woman by a confidence that had the further advantage of costing him nothing:

"There is a second fugitive," said he.

"Who's that?"

"Mlle. Lebirbe, the elder one."

"Since when?"

"Last night. She expounded to me that a domestic existence did not lend itself to misconduct, that she felt within her all the frenzies and that mysterious voices were calling her to a life of vile prostitution. So I sent her off--"

"Oh, that's wicked!"

"I sent her off to a respectable lady who keeps a particular house in Tryphême, where a large number of married women meet gentlemen—usually married, too, but not to them—"

"Why, you little bandit! It's rank villainy—"

"But that's not the best of it! M. Lebirbe is president of the League Opposed to Licentiousness in Private, an admirable society whose activities are a bit slack just now, I think. When he finds out that his elder daughter, in the privacy of a notorious house, is practicing every form of licentiousness and is taking them one after another, we'll see what an impetus of ardent zeal that will give him for the good cause!"

Diane's burst of laughter was heard by Pausole who appeared, fresh from the bath, in a morning costume:

"Ah! It's you, my boy? I have just a word to say to you. Yesterday, you conducted an investigation which must have been positively clairvoyant, but I shan't bother you for an account of it. I have just read the little letter that you found. It is very affectionate, but gives no information. Do you know what has become of my daughter? Where can she be today? That is all I want to know."

Giguelillot was whole-heartedly in favor of rescuing the fair Aline; but for divers reasons, he also wished to have another conference with her first. So, making Diane a slight sign to relieve her of anxiety, he replied:

"In Tryphême."

"That is enough for me. Is it your opinion that we should set out on a new stage today? I shall consult Taxis as a matter of form, since he is my counselor of the morning, but I have more confidence in you."

"It is better to set out, I'm sure."

"You are right. And what will be the best time, do you think?"

"The middle of the afternoon."

"What distance shall we cover?"

"It is four kilometres from here to Tryphême. We can reach there in three-quarters of an hour."

"That's a great deal; but we shall do it. I feel in good trim this morning. Go and tell Taxis to come and speak with me after you."

Taxis appeared, much agitated.

"Sire," said he, "a new crime has been committed this morning. A virgin has been abducted from her affectionate parents—"

"What!"

"By an unknown seducer. Our hosts' elder daughter is no longer in her rooms."

"Ha! Ha! Ha!" laughed Pausole. "Poor Lebirbe! That such a thing should happen to him, of all men!"

"I cannot escape the conclusion that there is a connection between these extraordinary events which have come to pass within a few short days; they all savor of rape or clandestine abduction."

"Such a comparison is without foundation," said the King testily. "Aside from the fact that I have my personal reasons for considering your speech very tactless, ordinary common sense dictates that a single individual cannot seduce and carry off more than one girl at a time. You are really too ignorant of matters of gallantry, monsieur. Even the father confessors consider it their duty to instruct themselves on that point. But we'll consider that subject closed. You have no other report to present to me?"

"The unknown, whom I persist in maintaining to be the author of all the assaults committed recently, is arrested, Sire, or on the point of being so. Once more, I await only a sign from you."

"Oh! If that's the way of it, I give you the sign," said Pausole. "Anything to interrupt a journey which is beginning to annoy me and pall on me terribly! May this end it! Where is the culprit?"

"On the road to Tryphême."

"And who is with him?"

"The Princess Aline."

"How do you know it?"

"While pursuing my researches in the apartments of Mlle. Lebirbe, I found a powerful glass, which the studious child no doubt employed for astronomical purposes, in order to contemplate every night the unfathomable work of the Creator whom the firmament—"

"Cut it short, Taxis. You're getting prolix."

"I, therefore, seized this glass and made use of it to observe the environs. Providence willed that this object should prove in my hands to be the instrument of a discovery. Two hundred metres away, on the road to Tryphême, I perceived a young man whose costume answers exactly to the description, given me by my agents, of the one in which the mysterious culprit was clothed. Beside him, in the green dress which has become familiar to every one in the palace during the past two weeks, the Princess Aline was walking. Such is the result of my efforts. I believed it my duty to advise Your Majesty that prompt and decisive action is absolutely necessary to the success of my plans, such as they may be."

"My opinion," said Pausole, "is firm on one cardinal point. Nobody but myself shall undertake to arrest my daughter. I shall never go back on that, at any rate; it cost me too much trouble to make up my mind about it in the first place."

"In that case, we must set out at once."

"So be it. Is the baggage ready?"

"Most of it. The rest will follow. I have attended to saddling our mounts, including my faithful Kosmon, whom a wanton malefactor has subjected to the most scandalous of outrages."

"What! Him too?"

"Pardon me—I mean—"

"This is perversion!" said Pausole. "In the open country, in a complaisant and unaffected land, where any one can, without difficulty, seduce girls in the fields, to go and make love to a dusty, knock-kneed nag such as the creature you dangle your legs over! That's a depth of depravity I never imagined!"

"I said nothing of the sort, and—"

"Your malefactor is a man more to be pitied than blamed. I forbid any pursuit. Keep silence about the whole affair."

"I desire to explain—"

"You shall explain on the road. The matter possesses no interest for me, anyhow. Get to work, Taxis, and take your leave."

The mobilization was carried out in the courtyard, where the guardsmen formed in line, from the main entrance to the stairway.

As Giglio, already in the saddle, was displaying himself to the

curious throng, the pretty Thierrette detached herself from a group of peasants.

Smiling, but with traces of fatigue burdening her eyelids, she advanced with an effort, but yet not without valor.

Although she was a girl ready to combat a whole company under arms, she felt intimidated by the silence and the space surrounding her cavaliers, and she was actually blushing by the time she reached Giguelillot.

"I thank you kindly, sir," she said. "Thank you— You have been kind to me—and these gentlemen, too. . . . Thank you all. . . . Thank you kindly for your generosity. . . . Thank you again. . . . Thank you, thank you!"

Then, nodding her head slowly and sighing from the bottom of her simple heart, she spoke these unaffected words:

"I shall not forget."

But Giguelillot was leaning down from the lofty back of his zebra.

"Why, what is that you're holding in your hand?"

"It is the fortieth tulip, monsieur. . . . I have kept it for you—that it may bring you good luck—"

"A charming thought. I shall keep it, this fortieth tulip of yours. What shall I give you in return? Tell me."

"Sir, they have been very cross with me at the farm. The Master said I was going crazy—I had too many visitors—I hadn't done the evening milking—some one had taken two buckets. What is the result? Here I am at the gate with six francs in my kerchief and out of a job at that."

"But, my poor Thierrette, I have none to offer you!"

"Oh, yes, you have! I can see one, all right. These gentlemen have no canteen woman. It's hard work, I know—but I'd be very steady and good natured. I'd do my best, you know—"

"Do you mean you'd be willing—"

"Yes. But for the first few days, I'd ride with the baggage. . . . I could get a horse a little later—if that doesn't make any difference to you."

"Done! Go to the baggage train; that's an excellent precaution. And conceal yourself well until noon. Don't show yourself any sooner, do you understand me?"

"Oh, no! Just at this moment, I have more desire to sleep than flirt, sir. And thank you again—thank you! You have a soft spot in your heart for the ladies."

*

CHAPTER TWO

How Philis Found a Husband

Father, find me a husband,
Or a lost girl am I.
Unless you find me a man,
I'll run the streets and cry,
All naked to the sky,
And I'll be as bad as I can!
COLLECTION OF SEVERAL
BEAUTIFUL SONGS (1542)

THREE verses of royal manufacture, an autographed portrait and some gratuities to the servants marked the passage of Pausole through the home of the unhappy M. Lebirbe.

But it resulted in the old man's losing both his daughters at one blow.

The King, not knowing how to console his host after Galatee's flight and believing that his experience with the human heart had taught him that, with most individuals, personal vanity heavily outweighs affection, thought to relieve M. Lebirbe's wounded feelings by informing him point-blank that he was captivated by the youthful charms of little Philis and was, therefore, establishing her in the ranks of his Queens and carrying her off with the convoy.

Then the whole cortège began its advance; Philis in blue on her pony to the right of Pausole on his mule, Giguelillot to the left on his zebra, Taxis scouting ahead on the wretched Kosmon with his stigmatizing stump, while at a distance, gently rocked by the nautical stride of her camel, Diane à la Houppe, her eyes closed in sleep, was weaving anew the fabric of her dream.

*

CHAPTER THREE

Wherein Philis Prattles, Listens and Learns

With flounces on her dress
And spreading hoops, she seems
Like lavender's caress,
Encircling garden streams.

Naïve, she pirouettes
Before her ardent swain:
Poor fly, that hops and frets
Around the dish amain!
SYGOGNES (1609)

PHILIS could not believe it.

"Sire," said she, "I shall be a Queen like all the rest, really and truly?"

"Why, yes."

"Like the three hundred and sixty-six? And I shall live in the harem? And I shall have all those playmates? Oh, what a good time I'm going to have!"

"Well," said Pausole, "you will find some with good dispositions."

"Are there any Queens of my age?"

"About thirty."

"So many as that? And are they nice?"

"Very nice."

"Do they really love one another or do they fight?"

"Oh, I suppose they love one another; rather to excess, in fact."

"It's impossible to love too much. Are they serious minded?"

"Not in the least."

Philis, with a merry little cry, rose up in her stirrups and fell back on her saddle several times, which was her manner of expressing palpitating joy while riding horseback.

"At last!" said the page. "Now you will have a superfluous wife, Sire, one more than the year has days! I am sure that henceforth and forever more you will find your cup of love running over."

"Not a bit of it!" said Pausole. "I am sending Queen Denyse away. Peace reigns in the harem. Every Queen has equal rights, which she asserts once a year. I should never be so foolish as to compromise by a mad whim an order of succession which ought to be perfect, since it is modeled on the revolutions of our own planet."

"What does that mean?" asked Philis.

Then she corrected herself:

"Pardon me, Sire. I have often been told that I must not ask questions. But I can't help it; I'm so terribly ignorant."

"I find that delightful," said Pausole. "But tell me: what do you mean by terribly ignorant?"

"Well, I know the list of the Kings of Tryphême and the names of the sub-prefectures and the rule of participles."

"You know all that? That's wonderful!"

"I know it—I know it—not very well."

"And what more should you like to know?"

To this question Philis replied so frankly that it gave Pausole quite a start.

Much confused, she lowered her eyes and corrected herself again:

"Pardon me, Sire, I've made a bad break! I shouldn't have done it—especially before you. But it's always the same thing—Papa was right—when I ride a horse for five minutes, there's no more holding me in, it seems. Another time, I'll be more careful."

Pausole reassured her with a gesture:

"I am the one that was at fault, my dear, if I let you believe that I disapproved of what you said, for you answered very well indeed."

"Really?"

"I should say so! Above all, you spoke from the bottom of your heart."

"Oh, yes!"

"And one must always tell the truth."

"Even about such things as that?"

"That is the one great truth about women and the noblest ambition that they could decently express. If you had answered me that you regretted knowing so little about the movements of the heavenly bodies or about differential calculus, it would have given me little satisfaction; not that there are no women mathematicians or astronomers in the world, who dutifully exercise their little professions; but simply because such women take on a likeness to men and thereupon wantonly exhibit the defects of a half of the human race; and masculine defects inspire me with antipathy."

"Oh, but not me!" said Philis.

This time, it seemed easy to speak.

Giguelillot, always cheerful, hastened to break the silence.

"Have you observed, Sire, he said abruptly, "how greatly the Tryphêmians resemble the French?"

"What a silly question! How could you expect it to be otherwise? We are a composite of Spanish and Provençals, and thus are closely related to the Gallo-Romanic race, to which the French belong."

"Yes, but that is not what I meant. I came from Paris, expecting to find here an entirely new environment. You had accomplished a complete revolution, proclaimed moral liberty—"

"Oh!" said Pausole. "That's nothing, my boy. The importance of revolutions is measured by the interest that the government may have in preventing their success. There has never been but one revolution that seemed improbable in prospect and inconceivable in retrospect; and that is the revolution that gave you Frenchmen religious liberty; because, by renouncing divine guidance, you removed the power of fundamental support which up to that time had assured you a stability more than secular.[49] And moral liberty, you say? Well, you will get it whenever you ask for it."

"What does all that mean?" hazarded Philis.

"You may be sure, Gilles my boy," said Pausole without heeding her, "that on the day when the people of Paris shall take the trouble to demand a nude dancing girl at the Opera, they will get her on the spot. So far from such a move's overturning the administration, it will strengthen their position, especially if the subscribers know that the girl is there with the sanction of the government."

"You may be right; but I expected to find here a world even more different from my own, something quite topsyturvy and unheard of; an absolute contrast. And after all, everything goes on just as it does in the adjoining country; the highways are peaceful, the crops are growing, the farmers drive immoral girls off the farm; the evenings are spent in formal functions, and the young girls seem to be educated with a certain strictness."

"Of course. Nothing changes for man, my boy. One can merely make life a little easier and pleasanter by leaving the individual free to indulge in any activities that do no harm to any one else. And that is what I have tried to do. I even believe that I am the only legislator for centuries that has adopted the principle of letting people alone."

Philis was moving excitedly on her saddle.

"Then, Sire, it is permitted to do what you please in the harem?

[49] The French is "*seculaire*." There is evidently a double meaning here, which is also permissible in the English word; secular as opposed to religious and secular in the sense of lasting, permanent.

Oh, I've asked another question! If I annoy you, you must tell me—I'm used to it—they scold me all the time."

"No, you don't annoy me," said Pausole. "And I love you just as you are. I hope that in the harem you will do nothing that is not permitted. In any case, it is not a prison. I shall keep you there as long as you are happy. On the day you wish to leave, you will simply say to me: 'Adieu.' "

"And you won't try to hold me? Why, that is mean!"

Pausole turned to Giguelillot.

"You see," he said. "One never loses the habit of complaining, and as soon as one has obtained liberty—"

But Taxis was galloping madly back.

"Ah! Ah! We are going to hear some news," said Giguelillot, ever the malicious chaffer. "Behold milord Chief Eunuch returning from a fruitful hunt. He has found the Princess. Praised be, on earth as it is in Heaven, his clairvoyance, even as his tactics."

"What Princess?" asked Philis.

"The culprits are arrested!" cried Taxis, as soon as he got within the remotest hearing distance.

"What! My daughter? You have dared to arrest my daughter?"

"Oh, how interesting this is!" said Philis under her breath.

"I have not been guilty of such temerity," replied Taxis. "I have caught only the accomplices, who are down there under heavy guard. They are two young peasants from the village; there can be no doubt that they are accessories before the fact in the abduction, for they are wearing the Princess' dress and the clothes of the Unknown."

"They admit it?"

"They deny it; that is precisely what proves them guilty. The true criminal can be recognized by an unmistakable sign: he invariably begins by declaring his innocence. Immediately upon hearing this declaration, the police commit him to jail. To my mind, such evidence is more than a presumption; it is practically conclusive. In fact, I add that, in default of other proofs, I shall be satisfied with that one alone to condemn them."

"Bring them before me," said Pausole.

A young country girl and her brother came into view, clasping each other's hand, weeping and livid with fear.

They stammered out that they had found this pretty dress and this pretty suit in the yard of their cottage; that, as it was the day of Pentecost, they had thought that the Holy Virgin was presenting them with this festal finery as a recompense for having worked so hard all the preceding year; that they had seen a miracle in all of this; this is

to say, something quite natural, and if they had suspected what was awaiting them on the highway, they would rather have thrown the garments in the fire than appear in them for a single second. In a word, their bearing was so humble and so straightforward and so guileless that Pausole, with an indignant shrug, cried:

"You're a fool, Taxis! These children are perfect simpletons and consequently incapable of wrongdoing. Crime is one of the privileges monopolized by intelligence—I mean, at any rate, the sort of complex and clandestine crime that we are engaged in running down. For the honor of my daughter, I hope that she has been abducted by some one possessed of sufficient delicacy not to ask for any assistance from the poor beggars that you have caught."

"Nevertheless, I demand that they be searched," said the Chief Eunuch.

"So be it. But you will find nothing, I'll guarantee."

Taxis, though quite abashed, disrobed the brother and sister with his own hand. The rustics clung together, their fingers nervously probing their nostrils.

He spread out their clothing on the dust-covered embankment beside the road and searched the pockets, the gussets, the lining.

"Nothing?" said Pausole. "I thought so!"

"Four letters," replied Taxis.

And with a deference that did not conceal his pride, he tendered them with a flourish.

"Where were the letters?" said Pausole.

"In the inside left pocket of the jacket."

"Read one of them; any one you choose."

So while Phílis, prodigiously intrigued, guided her horse around behind him in order to read over his shoulder, Taxis recited the text of the first letter:

"My darling Mimi,

"Awake. I shall jangle thy door bell at half after ten. My pet monkey has gone to the country to settle a law suit. I am free as a swallow and I feel so passionately languid that my eyes are closing! If thou art not alone, send me word quickly, no matter by whom! I don my clothes and run to thee!

"Thy sweetheart,

"CAMILLE."

"That's a funny letter," declared Pausole. "Who can this M. Camille be, who idiotically compares himself to a swallow and

possesses a pet monkey, who settles law suits? What sort of notion have old lawyers who sell their practices to marmosets? The thing's almost incomprehensible."

"Oh, say!" whispered Philis in the page's ear. "That is a woman's writing, you know. I can read between the lines—"

"Oh, so?"

"Shall I tell them?"

"No. That would only upset things."

And, twitching the reins to whirl his zebra to the right-about, he turned to the King.

"We are wasting precious time," said he, "in reading this correspondence. There is nothing it can tell us; I have known since last night who is in the Princess' company—"

"I know it too, monsieur!" cried Taxis. "My discovery corroborates all my deductions. These four letters are addressed to 'Mlle. Mirabelle.' I, therefore, affirm once more that this sophisticated meddler has acted as go-between for the intrigue and that the culprit is his friend, who has hired and bribed her."

"I argue," said Giguelillot, "that the actual truth is something very different."

Being certain of the reply that he would receive, he added:

"And it is the real truth that I claim the honor of narrating to the King, if he will grant me right now a three hours' interview, during which I shall give him an account of all the investigations that I carried out yesterday."

"Eh! Why?" said Pausole. "That's quite useless. I am no chief of police, and I haven't the least intention of meddling with your duties. Come to an understanding between you, I tell you. The explanation you gave me yesterday, though brief, has succeeded in bringing you nearer the end. Conduct the case together or each one for himself; it is all the same to me. I shall not intervene until the very end, when I intend to go in person and rescue my daughter from her hiding place, where I hope you will find her—"

"So your daughter ran away, Sire, just like Galatee?" asked Philis.

"It is not the same thing at all," said Pausole.

CHAPTER FOUR

How Taxis Finally Learned the Truth of the Whole Business

I have in my repertory several remedies—Pulsatilla, Natrum, Muriaticum, Belladona—which are efficacious with people who believe themselves damned.

DR. GALLAVARDIN (of Lyons) (1896)

THE two young peasants set at liberty, the whole cortège set off anew in the direction of Tryphême.

Giguelillot would have had no desire to mystify King Pausole, for he loved him quite sincerely, in spite of the fact that he had made a cuckold of him. But his scruples were not so keen toward milord Taxis; hence, as he felt it necessary to gloss over the annoying episode of the letters, he rejoined the Chief Eunuch and spoke to him confidentially.

"Sir, for my part I shall pursue the investigation relentlessly; but I consider it my duty to inform you that the guilty party is unfortunately a coreligionist of yours."

"What's that you say? Oh, what a scandal!"

"Don't be alarmed. It is only in appearance that he is straying from the narrow path of rectitude. Here is the truth of this whole business: a young man, chosen from among the most chaste members of a society which numbers many such, was despatched to Tryphême on a moral mission by a group of Protestants living in Alais."

"Alais is a city beyond reproach," said Taxis.

"You know, my dear sir, I do not share your beliefs," continued Giglio imperturbably, "but I find in spite of myself a certain grandeur, a certain disinterestedness in visits that your friends pay to the courtesans in our large cities, with the undoubted purpose of reforming them."

"There is not the least doubt of it."

"Such was the precise intention of the young man we are seeking. For five months, if I am to believe his own words, he has passed all his nights and even his days in the beds of lost women, going without cease from couch to couch, from mortification to mortification."

"The noble boy!"

"His actual method consists in displaying his own person, which

in fact is without charm, revolting and unclean. He would cast off his clothes, approach the sinful female and declaim in a doleful voice: 'Behold the flesh, even as it is; does it not fill you with loathing?' "

"He converted many?"

"Not a one. The majority protested immediately that they had never touched anything more alluring than his body, and that they loved blonds especially (for he was a blond). Others explained to him with a smile that they were just as fond of second-rate charms and that, in exchange for double price, they would give double measure of passion. Even those who retained enough frankness to tell him what they thought of him, did not feel impelled to insult the rest of their lovers by a display of contempt. These were the youngest ones. In short, he was about to give up in discouragement when, upon learning that the Princess Aline was living not far from the harem, he judged that no soul was in greater peril than hers, so he gained the glory of saving her."

"How did he go about it?"

"That's a secret. At the same time, sir, he furthermore succeeded in tearing a poor dancer named Mirabelle from the lap of sin."

"Ah! Now we are getting down to it!"

"But this dancing girl did not have enough money to return to her own country and forget the orgies of her youth. Her adviser was not at all eager to provide her with funds, for he had a horror of all prodigality. The Princess Aline undertook to do it. And thus she was enabled on the same day, not only to win salvation for herself, but to rescue another lamb from the bottomless pit. That is why she wrote and sent to the destination known to you, by the hand of a lady of honor, the letter that caused you so much alarm."

"That explains everything, in very truth! And these letters that I found—"

"Are the last witnesses to a life of folly. Mirabelle intended to destroy them at first; then she made a gift of them to her good shepherd to prove her sincere repentance."

"But what of these garments—the blue jacket—the green dress—?"

"A donation to some poor peasants. The Princess Aline and her companion were unwilling to dress any longer in anything but black."

Taxis fixed the little page with a look.

"Sir," said he, "(and I shall make my excuses in advance for what I am about to presume to say), I have reason to believe that you would make sport of me if I gave you the chance. But on this occasion, I believe you, indeed I believe you! The truth illumines what you

have just related to me. I feel it! I know it! I cry it aloud! Such things cannot be invented! Henceforth, a frightful combat is destined to be waged in my heart between my moral duty and my official duty. If I protect the Princess, I betray the King. If I deliver her up, I snatch a soul from virtue. On the one side lies treason; on the other, sin. In either event, Hell watches me gloatingly. What shall I do, whither turn? What is to become of me? ... Sentinel! Sentinel! How goes the night?"

Philis' pony dashed into the midst of his despair. Panting and purple, the child was crying:

"Why, you don't see anything! Look ahead of you! There! There! Down yonder, on the road—!"

*

CHAPTER FIVE

How King Pausole Was Received by the People of Tryphême

> *On January 30, 1589, there took place in the city several processions, in which there were a great number of children, as many boys as there were girls, men and women; altogether more than five or six hundred persons, in such wise that one had never seen so fair a sight—thank God!*
>
> DIARY OF EVENTS IN PARIS SINCE DECEMBER 23, 1588

ALONG the road, in the bright June sunlight, a whole cortège was slowly advancing, proclaimed by a babble of voices, songs and instrumental music.

The page and Taxis drew rein.

"Now, what can this mob mean?" said Pausole, who drew up level with them.

"I believe," said Giguelillot, "that Tryphême is preparing a triumphal reception for her good monarch."

"What! A reception? Why, I am making a secret trip! As a matter of fact perhaps I haven't preserved a strict incognito, since I have my crown on my head; however, I advised nobody of my intentions and I am amazed at what I see."

"Tryphême is seven kilometres from the palace; about a quarter

of an hour by bicycle. The entire city knew of your departure yesterday afternoon. It has had the whole time since then to prepare a cordial and elaborate welcome, and I see clearly that we shall have to go through with it, whatever our own feelings in the matter may be."

"It's a nuisance," said Pausole. "I bow to the inevitable. Let us accept with a pleasant smile whatever they intend to saddle us with. Popularity is a grievous burden; but only a fool would disdain it."

In the shady centre of a circular enlargement of the road, the head of the procession halted six paces from the King.

It was formed by two young girls astride Arabian mares with white coats and long tails. The girls wore garlands of peonies on their black hair. Their dark-skinned legs stood out against the gleaming hides of their steeds and their little feet, having neither saddle nor stirrups, hung straight down.

In one hand, each held the reins of satin, and in the other, bore aloft the bamboo pole of a light banner which, stretched between the two, flaunted to heaven this device in silk and silver:

Long Live Our Good King Pausole.

Farther on, two other girls carried a second banner on which could be read:

Tryphême is Happy.

Still a third pair displayed this final inscription:

Tryphême is Grateful.

Beyond them, long lines of women, who carried baskets of flowers on their heads, formed a frame for the musicians and especially for the city administrators: bearded men or shaven elders, all garbed in white duck.

In the rear stamped an enormous crowd.

"Oh! How pretty! How pretty!" said Philis, hand on chin. "All that for us? Just for us two? To celebrate my marriage?"

"Yes," said Pausole. "You have guessed it."

Thereupon Philis cried:

"Long live the women of Tryphême!"

Her piercing voice sounded even above all the fanfares and the crowd responded:

"Long live King Pausole!"

Then the ophicleides,[50] having brought their march to a con-

[50] A wind instrument of low register and of peculiarly harsh and rough timbre. In the modern orchestra it has practically been supplanted by the bass tuba. Imagine a band of ophicleides!

clusion with twelve perfect cadences modulating through every key, burst forth into the Hymn to Pausole, sung simultaneously by a hundred voices.

Pausole listened to this without standing up. A very busy gentleman with nervous hands and feverish eye, having formed the whole procession into a circle, escorted the King to a carpeted throne, hastily erected in the verdant shade by the roadside.

Philis, finding there no seat for herself, sank with a laugh on a small cushion. Diane à la Houppe, not so jealous as the evening before (and with good reason), contented herself with a similar cushion. Thus flanked by his two wives, like a marble statue surrounded by allegorical figures, Pausole spread his arms and bowed, to express to all that he proclaimed himself overwhelmed with honors, and softly seated himself on his throne.

Alas! He foresaw clearly that the official eloquence of the day would have to be resignedly received as a scourge from Heaven.

But the City understood the art of flattering its favorites and the first speech was delivered by a man of the people.

"Sire," said the orator, "we love you well; we, the beggars, the people without a hut to their names. When we are found stretched at the foot of a wall or on the green boards of a bench, in pursuit of sleep or love, they do not send us off to prison to punish us for not being rich. When we have but two sous to buy ourselves bread, the law does not force us to go steal six francs to buy a pair of trousers. When we haven't a sou nor a farthing, we know that we can go into the royal bakeries, where you distribute the bread of life to the ragged beggars driven by hunger. Finally, so long as we do no harm to those who pass by, we have the right to be beggars and not to die in spite of that. That is seen nowhere except in our country. King Pausole is a noble man."

Pausole stretched forth his hand:

"This speech pleases me greatly. Let this poor tramp be given a cottage and a pension with tobacco, good wine and two or three strong girls to warm his bed clothes in December. And give the same to a dozen beggars whom he shall designate of his own free will. I undertake the expense of this provision from my private coffers, and if they produce any children, I shall double their income. Finally, collect all the other strays and present each one with a small gold piece; that is my largess for my joyous entry into my good city of Tryphême."

The crowd gave vent to mad cheers.

A second orator advanced.

"Sire," said he, "we bless you, we petty trades people, for you

leave us in peace, and we sell what we please, without patents or privileges. Nobody representing the government has the right to enter our shops; our matches, our cigars and even our playing cards bear no revenue stamp. If the purchaser disdains our neckties, but feels attracted to the saleslady and expresses his preference on the spot, we can shut our eyes to what passes in the room off the shop, without the State's poking its nose into a case in which neither party appeals to it for support. If, the better to make both ends meet, we declare our intention of dyeing and bleaching the handkerchiefs that we sell, nobody undertakes to triple our taxes to drive us into bankruptcy and ruin twenty-five poor people at one blow. It is to you alone, Sire, that we owe our lot, which Europe envies us. In the name of all petty commerce, I thank Your Majesty."

"My friend," said Pausole, "you will not accept it, if I bestow on you a largess of which you have no need, but I give you six acres of crown land, together with the necessary money to construct a home for petty merchants who have met with misfortune. If I were able to add the least liberty to those you already enjoy, I should gladly do so, but as the code of Tryphême does not give me the right to impose a single restraint upon you (in accordance with my express wish), it denies me at the same time the pleasure of according you any further liberty. Enjoy your privileges to the utmost, since you declare that they afford you true satisfaction, and depose my successor without mercy and without scruple, if he essays to draw a single restricting line upon the infinite expanse that I grant to your acts and motives."

"You will live forever!" cried the people.

"I appreciate your good wishes, though I doubt it," replied Pausole.

A third personage stepped forward.

The tenor of his speech could be read in his eyes, and still more in the sweeping gesture by which he announced the opening of his first period. In the name of the ruling classes, he was about to thank the King for the great benefits which his friends, too, knew how to derive from the great law of Tryphême.

But the King stopped him at the first word.

"Sir, in the first place, it is not for you that I have altered all our customs. If my law meets with your approval, I am truly delighted, but you will agree with me that you were able to attain happiness without the need of my petting your cheek to keep you from weeping. The stupid burden of the laws lies no less upon your heads than upon the meanest of my subjects. Their interests, however, come before yours and I concern myself with you only as an added favor. That does

not in the least prevent me from being sensible to your homage and touched by your gratitude. You are a man, and as all men, you had the absolute right to order your life at your own free will. I have the honor to bid you farewell."

The cheers redoubled.

"Well, well," said Pausole, "that will do. I declare the session adjourned. Is the Chief of the Detective Bureau among those present? I have a word to say in his private ear."

Pausole and his companions returned to their respective mounts. The cortège, the banner bearers, the crowd, the baggage train and the forty lancers followed one another in a straggling array ordained by Giguelillot, who had just assumed command.

Meanwhile, the Chief of the Detective Bureau was drawn to one side by the King and was listening to the following instructions:

"I should have preferred, sir, to pass through the gates of Tryphême without being recognized by anybody, for I am traveling on a mission which can only be furthered by the extreme of mystery and silence. But, since it is now undeniable that my movements are no longer a secret to any one, I have no reasonable motive left for concealing my purpose from you or depriving myself of your devoted service. So please come to my assistance."

"That will be my duty and honor," replied the loyal official.

"My daughter, the Princess Aline, left the palace on Thursday. She had her own reasons for doing so and I shall permit nobody to make them a subject of discussion. A young man is acting as her adviser, companion and protector. I do not know where he has taken her and I should like to be informed on this most important point. I am just as ignorant of his identity, and it would be well for me also to be relieved of this second point of uncertainty."

"Can Your Majesty give me a description?"

"Taxis!" called the King.

Taxis, very pale, appeared before him. Pausole said to him in a low tone:

"The Chief of the Detective Bureau requires a description of the unknown whom we are pursuing—"

"Ah!"

"Well? . . . Answer! . . . Have you got it?"

His soul torn by conflicting emotions, Taxis yet yielded to the habit of obedience, plunged a trembling hand in his pocket and drew forth a paper which he held out.

"The description!" he said to himself. "The description! Ah,

unhappy youth! Noble martyr! They will recognize you at once and it is I who shall have betrayed you!"

The document was couched in the following terms:

Stature	Medium
Hair	Chestnut
Beard	None
Eyes	Gray
Brow	Medium
Nose	Average
Mouth	Medium
Chin	Round
Face	Oval
Distinguishing Mark	None

"That's perfect!" said the Detective Chief. "With that exact description, we can begin our campaign. How old is he?"

"About sixteen," said Pausole.

"Oh!" put in Taxis. "Sixteen, or eighteen—somewhere under thirty. Nobody got a close view of him."

"Then how do you know the color of his eyes?" demanded the officer.

"Oh! Why, they know it.... It would be more exact to say they suppose it—"

"Well, has he any beard, then? The description says not."

"A slight beard—slight—only a slight—"

"That makes little difference, anyhow. Such as it is, the document answers all purposes, and more."

Taxis withdrew in haste.

"Sir," Pausole went on, "please do not annoy me either with questions or reports on progress. Remember, moreover, that your duty is to detect, but not to arrest. As soon as you have succeeded in fulfilling it, you will render a report and deliver it to my page; you see him yonder riding a zebra, beside Queen Philis, who is at the moment talking to him and laughing. If, however, your efforts attain their end between midnight and the following noon, your superior will be my counselor, Taxis, who just left us. For my page holds authority only during half of the twenty-four hours. Farewell. I have told you all that you need to know."

During this conversation, Giguelillot had approached Philis.

"Go away with you," said the child, with a move that was intended to be severe.

"Why?"

"Because I find you nicer and nicer all the time. And it seems that I haven't the right to tell you so."

"Well, don't tell me, then."

"But I'm thinking it just the same! Go away with you! I want to kiss you."

"Oh dear, no!"

"Yes—right there, on the neck, behind the ear, where you gave me such a wonderful kiss yesterday, so nice—! I'm going to put one on my hand for you. Pay attention, now! There! That's for you."

"I felt it."

"So did I. Go away!"

She blushed violently, feeling Giglio's eyes upon her.

They said nothing for a moment.

"But you must go!" she continued. "You make me say horrid things."

"I didn't urge you to."

"Really? Oh, yes, you did! . . . You don't have to listen to me, you know—I never know what's improper."

"Neither do I."

"So—I thought of you all the time last night, after you had gone. . . . May I say that, or not?"

"If it is the truth."

"Oh! I did give you pleasure! You got very much excited. You are very well satisfied. Ah, now! Stay there, I forbid you to follow me."

Divining with a sure instinct that she ought to use this little effect for her dramatic exit, she drove her heels against her little black pony, who galloped over and ranged himself beside King Pausole.

They entered the suburbs.

In all directions, at windows, at doors, on roofs and on trees, an enthusiastic populace was crowding, laughing all at once, waving their arms, throwing bouquets, uttering joyful shouts.

Workmen in colored shirts and blue linen trousers, bourgeois in radiant attire, little naked girls, errand boys and red-stockinged women in striped petticoats, were leaning over the edge of the sidewalks with flowers and green branches.

Shouts were heard, sudden voices:

"I see him!—It is he!—There he is!—Mamma! Mamma! There he is!—Oh, I saw him just as clear! I really saw him!"

Others were weeping:

"Papa! Lift me up! I'm too small!—Where is he?—Let me get up on your shoulder!—Higher! Higher! Still higher!"

A three-year-old, waving a red doll by the foot, yelled:

"Long live the King! King Pausole!"

And Pausole lifted her by the arms to kiss her on both cheeks.

Everywhere, triumphal arches erected overnight stood at street corners, at the entrance to public squares and crossroads. All the windows were hung with bunting. Gay fabrics, leafy branches, waving garlands, roses, covered the houses, the sidewalks, the streets and even the sky. From the city gates to the Town Square, eighteen hundred naked young girls formed a tawny hedge and poured a flood of red roses before the steps of the King and the Queens. The numberless flowers of June fell unceasingly from the windows to the street, like cascades in a mountain torrent.

Pausole bowed, bowed, spread his arms, dipped his head, often lifted a hand which seemed to say: "It is too much!" And his kindly beard and his kindly eyes with their gentle expression bore witness to a wholly paternal affection which delighted the entire enthusiastic throng.

Philis, at his side, held herself stiffly erect, very conscious of her new rights and of the share that she might assume of the public acclamations. Her gaze was fixed and dignified; but in order to put herself in keeping with the fashions that she saw prevalent, she had removed the pin which confined her corsage over her bosom, and letting the lights and shadows play upon her exposed breasts. Very proud she was of their little pink points and their transparent skin as she displayed them to the populace.

Taxis was searching in his Bible for some sane antidote to such a mad spectacle; but chance having led him to the second book of Chronicles, the only texts he could find to confound the wanton licentiousness of his royal master were the still more scandalous debaucheries narrated in Solomon's biography.

Diane à la Houppe was gazing at the mob through the raised curtain of her palanquin.

Giguelillot, backside foremost on his saddle, was holding two girls by the hand, each of whom was leading a farandole in which sisters, friends or strange girls were taking part. What he was saying to them must have been of extraordinary interest for no sooner had he uttered the slightest word, than it was repeated from one end of the line to the other with deafening bursts of merriment. The cortège

went on and on, trailing behind its sternpost, where Giguelillot was the siren, a double wake of laughter.

CHAPTER SIX

Concerning the March That Pausole Made Through His Capital

Two needs which will always band men together in societies; the need of order and the need of self-perpetuation, decided these new inhabitants to demand a leader and women.

BARON DE WIMPFEN, VOYAGE TO SANTO DOMINGO (1789)

THE Prefecture and the City Hall, having come to an amicable agreement to share the honor of the illustrious royal presence, Pausole accepted the invitation to a banquet tendered by the City Council and despatched his baggage to the apartments prepared at the Prefect's home.

To be sure, there was somewhere or other a palace belonging to the Crown, but as Pausole never visited his capital, he had sanctioned the transformation of the ancient residence into a rejuvenated public museum.

Immediately after the repast, Pausole, heartened by the good cheer, and not a bit fatigued by his two days' ride, declared his intention to mount his mule again and make the rounds of the humbler quarters of the city.

Macarie, with a placid air, received him once more on her back and lowered her ears in complete resignation.

The King, Taxis and Giguelillot set off without any escort but their own.

Around them, the people, still excited but not quite so noisy as on the day before, filled the streets and the windows. They shouted continually: "Long live the King!" to which Pausole would reply: "Good morning! Good morning, my friends!"

Some newsboys were running along the sidewalks, crying their sheets still wet from the press:

"Here y'are! The Peace! The Independent!"

"Get your Nudity! Special extry every five hours!"

One little chap committed the blunder of shouting into the ear of Taxis:

"Get your General Directory of Girls for Hire, only twenty-five centimes, with a premium thrown in!"

"What sort of premium is that?" asked Giguelillot.

"Good for one kiss a minute up to next Sunday!"

But the gamin jumped hastily aside to make way for a hired vehicle, in which two Tryphêmian girls, about twenty years of age, stretched at full length the pure lines of their velvety bodies over a broad advertising placard which bore in huge letters the address of a perfumery shop.

"Look at the pretty girls!" said the ever-alert Giguelillot.

"Sinful folly!" growled Taxis.

"Is there a woman living that you could like?"

"There was one once, sir."

"Oh! Tell us the story; that's the most remarkable thing I ever heard."

"What is that!" exclaimed the King, well-nigh serious for once. "Why, you amaze me, Sir Chief Eunuch! You were once in love? What can be the meaning of that?"

"In love? No! The Eternal God is my only love. Your Majesty knows that perfectly; but there was a day when I keenly felt the perfection of the divine workmanship, in the presence of a creature of the Sex. In a word, I once knew a lady who was the complete personification of my ideal of beauty; to be exact, let me say: my physical ideal of moral beauty. You understand me?"

"Not at all; but that makes no difference. . . . Continue."

"So be it. This woman was my father's sole tenant. She was the mistress of a select house of respectable exterior, where the blinds were always decorously drawn; it was, in fact, one of those dens which M. Lebirbe bitterly opposes, but which I for my part esteem highly, for their excellent efficacy in concentrating the impurities of an entire city in one spot, and especially because they are the foes of scandal. On this question, Protestants are unanimous, you know. The kind and worthy woman received me often; my father knew that my high principles and my innate chastity would permit my entrance into her house without my running the slightest danger; on Sunday, upon leaving church, I would go and play with her children. Now, one day, as I was there engaged in imbibing a salutary horror of vice by its actual contemplation, we saw a worthy person enter whom my father highly esteemed, inasmuch as she brought him five thousand francs per annum. She wore no chemise and I felt myself deeply

smitten within. Her majestic obesity above all commanded respect. You would have said that she was carrying six children and that she could have nursed them all, so enormous were her breasts. It was impossible, sir, to behold them without comprehending that maternity is the prime mission and the supreme glory of woman. In fine, to crown her beauty (her moral beauty, I mean), her belly, with a charming modesty, fell down before her even to her knees. Her breast was an enveloping shawl, her abdomen was a skirt; her children could thus look upon her without wrongdoing; even nude, she wore nature's veils."

Giguelillot clasped him by the hand.

"Ah, sir! I am seized by a violent desire to number you among my intimate friends, for we shall never fight over a woman that is passing by. And all other quarrels do not count."

Pausole, who was no longer listening, stopped in front of a shop and pointed to a sign ornamented by a palm: "The Lebirbe Society, First Award of Honor."

"So this is where the Queen of the May lives?" he asked.

"Yes, Sire," said a neighbor.

"Where is the child?" continued the King. "I want to congratulate her. After all, if M. Lebirbe often does give utterance to ambitions whose realization would be fatal to the liberties of the people, he is really a man of common sense and he puts an unerring finger on the very principles that must be spread broadcast. I am sure that he has made a brilliant selection from all the young aspirants for the crown of roses. Where is the lucky Rose Queen? Tell her that I am paying her a visit."

The young girl came down on the run and, as soon as she caught sight of the King, she hastily pulled off her petticoat and shawl, as if she were taking off an apron to go to Sunday services.

She was pretty from head to foot.

"You won the crown?" said the King.

"Yes, Sire, they were very kind."

"You deserved it, didn't you?"

"Many others did, too. I had good luck, that's all."

"But what did you do to be Rose Queen?"

"Sire, my parents are confectioners. All our four bakers asked for my hand and every one of them said that he would kill himself if I didn't marry him."

"That was a difficult problem; how did you settle it?"

"Oh! I didn't want any suicides in my little life. I married all four of them. Girls should always be kind, shouldn't they, Sire? The

men are so unhappy when you turn them down! They want so little, after all! Why refuse them?"

"But if a fifth should appear? You would have to say no—"

"I never said no to anybody, Sire; it's not in my nature. My husbands realized at once that I was nice to them all and that I had no reasons for being disagreeable to other men. Everybody in the quarter considers me pretty. I don't say that I like everybody, but what do you expect? Everybody has to follow out his own ideas of charity. We are not rich at home, I give my little all, I like to make people happy, and at night I go to bed with a cheerful heart when I can tell myself that I have not failed in kindness to anybody that held out a friendly hand to me. That is my little virtue, my very own."

Pausole was still in a revery.

"I should have nothing to say," said he, "if you were not married. Marriage is a voluntary renunciation of liberty. It is possible to revoke this renunciation; but that means a separation—"

"Oh! We don't look so far ahead! I have married father's bakers. They occupy the house; I do the housekeeping. It is to our interest to stay together and, as we all love each other very much, everything is settled nicely. When night is past, when the housework is finished, I am left alone and I have nothing to do. My husbands are at work. Then, like so many others, I could go from door to door and chat with the old crones and gossip about the neighbors. But I find that when one is twenty years old, one can find a better occupation than that. As soon as I have taken off my skirt, I go out with some man or other; that, at least, is not time wasted."

"Well, well," said Pausole. "I am growing old. I see that I am a reactionary and getting behind the times. I shan't condemn you, my girl. At bottom, you are interpreting my laws better than I could have done myself. Up to the present, I have pronounced sentence on all adulterous women, unless they ran away from home. Now at last a god has manifested himself more indulgent than I ever was. He pronounces that liberty must not be renounced, even by mutual consent. Your case is a striking one, my child, for you surpass me in observing my own principles and you have, as you say, your little virtue all your own; and that, perhaps, is the great virtue. Give me your hand; I congratulate you."

Pausole continued his visits; he entered workshops, stores, sheds; he questioned the beggars that were sleeping along the walls; he shook many begrimed hands and saw smiling faces. If anybody complained of his lot, he at least did not lay the blame on the government.

Upon his return to the prefecture, Pausole was subjected to

a second banquet, heard more speeches and shook new hands with a growing fatigue.

As the guests were forming in groups in the prefect's drawing-rooms, which were adorned with portraits of Pausole and his favorite Queens, the Chief of Detectives rushed in. His arrival interrupted the King in the act of dragging Giguelillot by the left shoulder into a retired corner, to talk poetry with him.

Bowing with a deference that was tinctured by pride in an accomplished task, the Chief slowly pronounced these words:

"I have the honor to inform Your Majesty that his august daughter, the Princess Aline, has been located and is safe and sound."

"Already?" exclaimed Pausole.

"Yes, Sire. Your commands have been obeyed."

CHAPTER SEVEN

Wherein the Reader Has the Good Fortune to Meet Our Heroines Again

> *As soon as I had lain down in bed I said to her: "Come to me, little sweetheart." She needed no urging and we kissed each other with tender passion.*
>
> THE HISTORY OF THE COUNTESS DES BARRES (1742)

ALINE and Mirabelle, leaving the Hotel du Coq, reached the city about ten o'clock in the evening.

Tryphême, dormant as it is in the hours of sunlight, comes to life at twilight and remains awake until late at night. All the shops along the crowded streets were open when the two friends mingled with the throng, and Mirabelle profited thereby to don some clothes without further delay. Her nakedness gave her the most unpleasant feeling that she had ever experienced. Although she was elbowing many other girls just as devoid of clothing as herself, her eyes imagined that all other eyes were fixed upon a single portion of her person; an unendurable situation—that is to say, unendurable in the presence of a whole crowd.

She, therefore, entered a shop and explained her wants.

"Oh, madame!" said the shopkeeper, looking her over from head

to foot. "It is not good business for me to say so, but what a pity to put clothes on madame! When you have such youthful breasts, such a shapely abdomen and such perfectly formed legs, how can you bring yourself to hide them?"

"It is a whim of mine," said Mirabelle.

"Then at least wear some diaphanous stuff. I can make madame a lovely Empire gown of white lawn, unlined and very tight around the hips. From a distance, it would look like a dress and at close range it would look like nothing. I have some lawn of the very thinnest texture. You could read a newspaper through it. Does madame care to try it? Or possibly madame prefers black tulle? But that is better for balls."

"No, nothing of that sort. Some batiste, a pair of silk stockings, a linen skirt, ready made, and a blue chemisette; that is all I need. Duplicate the order for my sister, who desires to dress exactly as I do."

"But please—I beg of you!" said the good woman. "Really, it is a sin to obey you."

When dressed, they bought some broad-brimmed straw hats, with ribbons to match. Mirabelle was very fond of these.

Then they left.

"Big sister," said Aline, with a smile, "where are we going to spend the night?"

In spite of Giguelillot's advice, Mirabelle replied quickly:

"At an hotel."

"Why not in the house of which the page gave us the address?"

"That frightens me, all those boys and all those girls together—!"

"Why, they must have lots of fun! Don't you want to go see?"

"Somebody might stop us and ask questions—I feel nervous about it. The hotel is safer."

"The page said just the opposite. And he is so clever! Don't you think he is nice, that little page, Mirabelle?"

"So—you find—?"

"Yes. I just love his eyes!"

"Well, I don't!"

"Oh! I said something to hurt you. You have gone all white—"

"Not at all! I don't share your opinion, that's all."

"Oh, but you are positively shaking! Why did I say that? Forgive me, Mirabelle, I won't say it again. Let's find a little dark corner, right away."

"Why?"

"So that I can kiss you—if you'll let me."

They took to a dark street, and found the desired shelter; behind

a cart full of sand that some one had left standing in the gutter, the two young girls, lip to lip, exchanged loyal tokens of mutual tenderness.

"Come," sighed Mirabelle. "We must hurry; it is late. We need a place to sleep, you know."

"Yes," said Line, "I'm very sleepy still. I've slept so little for the past three days. I feel weak—yes, weak this evening. And I have a pain in the legs. How does that happen? We haven't walked any to speak of."

"Those are growing pains. I'm glad to hear it. It's a good sign, darling."

Aline believed all that she was told and ceased to worry.

On a silent avenue, they halted before a hotel that looked very comfortable and bore the legend: Hotel Whitebreast—Westphalia.

They entered and Mirabelle selected a spacious room with a large bed and broad windows, which assured her a welcome breeze.

They were just stepping into the elevator when the manager, a woman of course, took Mirabelle apart and offered her profound apologies; the hotel had a staff of six men engaged in night service for ladies who were traveling alone; but that very afternoon, there had come a family of six Englishwomen, who had engaged in advance this entire personnel by telegram and thus other guests were perforce deprived of their services for two whole days. The manager offered to provide the best obtainable substitutes by waking the two bellboys, who were rather young, to be sure, but were usually considered very nice. She asked further whether the ladies intended to stay several days, in order to put their names at the head of the list for the first available members of the staff.

Mirabelle let her finish; then she merely replied:

"My sister and I, madame, need no one."

Hardly had the door of their room closed than they undressed wearily. Aline fell asleep making her toilette, with her hands still fumbling in her hair without being able to undo her plaits.

Mirabelle, melancholy but patient and resigned, put her to bed as she would a child.

"Good night, Mirabelle, sleep tight," murmured Line, extending her lips, but unable to re-open her eyes.

"Good night, darling. I shan't waken you."

"You're nice—good night."

Mirabelle slipped down beside her beloved, clasped the little body tenderly between her beautiful jealous legs, cradled the blond head on her breast and only fell asleep long after, long after...

She was the first to awake, in spite of that. She rang, jumped out of bed and stole into the corridor to give her orders in silence.

She wanted flowers—sheaves, armloads, bundles of flowers. She put them everywhere; on the tables, the mantel, the sofas, the chairs, the consoles. She put them behind the picture frames, around the mirrors and even over the hinges of the lofty open French windows. She strewed them on the carpet, she spread them on the bed. Around the dear face of the sleeping Aline, she turned the white pillow into a mass of red and Line was awakened by the powerful perfume.

Her hands clasped under her chin, her eyes and lips smiling, her hair tumbling over her bosom and one breast nestling in her elbow, she called Mirabelle, who knelt upon the floor as if she were praying a *ballet d'amour*.

Aline had a grateful heart. She flung her naked arms around her dear friend's neck and implanted on her cheek several kisses more resounding than voluptuous. Then, gently turning Mirabelle's head until her ear rested on her own lips, she frankly enticed her lover with all the alluring temptations that the girl could desire.

Mirabelle needed no urging. Having displayed for the space of twelve hours all the discretion of which she was capable, she decided that she had reached the extreme limit of her reserve and that she had at last won the right to comport herself as the gods had made her.

Her frank display, for four whole hours, took on endless aspects. After numerous caresses, which shook her to the very depths of her ready, youthful passion, Line declared that she was decidedly exhausted and that she scarcely had the strength to sit up in a chair for breakfast.

She sat on the edge of the bed to eat her meal.

Meanwhile the day was advancing. Mirabelle set the room in order, received their clothes from the maid, folded them carefully in obedience to her early training and, in response to the urgent necessity of planning to meet the exigencies of a practical world, she explored their pocketbooks and took stock of their common resources.

Two days at the village inn, together with purchases of clothing and flowers, had depleted three-quarters of the contents of their little purses.

Mirabelle sketched the possibilities in great anxiety.

"What are you thinking about?" asked Line.

"About you, darling. I must go out—"

"You think about me and so you leave me?"

"Not for long—two hours, perhaps. Even if I don't get back by dinner time, you won't get worried—promise me?"

"Oh! But how bored I shall be! Why do you have to go out?"

"Don't ask me. It's for the sake of both of us. As soon as I am gone, shut the door tightly, won't you? And don't let anybody come in. Since you're tired, you ought to take a long nap while you wait."

She picked up some scissors, cut off one of her dark curls and fastened it to the second pillow with a hair pin.

"Look, my love, here is a little of myself to keep you from feeling altogether alone."

CHAPTER EIGHT

Wherein Events Begin to Come With a Rush

I love a flower, and yet I know not which that gives me pain. HEINRICH HEINE

"My daughter is found?" said Pausole. "That is very fortunate for her. But what a strange hour you have chosen for such a discovery, monsieur!"

"Sire—I am overcome.... We do not exactly choose the—"

"Do you expect me to run around the streets a few minutes before midnight, on a holiday night, in the midst of the gaieties and probably of the excesses that every festive occasion invites and even facilitates, on a mission so intimate, so delicate, so ticklish as a personal visit to the secret apartments of a Royal Highness, with the purpose of recapturing her filial affections? The Princess Aline goes to bed at nine o'clock, my excellent Chief of Detectives. She is certainly asleep by now. I should arrive on the scene like a character in a melodrama who catches the culprits red-handed, and such an idea is wholly repugnant and revolting to me; that should be plain to you. Begone, monsieur, you are a bungler!"

"But, Sire, it was your minister, the honorable lord Taxis, who advised me to—"

"He again! Always that man! I never hear of a single ill-timed, tactless blunder but what he is at the bottom of it! He is getting intolerable and I really can't see any solution except to deprive myself of services that produce only confusion and disturbance. Begone, I

tell you! I am completely upset. Settle the matter with my page. I refuse to take any further part in it."

Giguelillot showed the unhappy man out.

"Why go and talk to the King about it? If you had taken me aside, I should have warned you with one word. Let us see now—tell me what you know. I shall try and arrange things."

The Chief explained that the Princess Aline had been found, not with a young man, as had been believed, but with a young girl somewhat older than herself, in the Hotel Whitebreast—Westphalia. He added that two officers, who had listened outside the door for three hours, had made a most remarkable report on what they had been able to hear. He insisted on an immediate arrest, saying that, at frequent intervals, Her Highness had complained of extreme weariness and that the care for her august health ought, it seemed, to outweigh every other consideration.

"Do you know nothing further?" asked Giguelillot.

"The strange girl spoke of being absent on some errand during the course of the afternoon and this was confirmed by the hotel porter."

"Where could she have gone?"

"She refused to tell; but she returned with two hundred francs of mysterious origin and a ring that she wanted to sell without keeping it a single day."

"That is all that is known?"

"Tomorrow, Monday, from four to eight, she will go out again."

"Ah! That's very interesting."

Giglio thanked the officer and ordered him to remove the surveillance on the next day at four o'clock sharp, and especially to refrain from all communication with either Taxis or Pausole.

He had scarcely finished speaking, when an excited movement began in the crowd around him.

The King had just indicated to the prefect that it was his pleasure to retire to his apartments with the young wife that he had married that same morning.

Giguelillot quickly crossed the salon and approached Diane à la Houppe. Assuming a tender, suppliant air, he bent over her shoulder.

Diane tried to draw her brows into a frown but was unable to prevent a smile. She lifted her face close to his and concisely murmured:

"Yes."

Then, with a repressed laugh, she added with gay bravado:

"You can never say again, you little terror, that you have never heard that word."

He rejoined her an hour later. She was awaiting him on a chaise longue; her black hair spread in great waves down her cheeks and covered her whole back to her hips. He saw only the expression of two burning eyes and two moist lips—

"You see, madame," said he, "I have obeyed you. The Princess Aline has not been arrested."

"Oh, but you're a nice boy! You're a very nice boy!"

"What is my reward?"

"Something of which you're very fond."

She softly shot the bolt, while he extinguished all the electric lamps, save one that he placed on the floor, to shroud the room in the mystery of semi-darkness. He took off his suit of yellow and blue in the bathroom. His eyes lighted on a bottle of perfume; he recognized it instantly and carefully poured some over him.

But when at last he shivered in the young woman's arms, he felt himself almost humiliated, or rather helpless, if one may put it thus. His graceful talents were of no avail. Diane responded to his caresses with such eagerness that all the subtlety of his wonted blandishments became useless. What his system of making love strove to convey to her by delicate suggestion, she impatiently sensed in advance. Thus she disconcerted him time and again.

In the middle of the night, as if to dominate him and hold him, as if to impel from him a solemn response to her passionate caresses, Diane à la Houppe covered the page with her quivering body, planted her elbows on either side of him and stroked him again and again with her supple, swelling breasts, whose fondling touch exuded a tender warmth. Heaving a deep sigh, she said to him with evident effort:

"You love me?"

"Yes."

"How long will you love me?"

"Always."

"Then—I can tell you—a secret?"

"Of course."

"The King told me that he was thinking of letting the pages—enter the harem—and that he would shut his eyes—on what would happen—very probably."

"Marvelous inspiration!"

"Oh, don't laugh!—I am so happy!—We can see each other

again. . . . Now I don't care how soon the fair Aline is captured—since that won't separate us any longer—"

"Darling!"

"But I want you to swear to something."

"Anything you please."

"There are so many women in the harem— How can I know that some one of them won't make advances to you? Remember, Djilio, remember that I was the first to yield—and swear to me that the others will receive no favors from your lips. . . . Swear to me that no one shall embrace you as I embrace you—with my body and soul. . . . Swear, Djilio! Give yourself as I give myself!"

Giguelillot consented without argument. He swore in the manner dictated by tradition and in the tone suited to the occasion. Then he left the beautiful Diane, "to avoid compromising her," as he made her understand—and also to sleep in peace himself, but he refrained from mentioning the latter reason.

The next day, as he was passing along the corridor of the prefecture, a whispered but urgent appeal made him turn his head.

The little face of Philis was venturing timidly from behind a half open door.

The door opened wide, then closed upon the two of them.

"The King is asleep," said Philis. "Stay here—nobody will catch us."

"What! Half past twelve and the King is still sleeping?"

"But he hasn't been asleep very long!" explained the child, with some show of pride.

"And you?"

"I? Why, I can't sleep when I'm thinking of you. I've been waiting for you behind this door for a whole hour."

"What can I do for you?"

"Give me a little lesson, monsieur. . . . You only gave me one and I learned it by heart right away, but I shall never make any progress if you teach me only one rule in four."

Giguelillot congratulated her on her studious tendencies.

However, as he found the rôle he was called upon to play neither pleasant nor becoming, he decided in the interest of his pupil that the second lesson ought to be more practical than the theoretical; and so, consulting his own inclinations rather than the demands of his task, he took advantage in divers ways of the opening offered him and began the preliminary instruction that Philis was heedlessly and persistently demanding, with all the impetuous trustfulness and curiosity of youth.

Philis learned the four rules. Her mind was opening gradually to all the strange new lights of this enthralling science, which was never too difficult, she asserted, for her youthful comprehension. However, at the end of an hour and a quarter, Giguelillot told her as a friend that her delicate little brain had worked enough. She held him back:

"You are going away?"

"Until evening."

"You are going downtown?"

"Yes."

"May I get you to do an errand for me?"

"What is it?"

"Listen. My sister has not always been nice to me, . . . but I am very fond of her all the same—and I am sorry that she has gone away. You are so clever, dear boy—perhaps you can find out her address—and see her for a moment—and speak to her for me. Try to find her—you will please me so much. Keep my secret, I am not angry. But tell me if she is well—and I won't ask for another thing."

"You will receive word this evening," said Giguelillot.

"That is nice. Just another little word. . . . When you speak to her, you will be—you will be quite close—don't kiss her—"

"I promise."

"Even if she looks as if she wanted you to?"

"Young girls never look that way, mademoiselle."

"Oh, then I see clearly that you don't know them!"

Giguelillot lunched very quietly and gave several friends the confidential information that he was setting out on an investigation, in order that the news should be immediately repeated to the King. He then set forth all alone, with not even a cane for company.

In front of the prefect's residence, on the seat of a public bench, he caught sight of the pretty Thierrette who, with clenched hands and bent body, was unconsciously posing as the statue of Silent Discouragement.

He put his hand under her chin.

"Well, my poor Thierrette, you're not getting along, eh?" said he.

"Ah, monsieur! It's too much for me. Really, it's not for lack of trying. I go at it with all my heart, you know that. I turn myself into four women in my efforts to give satisfaction—but there's too much work. I am going to resign."

"Already? What! You, a strong girl, with your muscles and your health, you can't shout: 'Hurrah for the army!' for two days

in succession? What the devil kind of a puny little bird are you, anyway?"

"Puny? I should like to see another girl try it! Monsieur, they are bringing their friends now! A regiment—that's all right—but the whole city! It is too much. So I come to beg of you—if you know a house that's more quiet—even with several men to take care of—so long as there are no more than fifty—"

"There, there! No more weeping! I know what you need. On my own authority, I name you mistress-in-ordinary to the apartment of the page corps. There are scarcely fifteen of us—"

"Oh! If there are no more than that!"

"And we all have many mistresses; but we lack (how shall I say it?) some one who is within range. The King's chambermaids are never alone when we want to pay them a visit—you can never count on them. You now, you shall be our own private little harem. That's settled. Dry your tears."

The peasant girl was overwhelmed with gratitude and remained rooted to the bench.

Leaving her with a gesture of encouragement and good fellowship, Giguelillot first went to buy some cigarettes, then directed his steps toward the spot where he knew he could find Galatee.

It was a little white mansion, of highly respectable appearance and with nothing to betray its inner character.

The page rang. He was led into the presence of a grande dame of middle age and perfect manners, who at once inquired after his preferences; "did he desire her to send word to town for Mme. X., the magistrate's wife, a 'wild woman' with very blond hair, or did he prefer Mme. Y., whose photograph was on the mantel?"

But Giglio went straight to the point and drew in a few precise words the ideal portrait of a young girl that resembled Galatee as Galatee did her own reflection.

He was led to a bedroom and left to himself. After a wait of twenty minutes, designed to make it appear that they were sending a message to a young lady at her home, Mlle. Lebirbe made her entrance, coming actually from the adjoining room.

As soon as she saw him, she uttered a cry, bowed her head and began to weep.

Instead of a triumphant "I told you so!" which would not have afforded her the needed consolation, Giglio went over and took her hand.

"What is the trouble?"

"Ah! How kind you are to come!"

Her tears redoubled. She continued:

"You were right—you spoke to me as a friend. I have been so grossly treated—if you only knew! I was happier at home—"

"You will return to your father?"

"Oh, no! But I want to get out of this place."

"Nobody has the right to detain you. Where will you go when you leave here?"

"I don't know—"

Then, growing still more desperate, she sobbed:

"I am in love."

This time, Giglio failed to understand.

"Did I hear you aright?"

She made no reply.

"In love with whom?"

She hesitated again, smiled wanly, sighed and at last said:

"With a woman—a friend of yours."

Feeling the seriousness of the occasion, the page ventured the question:

"Couldn't you be more precise—?"

"Your friend of the Hotel du Coq—the elder of the two. She came here—she needed money, it seems. Ah! If you had seen my joy when I beheld her! Surely there must be some events guided by the hand of Providence! Surely she and I were predestined to meet again some future day, perhaps never more to part!"

"There can be no doubt of it," said Giguelillot, who began to see through these Machiavellian combinations.

"You know that I am a fool about all this?" went on Galatee. "I now understand all that I saw through my window, with my glasses, which always trembled.... We had a half hour to ourselves in a reception room. I feel sure that she loves another and yet she made love to me—to purify herself, she said, for what she was about to do in this horrible place, where I still am. When I think that she is going to come back in half an hour and that perhaps after that we shall never see each other again—!"

"You will see each other again," said Giguelillot, "this very evening, and forever after."

"I begged her to. She doesn't want to."

"She will change her mind. Believe me now, since you regret not having believed me before. Come over here and write a letter. If you haven't everything you need, send for it."

A slave wearing a bonnet brought a writing set.

"You are going," said Giguelillot, "to write to the girl you are expecting, that you are waiting for her right here."

"Why?"

"First of all, to tell her your feelings toward her—"

"She knows them—"

"No, she doesn't. Nothing means so much as a written declaration. Tell her in your letter all that you have said to her in your thoughts since you left her. And finally—"

"But she's going to come here!"

"Oh! You mustn't mention that. It's very important. You would spoil everything."

"Very well—"

"So, as I say, tell her your feelings toward her and make an apointment for this evening in the Royal Park, under the statue of Felicien Rops." [51]

"She will be there?"

"She will. I pledge my word on it. But hurry up! We haven't much time."

Galatee wrote her letter and handed it to him.

"What address?"

"I'll see that it is delivered."

"And what will come of it?"

"This evening you will be all alone with this young person and you can lead her away wherever you please. I advise you to go to France."

"You're not making fun of me?"

"Why in the world should I be making fun of you? I know what I'm doing, even if I have so far let you believe that I was trying to cast a fine air of mystery about this whole affair of yours."

"Pardon me, my friend. Thank you—thank you with all my heart. Shall I see you again?"

"No. Or at least—not this week. We always see each other again; the world is so small. I am simply getting you out of this place and I'll make no appointments with you. That is the best proof I can offer you of my respectful friendship."

[51] (1833-1898) A celebrated Belgian etcher, painter and lithographer of Hungarian descent.

CHAPTER NINE

Wherein Giguelillot, Too, at Last Falls in Love

The lad is for the maid,
The maid is for the lad,
The things by manikins done and said;
But trifles are, by gad!—
But mystery and fad.
The net the eel is for,
The key is for the door.
The slug is for the shell,
The shell for snail, as well.
The lad is for the maid,
The maid is for the lad.

The fuel is for the grate,
The hook is for the bait.
The deck is for the keel,
The rock is for the eel.
The seine is for the gaff,
The banner's for the staff.
The curry-comb is for the horse,
The reins and saddle, too, of course.
As the nipple for the child,
So the bush for bird that's wild,
So is lad by maid beguiled.

As the cage for bird that's tame,
The stream for duckling is the same.
The pond is for the fish,
The corn is for the dish.
The grape is for the vine,
The maid for lad, in fine.

VIRELAI [52] BY CLAUDE LEPETIT (1660)

When Giguelillot finally reached the Hotel Whitebreast—Westphalia—you can well imagine that he ran there—Mirabelle had just left. He gave three discreet knocks, and waited:

"Who is there?"

[52] Old French song. The original is built entirely on two rhymes: ille and on. This I found impossible to reproduce in English, especially since the subject-matter, being composed largely of names of objects, presented little latitude of wording. I have done the best I could. The naïve tenor, at least, is in keeping with the spirit of the original.

"I."

"You? Papa's page?" said Line very softly, through the keyhole.

"May I come in?"

"I've been strictly forbidden to open the door.... But as it's only you, there can't be any danger."

Opening the door, she raised herself on tiptoe and held out her cheek to him.

"Kiss me," she said. "You have my permission.... On the other cheek, too.... Now, your cheek—!"

She heaved a sigh.

"I have many things to tell you. Sit close to me, here on the couch. What's your name?"

"Djilio."

"Oh, what a pretty name!" said Line.

And the thought occurred to Giglio once more that even if each woman has a different set of stereotyped remarks for each of her different lovers, yet each man hears no more than ten sentences from all mistresses put together, as if they had been secretly rehearsing to recite the same rôle to him.

"What luck!" cried Line. "I was just thinking about you. Let me look at you. I almost had a quarrel with my friend over your eyes. I said I thought them very pretty. She disagreed with me. But I am right and she is wrong, Djilio. They are very pretty, your eyes are."

"Very ordinary," said Djilio. "If they sparkle when they look at Your Highness, you yourself are the sole cause of it."

"Don't call me 'Your Highness'; formality makes me shrink. Call me Line; it's much nicer."

But he failed to address her by any name, for, with an evident confusion that was this time involuntary, he could find no words that seemed to him worthy to be uttered to the fair Aline.

The first day that he had seen her, in that other hotel room in which events had passed with such dizzy rapidity, circumstances could hardly be said to have lent themselves to tender contemplation. The jealous Mirabelle had been there and had not let her presence be forgotten. Worried haste had altered Aline's features. That strange, mad, brief, vertiginous quarter of an hour had become for him but a dim, whirling memory.

Here, however, under her silent eyes and so close to her charming countenance, he saw her in the semblance of her real self.

Diane à la Houppe seemed too sensual to him; Philis, too devoid of tender passions. The one devoured and the other gamboled,

but neither of them possessed in his eyes that steady little flame which compels and holds love by its own self-preservation.

He was holding both her hands and Line was gazing wide-eyed at him. Her little mouth, tiny and arched like a child's, hung parted, as if always ready for a kiss.

He still spoke not a word. He would not have known what to say to her. Vaguely and one by one, the phrases that he had repeated a hundred times passed through his mind. At first he rejected them; then, with a smile almost sad, he realized that, in a different atmosphere, these phrases would no longer have the same meaning. He told himself that his hyperboles and his exaggerated compliments would now become but the simple truth; that the little insincerities of gallantry, pardonable in pursuing an adventure, would prove inadequate for the object of a genuine passion; and he told himself finally that he could, without falsehood, follow his usual methods toward his new-found love, in the knowledge that he would afford her pleasure and in the conviction that it was only her due.

"What is the matter?" Line was saying.

"I love you," he said.

"I love you, too, Djilio; I love you with all my heart. I am very happy when I tell you so."

"But I, I have loved you for a long, long time. You didn't know anything about it, did you?"

"For a long, long time?" repeated Line. "You have loved me for a long time? Why, yesterday morning I didn't know you—!"

"I have loved you for three years," said Giguelillot with a sigh.

"And you never told me?"

"I didn't dare—I was thinking of you, but you were so far above me, like a distant star! How was I to believe that you would ever consent to listen to me? My love seemed so far beneath you.... I thought of you unceasingly, but I could only hope that a day would come, by such amazing good fortune, when I could really speak with you all alone, hand in hand, your eyes on mine—"

Aline was looking at him tenderly.

He continued:

"You don't believe me?"

"Oh, yes!"

"But look; I wrote some poetry about you."

"Poetry? You're a poet? Oh! But I do love poetry! And you made some about me? Truly?"

"Do you care to read it?"

"Do I care to read it! Of course!"

"Here it is."

Giguelillot produced his first volume of verses from his pocket, turned the pages—Agnes—Alberte—Alexandrine—Alfrede—Alice—Alix—Aline.

"Read!" he said simply.

Aline seized the little volume and read eagerly:

> Ah! Love, when of thee in my sad hours of ease,
> Longing I dream, maid of heavenly fires,
> Ideal reborn of my youngest desires;
> Ne'er can you feel how my spirit aspires
> E'er to enfold you with passionate pleas?

Little Aline raised wondering eyes.

"But how am I to know that these verses are for me?"

"It's an acrostic. You know what an acrostic is, don't you? You subscribe to the Young People's Magazine, I suppose? Read the first letters of each verse."

"A, L, I—Aline!" she cried with a smile of joy. "I never read anything so pretty as that! What a genius you are!"

"When I speak of you, Line. It is you alone who inspires me. ... You understand, don't you? I didn't dare write your name in a volume that anybody at all might read. So I concealed it in an acrostic—secretly—for you and for me. Nobody knows it, beside us two!"

Aline cast herself into his arms. He held her passionately to him and, without essaying any ruder intimacies toward her yielding body, he united his lips to hers, which offered themselves very tenderly, almost shrinkingly.

"What!" said Line. "You know that, too? Mirabelle told me she had invented it. ..."

"Somebody taught it to her," said Giguelillot.

"How did you learn it?"

"Oh, I should have discovered it by instinct, the first day that I saw you!"

"Why, then—she deceived me?"

"Yes, she deceived you very prettily."

"It's all the same. She told me a lie. I shall never forgive her all my life. Lies are mean things, aren't they?"

"Nothing could be meaner," said Giguelillot.

Aline meditated, with compressed lips.

"I love you more than I do her," said she.

At this, Giguelillot lost his self-restraint. He picked up little

Line in his arms and carried her over to the bed with his lips still pressed against hers; which was all the easier because she kept murmuring to him:

"Oh, yes! Lie down there—close—close—oh!"

An hour later she was passionately confessing in his arms:

"Mirabelle told me a lie. I can't forgive her. I love you more than her anyhow—much more. I love you as I never loved anybody in the world. Oh! Don't go away! Don't go away!"

"I must."

"But why?"

"The King is waiting for me. Mirabelle will return soon—"

"I don't want to see her any more; it's only you I love, only you! . . . Stay here! I want to fondle you all over and stay with you forever, my fingers twined in your fingers, my lips on yours. . . . I don't want you to go away! Don't leave me, I say!"

Giglio bluntly told her:

"All is lost if we stay here. Mirabelle will get you in her power again in less than an hour. She herself will be captured an hour later and we can never see each other again, for the King will confine you to your apartments in the palace once more."

"Then, take me away, anywhere . . . Are there not other countries where we can live quietly, without anybody being able to torment us?"

Giglio took pity on Pausole:

"You love your father, my little Line. You love him very much. If you go where you can't see him any more, you will soon be very sorry for it."

"Yes, I love papa, but why does he shut me up? If I go back to the palace, I shall not be able to see you again and I shall be unhappy, as I was before. For now I'm enjoying life . . . I was very unhappy. I scarcely suspected—"

"There is a way to settle everything. You remember the house of which I told yesterday? The house where those kind old people take in children that are badly treated and care for them?"

"Yes, 22, rue des Amandines. I think I still remember the address, don't I?"

"Perfectly. Go there at once. And when you get a room to suit you (ask for the girls' ward), I guarantee to bring you out of there without a single restriction on your freedom."

"Forever?"

"Forever."

*

CHAPTER TEN

Wherein the End Draws Nigh

> *Therefore, we must adopt some means to train our children from their earliest years, as Plato says, to rejoice and to be sad according to the demands of circumstance; for this is the true education.*
>
> ARISTOTLE, ETHICS, II, 2

IT was four o'clock on the following afternoon when Pausole and his two ministers were received in the rue des Amandines, where the kindly King, with all his kindliness, had no idea that he was entering in the rôle of father.

Giguelillot, since morning, had exhausted all his zeal and patience; first in persuading the King that this visit would prove full of attractions; secondly, in secretly instructing his hosts how the occasion demanded that they should speak to him.

The director of the Society led Pausole to an armchair, bowed thrice before him and finally read, in a self-satisfied and rhetorical tone, the declamation that follows:

"Sire.

"The Tryphêmian Union for the Rescue of Children defies comparison with similar institutions in adjacent countries, even as Your Majesty's laws prove their unutterable superiority to those of rival nations. Here we receive children that are maltreated, physically or morally, but the moral pitfalls that we are struggling to combat are not at all the same as those dreaded by our excellent confrères in foreign lands, who do not understand as we do the happiness of little children."

"I can believe that without difficulty," said Pausole.

"We consider, even as you, Sire, that the young of our species early acquire some right to liberty. We consider that, by subjecting youth to paternal authority for twenty-one years of its existence, the antiquated laws of Europe are guilty of prolonging in their bosom one of the numerous roots that the slavery of olden times still nourishes in their midst. The control of father over son, as that of husband over wife, is fundamentally, whatever name you give it, the grasp of the stronger on the shoulder of the weaker; it is from days of tyranny that it borrows its boundless and arbitrary power, just as it does its

pretext and its emblem; protection! The motive which induces a free citizen to shut up his children in the horrible jails that are dubbed boarding schools is no different from that which drives him during vacation time, to martyr the poor little one with slaps of the hand or with blows of the ruler. The adult male, who no longer possesses rights over the liberties of other adult males and who no longer can confine or beat a human slave with impunity, everywhere preserves his power over the person of his child, and, as it is a certainty that he will abuse every power given him, so he abuses that one to recompense himself for the loss of the rest."

"Very well thought out, isn't it, Sire?" said Giguelillot.

"Very well, indeed," said Pausole.

"We regard as an abuse of paternal power every attack directed upon the free expression, as well as the exercise, of the child's wishes, so long as these wishes concern only the child itself. We offer in our Home a refuge for all unhappy children, without asking them the nature of their suffering in their own families, but merely pointing with legitimate pride to the fact that they are happy in our bosom. We foster among them in their own rooms the spontaneous desire for study, instead of making them hate every form of work by imprisoning them in a classroom. Their sense of emulation is not lessened thereby, and we have proved many times over that, with a popular teacher, the hope of reward is a better incentive than the fear of punishment. The two sexes, thus educated together, learn to know each other and are consequently less liable to deceive each other cruelly later on. When they feel the impulse to play, they are free there as elsewhere. Nothing is prohibited for them, save only quarreling. They associate with one another freely and form what friendships they please, in the courtyard as in the dormitory. Respecting the laws of nature as well as the principles of man, we do not confine the physical senses of our pupils under an artificial constraint which would lead them into fatal error, and would prove of the greatest detriment to their fragile precocity, in the conviction that, by discouraging love, we should only succeed in rendering it a greater source of peril and by supplanting pleasure with dreams, we should commit a great wrong. That is not education, in the proper derivative sense of the word—"

Pausole interrupted the oration:

"What do you do when these children ask you for advice?"

"Sire, we advise them against centralized attachments, but that is in order to offer them promiscuous attachments as a better exercise of their youthful tendencies. Love—the exclusive love of a single individual—in a word, love such as it is interpreted in literature classes

of French or German universities, is in reality a tragedy which most frequently ends in the raging madness of an Orestes, the pitiable death of a Marguerite or the harrowing suicide of a Romeo and Juliet. The columns of all the big dailies are filled with such catastrophies. Inspired by the duty that is incumbent upon us and by the salutary influences that we are able to exercise, we teach our pupils the dangers of individualized love; to be sure, we bring to bear the tact and discretion that such subjects demand, but we could never forget in all our dealings with our little orphans, that it is a question of their moral health and of their entire future."

"I applaud you with both hands," said Pausole. "Debauch them, monsieur, debauch them! One can see clearly, by what happens beyond our frontiers, the parallel effects of the two great systems. On the one side, among the upper classes, sequestration in the chamber and compulsory continence of youth, contrary to nature and common sense, have produced a race emaciated, feeble, consumptive and anæmic, which today constitutes the effete aristocracy of Europe. On the other hand, whence come the strong workmen, the wielders of hammers, the laundry women? From Charonne and the East End, from Whitechapel and Menilmontant, from the slums of Hamburg and the gutters of Marseilles, in a word, from all quarters where childhood grows up in freedom, mingles and unites by its own instincts, without restraint and without control—!"

Pausole, worn out by his long speech, sought rest by asking:

"Do you succeed?"

"Not always," replied the old gentleman. "However, we are satisfied, by comparison at least. A society in a neighboring country (an activity of which I can speak with all the respect that a charitable institution deserves a priori) has undertaken the mission of liberating only the girls in their charge who are virgin or married; nobody knows exactly why. But here are the figures; within thirteen years, that Society admitted almost two thousand one hundred and fifty children—"

Giguelillot called out:

" 'That's a great many,' said Candide." [58]

The president continued:

"And with this enormous number of marriageable girls, do you know how many they married off?—Two."

Giguelillot muttered:

" 'That's a great many,' said Martin."

[58] A quotation from Voltaire's most celebrated work, *Candide or The Optimist.*

But the president preserved a grave demeanor.

"We, on the contrary, within seven years and with eight hundred and forty-six girls, have debauched eight hundred and twelve of them. I dare say, considering the respective aims of the two Societies—"

"Oh, yours wins the prize," declared Pausole. "There's no doubt of that."

"Your Majesty deigns to recognize our efforts?"

"Not only do I approve of you, but I will subsidize you," said Pausole. "I subscribe you sixty thousand francs in my budget of Internal Affairs. If that sum proves insufficient for all good works within the scope of your undertaking, it shall be augmented."

The old gentleman made a profound bow and stammered in a suddenly loud voice:

"The benevolent reception—that Your Majesty—the approbation, I mean—so flattering—that our ideas receive from you—our experiments—our attempts to realize—ah—encourage me to—"

"Well, speak, speak!"

"Sire, the communication that I have to make to you—is of so confidential a nature—that I do not believe that I have the right to impart it under these conditions—"

"Withdraw, my friends," said the King to his counselors. "So now, speak, sir; we are alone."

"Last night, at seven o'clock—we saw some one enter here—an august visitor, Sire, Her Highness the Princess Aline."

Pausole jumped up.

"Here? My daughter? In this house of assignation and perdition?"

"She requested aid," murmured the old gentleman, well-nigh fainting.

"Against whom?"

"Against her destiny, Sire, against her destiny. She accuses no one."

"She is alone?"

"Quite alone."

"Tell her, then, that I am waiting for her! She will throw herself into my arms!"

"Yes . . . but before that . . . she demands that you assure her . . . the liberties which you just now found so equitable, Sire, and which you declared were rightfully offered to the youth of both sexes. . . ."

"Well, well! What does that signify? Where is my daughter? I intend to see her at once."

They sent to request her presence.

As if to affirm by an external token all the liberties that she had already assumed, Line had clothed herself again in the national costume

of the girls of Tryphême; the brightly colored kerchief over the hair and the slippers.

She took several steps, very proud of her symbolic nudity, but also a little timid.

Pausole took her in his arms.

"My little girl! My little baby! Why did she run away!"

"Because I met a girl that I could love, papa, and because in the palace you forbade me to love any one."

"With whom did you run away, then?"

"With a dancing girl of the opera."

"With a dancing girl? Why, the whole business means nothing at all, then?"

"Ah!" said Line.

Pausole kissed her again.

"And now you want to go home with me, don't you? Won't you give me a kiss?"

"Yes, papa. I say: 'Yes' on the spot. I know that I shall never leave you again; but I also know that you are going to whisper something in my ear and on the spot just as I did; something very nice."

"That I love you dearly, eh?"

"And that you will leave me free."

"But why that?"

"Because you love me dearly."

Pausole, much moved, looked at his daughter. For a long time he held his peace, as if a profound and almost painful struggle were taking place in his breast between the warring counsels of his paternal affection. Then he said, a little sadly:

"Well, we shall see, my child. I love you enough to make you happier than myself."

*

EPILOGUE

Sat prata Biberunt (*The meadows have drunk their fill*), *as old Horace says.*

LE TEMPS, Nov. 20, 1900

UPON his return to the palace in the evening, after a very fatiguing journey, which lasted almost an hour and a quarter, King Pausole passed three days in silent meditation.

After his departure, Tryphême resumed its normal life. The young girl, crowned by M. Lebirbe, continued to set every day the

commendable example which had won her the palm. Mirabelle, torn by despair upon learning that Pausole had recovered his daughter, nevertheless betook herself that night to the statue of Felicien Rops, where she knew she would meet Galatee. That same evening, the twain accomplished their union unto the dizzy dreams of supreme sensation and they did not realize of what a loyal and tender love this long tearful embrace was knotting the first strands of remembrance.

Giguelillot in his return had dashed over the road with four bounds of his little zebra, for he surmised that he was equally incapable of concealing from the fair Aline the new and strange emotions with which she inspired him, and of expressing to the beautiful Diane those with which she did not inspire him.

During the three days when the King, alone with his own good conscience, debated within him on moral questions, Line and her lover the page unfailingly found themselves every night before the mirror of the Nymphs, which was ever filled with moonlit waters and darkling foliage.

"It's too bad," Line would say, thinking of Mirabelle.

"No," Giguelillot would say, "for she knows nothing about it."

And he could forgive himself all that was mean-spirited in this utterance by the consciousness of all that it offered of absolution and consolation.

At last Pausole, on a sunny morning when Queen Alberte had just been the recipient of his courteous but somewhat distraught favors, came out of the palace and ordered his mule Macarie.

At the same time he made proclamation that all the inmates of the royal residence, Queens, lackeys and ladies of honor, ministers, pages and grooms, were to meet in council assembled before the cherry tree of justice, to hear the discourse that he would see fit to deliver.

When he was seated there in his floating red robes with his sceptre and golden ball:

"Ladies and gentlemen," said he, "many principles that we know from the teachings of philosophy to be beneficial are hard to apply to our own conduct. I have long believed that I should be permitted to maintain liberty among my well-beloved people, without experiencing myself, in certain arduous cases, the distress which that liberty often causes. It seemed to me that in a territory which numbers five hundred thousand homes, I could without great harm make an exception of one, and only one, in which a certain authority might still be kept alive. It was quite natural that this home should be my own and that I, the dispenser of liberties, should not be the first to suffer from their possible excesses."

Hereupon the King paused, picked a delicious cherry, or rather broke the thread that dangled it within reach of his fingers and, while sucking gently the meat of the warm and juicy fruit, he observed with a somewhat melancholy eye the impassioned agitation of the multitude who were listening to him.

"But," he continued, "the King himself was his own teacher. I have just returned from a secret journey, during which I learned a great deal, about human nature in general as well as about my own duties to mankind. I have seen free and happy throngs whose happiness was so deeply rooted in freedom that I can no longer doubt that I have sown this grain in its most cherished and fruitful soil. It appeared to me that in my own household people were not so happy because they were not so free, and that fact in itself was sufficient to prevail upon me to dictate a sort of abdication—"

Loud shouts prevented him from finishing:

"No! No! Long live the King!" voices were crying. "Abdicate? We won't let you!"

Pausole held forth his hand.

"I shall remain your head, or at least, the arbiter chosen by your common consent, to assure the maintenance of the rights which are the appanage of all; and, for my own part, I shall not change my habits of existence, which I have recognized as necessary to my tranquillity of spirit. But henceforth I lift the relative restrictions which weigh upon my household. Taxis, my friend, return to France, from whence you came to us like the raven on the winds of winter. For the future, my wives and my daughter shall conduct themselves according to their inclinations. I emancipate their charming heads, which your own rendered more charming still by its hideous contrast."

At these words, there was perhaps less of joy in the throng than of tender affection; and, like children who receive magic gifts without yet caring to touch them, the women crowded around him who was so good to them, and came with the fair Aline, devotedly, to kiss his hands.

*

HERE endeth the extraordinary adventure of King Pausole who, to recover his daughter, undertook the onerous task of traversing seven whole kilometres on muleback, from his palace to his metropolis.

This tale will have been read in the spirit in which it was meant to be read, if, from page to page, the reader has been wise enough never to mistake Fancy for Dreams, nor Tryphême for Utopia, nor King Pausole for the perfect Man.

THE TWILIGHT OF THE NYMPHS

TRANSLATED BY
MITCHELL · S · BUCK

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INTRODUCTION

READING these pastels by Pierre Louÿs, I was reminded of a remark made by a reviewer of a volume of my own prose poems, some years ago: "They induce a luxurious stupor against which the mind eventually rebels." I was never quite sure of the exact intention of this remark: but, although the two works are, alas, vastly different, it is not impossible that a similar thought might also occur to some readers of the present volume.

These charming combinations of fantasy, symbolism and mythology are far too delicate for casual reading. In the broad light of the American day, the delicate nuances of dew-tipped grasses and shadowy waters, the pale twilights over fields of asphodel, seem exotic and unreal. And, in spite of ourselves, our mind does, in a way, rebel, possibly resenting our weakness in permitting such fanciful dreams to absorb our attention or, possibly, because of our English heritage which so often makes us feel slightly ashamed at having allowed our emotions—particularly the more delicate ones—to be played upon.

It is to be regretted. We need more dreams and more dreamers. The soft voices of the nymphs would benefit and calm us infinitely more than the loud, shameless voices of the young females found between the covers of so many of our present-day books.

But we are, just now, in a state of transition: in many circles, the awakening of the national self-consciousness is well under way. We are more interested in the furniture used by our forefathers and in their direct heritage to us than we are in the more subtle heritage from that civilization which died out two thousand years ago. One of the inevitable accompaniments of such a period will be a large number of books which, in the enthusiasm of the moment, will be unduly localized. And, before this impulse will have reached its balance, no doubt, in the usual manner of reformations, it will have swept aside most of the European literary influence.

With the reaction, when it comes, the scope of our vision will again broaden, and we will turn once more to the best of the foreign authors: but with more discretion, then, and without the blind idolization of past decades, to supplement, but never again to dominate, our own literature and thought.

In that future day, Pierre Louÿs should be remembered. Aside from his other works, these pastels, intangibly beautiful, pale and shadowy as the realm described by Dionysos, have too enduring an appeal to be ignored, even by the unknown Americans of posterity. And the gods and the nymphs, although they may have passed from the earth, are immortal in literature.

Pierre Louÿs retells these legends so beautifully that, under the spell of his relation, one almost loses sight of the extent to which their consummate literary craftsmanship reveals the master of literary technic no less than the imaginative artist. The pastels are not so sensational as some of the Author's other works but, in a general sense, they are the most delicate and the most sympathetic of all his writings.

As for the actual fables, those of Leda, who was visited by Zeus under the form of a swan, and of Danaë, for whom the same lover appeared as a shower of gold, are well known, together with the other amorous adventures of the Father of the Gods, whose passion for virginity seemed in no way appeased by Hera's special arrangements to renew her own once each year. The fable of Danaë, and that of Ariadne, as usually related, do not end quite so disastrously for the heroines.

Byblis is one of the lesser known myths, her affection for her brother, which Pierre Louÿs certainly handles with great delicacy, apparently being considered unsuitable for the ordinary, popular Mythology.

"The House upon the Nile," the one story without a mythological foundation, is really a variation on the theme of the Author's famous romance, "Aphrodite."

With the exception of "Danaë," which was not published in book form until it appeared in the Collected Edition, these stories appeared at intervals between 1893 and 1898, each as a small, separate book. These little paper-covered booklets are now very scarce and, partly on this

account, the Collected Edition was published, only a few months before the Author's death.

From this Collected Edition, the present translation has been made. The text presents some slight variations from that of the original editions but, in all such cases, has been followed as doubtless representing the matured thought of the Author. According to a note in the French edition, he had purposed, but apparently never written, two additional pastels, with the idea of forming a collection to be called "The Heptameron of Amaryllis."

The collection as it stands, ends with the story of Danaë, without any conclusion or the reappearance of Amaryllis and her companions, the Author's work ending with the words "any longer here." In order to cover the natural comment on Danaë's adventure, and to soften the ending of the collection as a whole, I have ventured to add a short conclusion, a considerable liberty, but one which I trust may be forgiven, particularly as the intention in the ending of Amaryllis' relation is somewhat obscure.

MITCHELL S. BUCK

Philadephia.
New Year's Day 1927.

LEDA

or The Glory of Blessed Darkness

One could no longer see.

An invisible Artemis hunted beneath the crescent moon inclined beyond the black branches which swarmed with stars. The four Corinthians remained lying upon the grass near the three young men; and one scarcely knew whether any would venture to speak again, so silent was the hour.

Stories should be told only in bright daylight. When the shadows have entered, one can no longer hear fabulous voices, for the wandering spirit settles itself and communes enchantingly with itself.

Each of the outstretched women already had a secret companion which she created charmingly to the real image of her childish desire. However, they all opened their eyes in the darkness when solemn Melandryon spoke these first words:

"I will relate to you the history of the Swan and of the little nymph who lived upon the banks of the river Eurotas. It is to the glory of blessed darkness."

He half raised himself, resting one hand among the grasses, and began to speak thus:

I

In those times, there were no tombs beside the roads nor temples upon the hills.

Few men existed; no one spoke. The earth abandoned itself to the pleasure of the gods and assisted the birth of monstrous divinities. Those were the times in which Echidna gave birth to the Chimera and Pasiphaë to the Minotaur. Little children paled in the woods, frightened by the flight of dragons.

Upon the humid borders of the river Eurotas, where the woods were so dense that one never saw the sunlight, there lived an extraor-

dinary young girl who was bluish like the night, mysterious as the slender moon and soft as the Milky Way. Because of this, she was called Leda.

She was really almost blue for, in her veins, ran the blood of the iris and not, as in yours, the blood of roses. Her nails were bluer than her hands, her nipples bluer than her breasts; her elbows and her knees were wholly azure. Her lips shone with the color of her eyes which were blue as the deep water. As for her flowing hair, it was sombre and blue as the nocturnal sky and quickened so along her arms that she seemed to have wings.

She loved only the water and the night.

Her pleasure was in walking over the spongy fields along the shores, where one feels the water without seeing it, and her naked feet shivered with pleasure at the hidden moisture.

For she never bathed herself in the river, fearing the jealous naiads; and beside, she did not wish to give herself completely to the water. But how she loved to get wet! She would dip the extreme ringlet of her hair in the rapid current and then trail it in slow circling designs over her pale skin. Or she would take a little of the fresh water in the hollow of her hand and let it run between her young breasts and lose itself in the fold of her rounded legs. Or else she would lie extended on the damp moss and drink softly from the surface of the water, like a silent hind.

This was her life; and the thought of the satyrs. These were sometimes seen by accident, but they always fled away in fright, for they took her for Phœbe who was severe to those who saw her naked. She would have liked to talk with them if they would have paused near her. The details of their appearance filled her with amazement. One night, when she had gone a little way into the forest, because rain had fallen and the earth was flooded, she had seen closely one of these demigods, asleep; but she, in her turn, had taken fright and had withdrawn quickly. Afterward, she would pass there at intervals, uneasy over things which she did not understand.

She began to regard herself also, and found herself mysterious. This was a period when she became very sentimental and wept in her hair.

When the nights were clear, she looked at herself in the water. At one time she thought it might be better to gather and roll up her hair in order to bare her neck which, she perceived, was pretty under her caressing hand. She chose a supple rush to hold the blue knot of her hair, and made herself a drooping coronal with five large aquatic leaves and a languishing water lily.

At first she took pleasure in walking about thus. But no one saw her, for she was alone. Then she became unhappy and ceased playing with herself.

Now, her spirit did not know it, but already her body awaited the beating of the Swan's wings.

II

ONE evening, when she was scarcely awake and reflecting on resuming her dreams, because a long stream of yellow day still gleamed beyond the night of the forest, her attention was drawn by a noise in the near-by reeds, and she saw a Swan appear.

The beautiful bird was white as a woman, splendid and roseate as the day, and radiant as a cloud. He seemed the very spirit of the noon-day sky, its form, its winged essence. That is why he was called Zeus.

Leda watched him as he moved with spread wings. At a distance, he circled about the nymph, gazing sideways at her. After that, he drew closer and, raising himself on his wide, red feet, stretched the undulous grace of his neck as high as he could, over the bluish young thighs, to the soft fold of the hip.

Leda's astonished hands gently touched the little head, enveloping it with caresses. The bird quivered in all his feathers. In his deep, soft wings, he clasped and bent her naked legs. Leda let herself fall upon the ground.

She put her two hands over her eyes. She felt, not fear, nor shame, but an inexplicable joy; and her beating heart lifted her breasts.

She divined nothing of what was going to happen. She did not know what could happen. She understood nothing, not even why she was happy. She felt, along her arms, the supple neck of the Swan.

Why had he come? What had she done, that he should come? Why had he not flown away like the other swans on the river or the satyrs of the forest? From her earliest memories, she had always lived alone. Therefore she had not many ideas for thought and the happenings of this night were so disconcerting . . . This Swan . . . this Swan . . . She had not called him, she had not even seen him, for she was asleep. And he had come.

She was no longer afraid to look at him, and did not move for fear of making him fly away. She felt, upon her hot cheeks, the freshness of his beating wings.

Soon he seemed to recoil and his caresses changed. Leda opened herself to him like a blue flower of the river. She felt between her cold knees the warmth of the bird's body. Suddenly she cried:

"Ah! . . . Ah! . . ."

And her arms quivered like pale branches. The beak had penetrated her, frightfully, and, within her, the head of the Swan moved violently, as though he were deliciously devouring her entrails.

Then she gave a long sob of abundant felicity. With closed eyes, she let her burning head fall backward, tore with her fingers at the grass and shivered in the air her little, convulsed feet which finally spread themselves out in the silence.

For a long time, she remained motionless. At the first movement she made, her hand met, upon her, the ensanguined beak of the Swan.

She sat up and saw the great white bird against the clear sheen of the river.

She wished to arise; the bird obstructed her.

She wished to take a little water in the hollow of her hand and cool her joyous pain; the bird stopped her with his wing.

Then she took him in her arms and covered with kisses his tufted plumes which bristled up under her mouth. Afterwards, she stretched out on the bank and slept heavily.

The next morning, at the break of day, a new sensation awoke her suddenly, and it seemed to her that something detached itself from her body. And this was a large, blue egg which had rolled in front of her, gleaming like a sapphire.

She wished to take it and play with it or perhaps to bake it in hot embers as she had seen the satyrs do, but the Swan seized it in his beak and placed it under a cluster of bending reeds. He stretched his wings over it, regarding Leda fixedly, and then, in a straight flight toward the sky, slowly mounted so high that he disappeared in the brightening dawn with the last pale star.

III

LEDA hoped that, at the next rising of the stars, the Swan would return to her, and she awaited him among the reeds of the river, near the blue egg which had been born of their miraculous union.

The Eurotas was peopled with swans, but this one was no longer there. She would have recognized him among a thousand and, even with her eyes closed, she would have sensed his approach. But he was no longer there; of this she was quite sure.

Then she removed her coronal of water leaves, let it fall in the stream, shook down her blue hair and wept into it.

When she wiped her eyes and looked about, a satyr, whose steps she had not heard, stood there.

For she was no longer like Phœbe. She had lost her virginity. The satyrs were no longer afraid of her.

She bounded to her feet and drew back in fright. The ægipan said to her, gently:

"Who art thou?"

"I am Leda," she replied.

He was silent for a moment, then resumed:

"Why art thou not like the other nymphs? Why art thou blue like the water and the night?"

"I do not know."

He regarded her in great astonishment.

"What dost thou here, all alone?"

"I await the Swan."

And she looked towards the river.

"What swan?" he asked.

"The Swan. I did not call him, I had never seen him, and he came. I am so astonished. I will tell thee."

She related to him what had happened, and she parted the reeds to show him the blue egg of the morning.

The satyr understood. He began to laugh and gave her coarse explanations which she stopped at each word by putting her hand over his mouth; and she exclaimed:

"I do not wish to know. I will not. Oh! Oh! thou hast told me—Oh! is this possible! Now I can no longer love him and I shall be unhappy enough to die."

He seized her by the arms, passionately.

"Do not touch me!" she wept! "Oh! how happy I was this morning! I did not know how happy I was! Now, if he returns, I shall no longer love him. Now thou hast told me! Ah, how wicked thou art!"

He clasped her suddenly and caressed her hair.

"Oh! No! No! No! . . . No!" She cried again. "Oh! not thee! Oh! not that! Oh! the Swan! If he should return. . . . Alas! Alas! All is ended, all is ended."

She remained with open eyes, without weeping, her mouth open, her hands trembling with fright.

"I wish I could die. I know not even whether I am mortal. I wish I could die in the water, but I am afraid of the naiads and that they would carry me away with them. Oh! What have I done!"

And she sobbed loudly upon her arms.

But a grave voice spoke before her and, as she opened her eyes,

she saw the god of the river, crowned with green grasses, who stood half out of the water, leaning upon an oar of bright wood.

He said:

"Thou art the night. And thou hast loved the symbol of all which is bright and glorious, and thou hast united thyself to it.

"From the symbol is born the symbol and from the symbol shall be born Beauty. It is in the blue egg which has come forth from thee. Since the beginning of the world, it was known that she would be called Helen; and he who shall be the last man shall know that she lived.

"Thou hast been filled with love because thou hast known nothing. That is the glory of blessed darkness.

"But thou art also a woman and, on the evening of the same day, man also has impregnated thee.

"Thou bearest within thyself the shadowy being who knows nothing of itself; whom its father has not foreseen and whom its son would ignore. I shall take the germ in my waters. It shall remain in nothingness.

"Thou hast been full of hatred because thou hast learned all. And I will make thee forget all. This is the glory of blessed darkness."

She did not quite understand what he had said, but she thanked him, weeping.

She entered into the bed of the river and purified herself there of the satyr. And, when she returned to the bank, she had lost all remembrance of her sorrow and of her joy.

MELANDRYON ceased speaking. The women remained silent. However, Rhea finally asked:

"And Castor and Polydeuces? Thou hast said nothing of them. They were Helen's brothers."

"No. That is a wrong legend, they were not concerned. Helen, only, sprang from the Swan."

"How knowest thou?"

"..."

"And why sayest thou that the Swan wounded her with his beak? That is not in the legend and it is not probable.... And why sayest thou that Leda was blue like water at night? Thou hast a reason for saying that."

"Didst thou not hear the words of the River? Symbols should never be explained. They should never be penetrated. Have belief. Ah!

Do not doubt. That which figures as a symbol hides a truth, but it is not made manifest for, otherwise, why should it be symbolized?

"Forms should not be rent, for they conceal only the Invisible. We know that there are adorable nymphs enclosed in the trees and that, when the woodcutter opens them, the hamadryads are already dead. We know that, behind us, there are dancing satyrs and divine nudities; but we should not turn: all would have already disappeared.

"The undulous reflection of the springs is the essence of the naiad. The buck standing amidst the goats is the essence of the satyr. One or another among you is the essence of Aphrodite. But it is not to be spoken, it is not to be known, one should not try to understand it. Such is the condition of love and of happiness. That is the glory of blessed darkness."

ARIADNE

or The Road of Eternal Peace

Now, having come to a cavern, the most profound, the most sombre of all the forest, so deserted by beasts and men that the very silence seemed to have smothered itself and given place to something still more inexpressible, the Corinthians recoiled a little, raising their hands to their temples, opened their eyes without seeing and, without speaking, opened their lips.

Trembling, for they felt themselves allured by the darkness, they pressed close to one another, as the poor little souls of the dead press together before the portal of Hades in an effort to remain without.

The voice of Thrases drew them from their benumbed terror.

"Assuredly," he said, "this is one of the entrances to Tartarus; but there is no need to be frightened; none of you will see the black torches of Persephone before the day fixed by the Keres. Moreover, that is a happy day which should be welcomed with joy . . ."

"I do not wish to die," said Rhea.

"O Thrases, what art thou saying?" asked wise Amaryllis. "For death troubles me also, and my soul cannot remain indifferent when I dream of the tomb."

But Thrases did not argue, in order to avoid the weariness of too obvious reflections, and, for his own pleasure, involved his thought in an obscure and subtle story.

The Corinthians had seated themselves on a long block of polished rock. He, meanwhile, remained standing near Clinias and Melandryon, the first too distracted to understand, the second too wise to listen.

He began slowly, as though he feared to speak, and his phrases were short, his voice hesitating and feeble.

I

A FOREST of cedars.

Evening.

Seven young men and seven young girls advanced, holding each other by the hand.

They had come from Attica, upon a ship with black sails.

And one of them was Theseus, son of Ægeus, son of Pandion, son of Cecrops, son of Erechtheus.

Green palms! coronals of oak leaves! cries! triumphs! laurels! outstretched hands! accompany the Heroes . . .

Accompany the Heroes . . .

They had come from Attica, upon a ship with black sails.

And all, during the funereal journey, had pledged themselves, two by two, to find each other again, beyond death, among the indolent fields of asphodel.

Beyond the horrible death for which they were destined by the human Bull, fruit of the shame of Pasiphaë.

They had pledged themselves. Yet two among them remained apart: the hero Theseus, confident in his hands, and the virgin Myris who walked near him.

And evening ascended over the earth.

Under the horizontal foliage of the cedars, through the thin plantings of the forest, the long rays from the west ran out like the blades of swords, impalpable and transparent.

The condemned ones, two by two, slowly traversed these great weapons of the sun. They knew exactly how many they would meet before reaching the entrance of the Labyrinth. And after the last would come the terrible night.

At least, this they believed, but Theseus, and Myris like him, had other certainties.

They advanced.

They advanced.

At last they arrived.

But they had not yet passed the last ray of the sun when they heard, behind them, a quick step on the dead leaves.

They turned: there stood a woman.

She was of large stature, well shod with tight leather straps and clad in the short tunic of the followers of Artemis. The white cloth, fastened at the shoulders with two clasps of beaten gold, was drawn in at the girdle, leaving her dainty knees uncovered. A silver diadem gleamed beneath the rich ornament of her hair, of which part was disposed in plaits and part tucked up in a Laconian knot, with more grace than artifice. And in her eyes, so brown and yet so clear, such high spirit shone that she seemed to all to be the princess of Crete, Ariadne, daughter of Minos and granddaughter of the Sun.

She made a sign: Theseus approached. She made another sign: the others turned and drew back a little to an opening which still flamed with the lingering red of the west.

She, still panting and with hot cheeks, smiled, half closing her eyes. She extended her arms and drew aside the heavy, dark curls on the Hero's temples . . .

"Thou art handsome," she said, happily.

He remained silent. She ignored this, and continued:

"Ah! I know well that thou goest to slay the Minotaur and that all the Gods will lend their weight to thine arm when thou shatterest that wild, surly muzzle upon the stones. But how wilt thou come out from that inextricable crypt? Triumphant, and holding upraised the disgusting head of the Recluse, thou wouldst die in the enclosed passages, between two walls always the same; and that which Strength should have accomplished, dull Forgetfulness would allow to perish. Thou knowest not that this palace is a labyrinth of stone and that those who enter it cannot release themselves. But I have thought of thee, son of Pandionian Ægeus, and, in the space between my breasts, I have brought thee safety."

She slipped her hand into her tunic and drew out a green ball.

"See," she said. "This is my Miletian thread. It is fine like one of my hairs and as long as the circuit of the island. With it I could weave green shifts for all the nymphs of this forest or a floating veil for the sea. Take it. Thou wilt unwind it all before reaching the distant dwelling of the Monster. And thou wilt follow it in returning to the day."

She turned toward the victims.

"Go," she cried. "You are saved."

They fled. Myris did not move.

Theseus accepted the ball of thread and asked:

"Who art thou?"

"I am thine."

"Can I not name thee?"

"Ariadne, sevenfold daughter of Zeus by the grandparents of my father who is Minos, King of Crete. But if some other name pleases thee, say it and it shall be mine."

As though he were establishing a landmark, he gazed into Ariadne's eyes. Then, without speaking again, he entered the Labyrinth.

"Theseus! Theseus!" she called.

"Theseus, stop! I cannot wait; I want to go! I want to see thee! Oh! I am eager to assist in thy bloody victory. Together! It is I who will carry the thread, and when thou hast overthrown the Beast I will kiss thy fair hands bruised by his horns, and thou shalt be my husband upon the field of thy triumph."

When she followed his steps into the Dedalian night, she fastened

the pendent end of the green thread to a rock; but when she emerged, in the arms of the Hero, letting the thread run through her closed hand, the anchor which connected them with life was the poor body of Myris, strangled.

II

BETWEEN the forests and the sea.

The morning.

A little beach, rounded, pure and yellow.

Ariadne, sleeping on the Isle of Naxos, awakened without opening her eyes, for she wished to recall in her spirit all that had happened since that first day when the sight of Theseus had brought to birth within herself a second, unknown Ariadne.

The cedars—the blades of sunlight—the opening of the abysmal edifice—the victims clad in white—the Hero without weapons or helmet—the thread—the anchor—the pathway—the sharply-turning circuits—the interminable descent—the interminable ascent—the Beast—the slavering nostrils—the horns—the monstrously great hands—the short struggle—the blood upon the earth—the return through the shadows—the adorable return of day—the dew upon the tips of the grasses—the evening upon the tops of the cedars—the leisurely journey—the departure—the first movement of the vessel—the fragrance of the sea—the color of the night—the freshness of the dawn—and the second day—and the second twilight—and the landing.

She knew that she had slept close to the Slayer, side by side with his glory, and she awakened in perfect felicity before the horizon of a life equally happy and certain.

Her hand stretched out. Her hand fell upon the earth. Her hand searched, turned, and drew back, astonished. Everywhere grass or sand or cold flowers or mud.

She called:

"Theseus!"

She opened her eyes and her mouth, raised herself, lifted her two arms; and a frightened sweat crept through her hair. Neither beside her, nor before her, nor at her feet, nor in her arms . . .

She ran toward the sea. The vessel had left its moorings.

Far away, half upon the sky and half upon the water, a little black bird was flying, the rapid ship which bore the fortune of Theseus, so far away that the eye could scarcely see it and a despairing cry would die before reaching it.

Folly! She entered the sea, throwing her tunic upon the pebbles.

The waves slapped against her shuddering thighs. The water mounted to her belly.

She cried:

"O Poseidon, King of the Glaucous Fields, Guardian of the Waters! Lift me up! bear me to him; he is my very self . . ."

Poseidon heard, but granted nothing. A miraculous water ravished the pleading Ariadne and threw her gently upon the thick moss.

And the vessel had disappeared forever beyond the wall of the sea.

At that instant, an uproar, a multitude, cries of adulation, crackling steps on the soil of the forests.

"Io! Evoë! Who is upon the road? Who is upon the road?"

Down the mountain came Bacchantes and Satyrs and Pans, the procession hurried along by the thyrses.

"Who is upon the road? Who is in the dwelling? Iacchos! Iacchos! Evoë!"

Their hands waved branches of trees and shook garlands of ivy. Their hair was so laden with flowers that their necks bent backward; the folds of their breasts were rivulets of sweat, their thighs glowed like setting suns and their shrieks were spotted with flying foam.

"Iacchos! Beautiful God! Mighty God! Living God! Iacchos! Leader of the Orgy! Iacchos! Impulse and Guide! Incite the multitude! Drive the rout and the rapid feet! We are thine! We are thy swelling breath! We are thy turbulent desires!"

Then: suddenly they saw Ariadne.

They precipitated themselves, grasped her arms and her legs, they twisted her disordered hair; the first seized her head and, bracing a foot on her shoulder, wrenched it off, like a heavy flower; others scattered the members; the sixth tore open the belly and pulled out the little womb; and the seventh, digging into the chest, uprooted the vomiting heart.

The God, the God appeared!

They hurled themselves toward him, brandishing their trophies.

He was nude, crowned with vine leaves. A fawn skin hung upon his loins. He carried a rod of box-wood. He said:

"Leave these poor members."

The Bacchantes threw them upon the ground and, impelled by a gesture, rushed off up the mountain, like a flock stung by bees.

Then he inclined his hollow rod which gushed out marvelously; and the members reunited, the heart awoke suddenly, and deluded Ariadne raised herself upon one hand.

"O Dionysos!" she said.

Night, clear and sombre lay over the sea.

The God stretched out his fingers and said, in a grave, tender voice:

"Arise! I am Awakening.

"Arise! I am Life.

"Give me thy hand...

"Come with me...

"This is the Road of Eternal Peace..."

III

A HIGH, bare ravine.

Night.

Peace.

"What happened?" asked Ariadne. "I no longer know his name and yet I recall that he abandoned me."

"It happened," responded the God, "it happened that he left thee, for that is the law of the love in which thou didst rely. Those who demand shall not be loved; those who shall be loved shall go. And this is why thou didst deceive thyself. But today thou art upon the true road, upon the Road of Eternal Peace."

"O King Dionysos, what then is this peace?"

"Thou feelest it not?"

"It is true. I am no longer Ariadne. I no longer feel the stones nor the leaves which, in former times, bruised my feet. I no longer feel even the freshness of the air. I feel thy hand."

"Still, I am not touching thee."

"Where dost thou lead me, Adored God?"

"To where thou shalt never again see the sun too glittering nor the night too shadowy. To where thou shalt never again feel hunger nor thirst nor love nor fatigue. From the worst of evils, the fear of death, Ariadne, thou art delivered for, in truth, thou art already dead. And, see, what happiness!"

"Oh! Could I but believe that one can be happy without pernicious Love."

"Look at me..."

"I see thee without it. I see thee. O Saviour! Where dost thou conduct me?"

"*The land which thou goest to frequent is indeterminate, crepuscular, unchanging, colorless, airy. The grasses there are like the* flowers, pale as the sky and the water. The air is always still; and the light is mysterious like a winter's day or a night of summer. One knows not whether day mounts over the earth or descends into the

lower firmament. The buds never close, the petals no longer fall, there are no birds among the branches, and the uproar of six thousand million souls is an inexpressible silence. Thou shalt no longer have eyes: what wouldst thou see? Thou shalt no longer have hands: of what use to touch? Thou shalt no longer have lips: thou shalt be delivered from the kiss. But the shadow of reality shall subsist about thee, the survival of a dream without joy and without regret; without desire and without pleasure, thou shalt no longer know sorrow."

"Dost thou also inhabit this land which thou dost promise me at last?"

"I am the Ruler of the Shades, the Master of the Infernal Water. I sit upon a throne of shadows; my upraised finger draws the souls to it and, from the farthest ends of the earth, they come, whirling, yielding, beating their wings beneath my glance. I bear a coronal of vine leaves for, even as the cut grapes revive under the feet in the press and stream forth in scarlet wine, so the anguish of death is miraculously transfigured in the intoxication of resurrection. And I carry in my hand a blade of ripe wheat for, as the corrupt grain is born again in the nurturing earth and sprouts forth in living herbage, so pain and trouble germinate, flower, become ecstatic, in the great eternal peace whither thou goest."

"Shall I be far from thee, a poor soul alone in the multitude?"

"No: thou shalt reign, thou also, at my side, O Queen with beautiful hair! And thou shalt reflect, on thy face, the ineffable calm of the subterranean fields. It is thou the dead souls shall see first, and thou shalt have this joy which is refused even to the Gods: that of seeing the birth of felicity in the forever-calm eyes of incorruptible Spirits."

"O Dionysos! . . ."

And she raised her arms toward him.

"Is that all?" asked Philinna.

"I shall say no more."

And Rhea, disconcerted:

"But it is Persephone who is queen of the underworld!"

"Yes," said Thrases.

Then Melandryon, who had listened to the end of the mythological story, drew aside the narrator and, regarding him with a penetrating eye:

"Thou hast not told all that was in thy mind."

"No. When Dionysos had spoken thus to the daughter of Minos,

the truth is that he annihilated her. But, by the simple description of so happy a future, had he not given her more joy than he promised her in it? I proceeded to do for these women what he did for Ariadne. Do not open their eyes. It is better to give confidence than to fulfill oaths, for hope is sweeter than conquest."

"Regret is sweeter than hope."

"Women do not know that."

THE HOUSE UPON THE NILE

or The Semblance of Virtue

AMARYLLIS stretched out languidly upon the moss and, with the tip of her willow branch, touched the hand of the youngest man.

"Speak in thy turn, Clinias," she said. "I would like a story from thee."

Clinias hesitated for some time.

"I still remember the legends which everyone knows; but I know not how, like Thrases, to mould them according to my humor, nor how, like thee, Amaryllis, to enliven them by the charm of words. I will tell what my friend Bion of Clazomenæ told me, on his return from Ethiopia."

"Is it a true story?" asked Rhea.

"Yes. But I would like to have you take it for a fable and to have the personages seem to be followed by the shadow of their symbol. If I had any talent, it would not be much trouble for me to make this short history a poem in hexameters. Perhaps simply to generalize it."

The sun glared hotly above the tall forest, and the coolness under the leaves was the more delicious. Spots of light caressed Lampito who had drawn her hair over her face to protect her closed eyes. Amaryllis remained near Rhea. Philinna played with her hands. Melandryon gazed at the ground.

Then Clinias began thus:

I

ABOVE Thebes and Hermonthis, above Silsila and Ombos, Bion had ascended the Nile. He had even passed the Elephantine Isle where the territory of Egypt ends, and had advanced toward black Ethiopia which is close to the edge of the world.

He had no boat with which to overcome the slow course of the river, for he would have needed slaves to handle the oars and he was apprehensive of depending on disinterested companions. Therefore he journeyed on foot along the damp, grassy banks so narrow that the path sometimes ran along the foot of multi-colored cliffs from which stretched back the monotonous infinity of the Desert.

This narrow band of living earth between two dull solitudes, this road of golden fields and of splendid herbage, split to the two horizons by the luminous green of the Nile, resounded to the cries of birds, strident and thronging, in the air, upon the water, under the tall grasses, swarming among the bare branches of the fat baobabs like perpetual, deafening locusts.

Ostriches and giraffes ran over the distant wastes; herds of antelopes fled like yellow clouds; monkeys hung suspended in fantastic groups from the supple branches of the sycamores, and occasionally, in the mud of the Nile, where the slender steps of the ibises followed each other like long flowers, Bion contemplated with astonishment the formidable human imprint left by that mysterious Amanit, the beast upon which no man dared look but of which the Ethiopians told strange stories. And Bion, uneasy, was persuaded that the Colossi of rose granite, sculptured in the mass of the mountains, came in the solitary nights to bathe themselves to the knees in the holy river which is the father of all.

For, so far from Thebes and Memphis, the remains of Egyptian splendor still endured in an impious land. Long since, the Autochthons had retaken the land from the conquerors and yet the face of Rhameses was forever engraved upon the cliffs, for the rulers of the North had given their form to the rocks which the chisel of slaves had subdued but which neither time nor Zeus had destroyed.

It was winter. The nights were filled with cool mist. The ethereal days were still oppressive. Bion sought the shade and the springs in the forests of mimosas where lions withdrew from the sun to issue only at the rising of the night. There also lived the men, barricaded in their cabins behind palisades of date palms. Bion was their guest, night after night, leaving them in the early morning.

II

THEN, one evening . . .

"At last!" cried Lampito.

"Thou speakest well," said Philinna, politely, "but thou art too pompous. Then too, why hast thou given us a little description of Egypt before beginning thy story? I suppose that has nothing to do with the course of the adventure?"

"Be indulgent," responded Clinias. "The story of Bion is very simple, I could relate it to you in a very few words, but, after that, another would have to be found, and the heat will not permit that

effort of my imagination. For the other part, it is a short scene which should not be expanded. It was necessary that I prepare with some unnecessary phrases, if I wished to give a story of the same length as the others. All this is unanswerable. Do not interrupt me again."

... One evening, as he had walked a long time under a painful radiance and his weary feet were marked by their narrow straps, he approached a brown and green house raised alone on the bank of the Nile with dry mud and interwoven grasses. The heavy heads of many palms bent about it and it was so overrun by large flowering water grasses that one might say it was floating upon the same water or in jeopardy in a marsh.

Motionless, his shoulder resting against a tree, Bion regarded it.

Two young girls, before the door opening, talked together, sometimes laughing.

The elder was clad in a full, blue, fringed garment, gathered under the arms and falling to her knees. Her abundant, dark hair was separated in a thousand thin strands which closely framed a face with shining eyes and thick lips and fell only as far as the delicate, full shoulders. She bent her loins over a low bar. She laughed a little and tossed her head.

The younger was not dressed, for she was still a child. She held herself seated upon her heels, her head bent between her knees, and stuck little yellow flowers between her outspread toes.

He regarded them with interest, without coming nearer. He contemplated the house. This spot, mysterious, like anything which appears for the first time, seemed protected by its air of strangeness, solitude and uncertainty. A family lived there. For how long a time? What kind of sadness and of furtive happiness had made this hut of mud and branches joyous or gloomy? Who had built it? Who had inhabited it? What deaths, what births, had it sheltered? He felt that all this which he could imagine told him nothing about it and that this lost corner would remain always impenetrable to him.

Evening ascended rapidly. At last Bion came up.

Immediately the two girls, with little cries, drew back toward the open house. But he did not approach, and said, simply:

"I ask for hospitality."

"Father is in the fields," responded the elder. "Wait until he comes. He will receive thee."

Bion rested his arm against a tree and turned his eyes toward the Nile, annoyed by the curious regards which fixed themselves on his person.

Long after sunset, the Ethiopian arrived, following a yellow ox with tapering horns. And when he appeared, the two girls both began speaking at once.

"There is a stranger.—He asks for hospitality.—Yes, he is alone. —There, by the tree.—We would not let him enter until thy return.—Have we done right, father?"

The master took three steps in the darkness and said in a high voice:

"Be welcome. Enter my house."

When they had entered the room, and it had been lightened by lamps of baked earth:

"Here is water, bread and fruits," said the Ethiopian.

They drank and ate. And the host remained silent, feeling it would be indiscreet to ask questions for which the answers had not already been offered.

She whose brown body was draped with blue brought in the food and poured water from the jars. The younger sister had drawn back against the earthen wall, and, her hands pressed over her mouth, was considering the Stranger.

When the meal was finished, the host arose.

"It is time to go to thy bed. I know the duties of hospitality. Here are my two daughters. The youngest has not yet known a man but she is of an age to come to thee. Go, and take thy pleasure with her."

Bion was not unfamiliar with this custom and he venerated it as a tradition of singular virtue. The gods often visited the earth, dressed as travelers, soldiers or shepherds, and who could distinguish a mortal from an Olympian who did not wish to reveal himself? Bion was, perhaps, Hermes? He knew that a refusal on his part would be taken as an insult; thus he was neither surprised nor troubled when the elder girl bent toward him and uncovered her young breasts so that he might kiss them.

Without speaking, without moving, the child watched their offense and poised herself, her head forward, her hands relaxed as though in a dream.

After an instant of paleness, trembling, close to tears, she precipitated herself through the open door. The night closed about her.

Then the father, raising his eyes, also walked to the threshold and peered into the heavy darkness where his daughter had carried away forever the lost honor of his house.

III

THE sun was shining when Bion awakened and took up his skin bag to continue his way. The house was deserted.

He regretted not encountering the Host, but was not astonished at not seeing his companion of the night. She was too wise to expose herself to a farewell.

He began his walk.

The road which he followed beside the reeds of the Nile was so dazzling that he soon abandoned it for a little path which crossed the marshy fields toward the woods.

A sluggish hippopotamus had crushed a whole field of rice beneath his vast, purplish flesh, and lay surrounded by the devastation he had caused. Bion passed him quickly. A little while after, he entered the shadow of the mimosas.

A joyous cry stopped him. A cry so tender, so full of recognition, so overflowing with perfect happiness, that Bion turned quickly with an involuntary smile.

The little fugitive stood before him, nude as on the night before, a little timid, but beaming, and awaiting only a gesture from him to throw herself into his arms and weep for joy.

"Thou! It is thou at last," she cried. "I did not know where thou wouldst pass. I did not even know whether thou wouldst ascend the Nile. But I was sure that I would see thee again. I came here, and I waited. I divined well that thou wouldst turn away from the sun of the road and that thou wouldst go by the wood. Oh! How pleased I am! It seemed to me that three days passed while I waited . . . I am no longer . . . That which has come to me is so extraordinary . . ."

And she added, more sadly:

"Thou didst remain a long time with her."

Bion remained immobile and regarded her with some uneasiness.

"But, my little child, why didst thou come here?"

"What?" she cried. "I came to follow thee, to remain with thee always, always . . ."

"Thou comest to follow me, and yesterday, when thy father gave thee to me, thou didst flee like a foolish goat. I did not please thee last evening and I please thee this morning, for no reason? Thou hast singular whims."

The poor girl remained silent, then suddenly dissolved in tears, pressing her little nude, sob-racked body against a tree.

More than any other tiresome things, Bion detested touching

scenes. With his finger, he tapped the child's shoulder and said:

"Farewell. Return to thy father's house. Thou wilt please him."

And he moved on, tranquilly.

But she ran after him. She grasped him by the mantle, by the arm, by the neck, and said quickly:

"I shall go where thou goest, I loved thee yesterday as I do today; I had never loved anyone; I love only thee, O, I shall love only thee . . . I went away, yesterday, because I was jealous of my sister, because I could not share thee with my sister nor love thee before her. If I had not fled, thou wouldst have taken me in passing and thou wouldst already have left me. After thee I would have given myself to another and to another, and so on until my marriage. Knowest thou that my sister has already known more strangers than I could tell thee in opening my two hands seven times? And I, also, should I have done that? Oh, I have felt sure that, for all my life, I should belong to the same man, to the first who should take me. And this one art thou! Take me, guard me always! I want to be thy wife and to follow thee."

Bion, very much wearied, replied:

"My dear little one, thou reasonest like a child. Thou sayest thyself that thou hast never loved anyone, and I am well convinced of it for, in the arms of her first lover, a woman already dreams of her second and, in her heart, it is he whom she loves. Thou wilt learn this a little later.

"There is no reason for always loving the same man. Wouldst thou condemn thyself to sleep all thy life under the same roof? to wear always the same robe? to eat always the same fruit? Love is not a sensation so very different from others, but of all it is the most abundant: it is for this reason that it can be shared.

"The gods have spread upon thy mouth a love generous enough to satisfy an entire army. Thou hast no right to deprive others of the pleasure they hope for from thee. When thy sister shall marry, thou wilt remain alone in thy father's house: then there will still pass travelers who long since will have left their own hearth and the bed sacred to their marriage. Wearied by the sun and the length of the road, they will be refreshed by thine attentions. Thou wilt be able to conjure away their weariness and to leave, in their life, the remembrance of a happy hour.

"Thus, through the passage of the days, the diversity of loves, the promptness of farewells, thou wilt understand, little by little, that one is not bound by love; and thou wilt more wisely choose the man to whom thou wilt give thy life."

"Could I ever choose better? Art thou not . . ."

"Oh, I am. I am without doubt the best, the only one, and thou art very certain of having found thy dream. Is it not this thou wert going to say? Ah well, see how thou hast deceived thyself, I should leave thee immediately afterwards, just as I left thy sister this morning. In the situation thou art in, it would be best for us to do nothing and to simply part. Thou didst make a deplorable choice. Try to forget it and go at once without turning thy head. In the house upon the Nile thou wilt find again thine afflicted father, the family hearth and the images of the Gods. Thou wilt find again thine elder sister and she will teach thee that true virtue of which thou knowest only the semblance."

He kissed her on the cheek and resumed his walk between the trees. But he had not yet passed from sight beyond the great thickets of yellow flowers when, for the third time, he heard running steps and weeping behind him.

Then he became suddenly angry.

"I forbid thee to follow me!"

"I cannot leave thee. Do not drive me away. I do not ask to be a wife since thou refusest to love me. I beg thee, let me stay near thee. I shall belong to thee. Make anything of me. I will be thy slave, if thou wishest."

Bion coldly removed his girdle, wrapped it like drawers around the child's loins, hung his filled sack, the gourd and the petasus upon her naked shoulder and in an indifferent voice:

"Go ahead," he said.

THIS history caused some scandal and the women were not far from thinking that Bion was an abominable man. This was much worse when Rhea, who always wanted to know the final end of stories and the disposition of all the people, demanded:

"What happened afterward?"

For Clinias finished thus:

"Before the evening of the same day, Bion sold her, like a slave, to a wandering chief of the plains and he does not know what became of her."

The women were indignant, but Thrases was already speaking:

"That was his obvious right. Had she not said to him: 'I belong to thee'? The characteristic of things which are owned is that they can be sold. There is nothing to say against it and, besides, she was a little fool whom he did well to pass over."

Melandryon was more severe:

"Reasons like that," he said, "are all too virtuous. Things cannot be judged by the relation of Good and Evil. These are considerations which vary according to climates, and of which the importance is much exaggerated. The single rule of life which seems legitimate is the love for beauty. If the child was pretty (Clinias omitted telling us this) Bion committed a grave fault in selling her to a stupid negro who would disregard the charm of her form and the grace of her movements."

"She had a short nose," responded Clinias, "heavy lips and a brown skin."

"In that case," declared Melandryon, "he was not obliged to bother with her."

BYBLIS

or The Enchantment of Tears

AND Amaryllis, between the three young women and the three philosophers, related this fabulous allegory, as though to little children:

Travelers whom I have known and who have been in Caria, having ascended the Meander much farther than any others had ever gone, have seen the God of the drowsy river, at the edge of the waters shadowed by rushes. He had a long, green beard and his face was wrinkled like the rocks on the gray banks from which hung weeping grasses. His ancient eyelids seemed dead upon eyes forever blind. It is probable that those who would seek him today would no longer find him living.

"Now, it was he who was the father of Byblis, by his union with the nymph Cyanis; and I shall tell you the history of the unfortunate Byblis."

I

IN the original grotto from which the river mysteriously issued, the nymph Cyanis brought forth two children at one birth. One was a boy, whom she named Caunos; the other a girl, who was Byblis.

They grew up together on the banks of the Meander, and sometimes Cyanis showed them, under the light upon the surface, the divine appearance of their father whose spirit stirred the passing floods.

They knew nothing of the world beyond the forest where they were born. They had never seen the sun except through the network of the branches. Byblis never left her brother, and put her arm around his neck when they walked together.

She wore a little tunic which her mother had woven for her in the depths of the water and which was blue and gray like the first light of the dawn. Caunos wore about his loins only a girdle of rushes from which hung a yellow cloth.

When the day had brightened so that they could walk in the wood, they would go far away together, playing with fallen fruits or searching for the largest flowers and those with the best perfume. The discoveries of one were always for the other, and they did not quarrel,

and because of this their mother praised them to the other nymphs who were her friends.

Now, when twelve years had flown away since the day of their birth, their mother became uneasy and sometimes followed them.

The two children no longer played and, after spending a whole day in the forest, would return empty-handed, bringing neither birds nor flowers nor fruits nor garlands. They walked so closely together that their hair mingled. Byblis' hands would wander over her brother's arms. Sometimes she would kiss his cheek; then they would both remain silent.

When the heat was too great, they would creep in among the low branches and there, lying upon their breasts on the fragrant moss, would talk together, admire each other and remain entwined.

Then Cyanis called her son aside and said:

"Why art thou sad?"

Caunos replied:

"I am not sad. In former times, I laughed and played. Now all is greatly changed. I have no need of games, mother, and, if I no longer laugh, it is because I am happy."

Cyanis asked:

"Why art thou happy?"

And Caunos replied:

"I look at Byblis."

And Cyanis asked farther:

"Why dost thou no longer care for the forest?"

"Because the hair of Byblis is softer than the grasses, and more perfumed; because the eyes of Byblis . . ."

But Cyanis stopped him:

"Child! Be silent!"

And, hoping to cure him of his forbidden passion, she took him at once to the dwelling of a mountain nymph who had seven daughters more marvelously beautiful than words could tell.

And both, concerting together, said to him:

"Choose. She who pleases thee Caunos, shall be thy wife."

But Caunos looked at the seven young girls with as indifferent an eye as though he saw seven rocks, for the image of Byblis alone filled all his little soul and he had no place in him for an unknown tenderness.

For a month, Cyanis conducted her son thus from mountain to mountain and from plain to plain, but without once succeeding in turning him from his desire.

At last, divining that she should never overcome this passionate obstinacy, she began to dislike her son and to accuse him of infamy. But the child did not at all understand why his mother reproached him. Why, among all women, should he be denied the very one he loved? Why should the tenderness which would be permitted in the importunate arms of another become criminal in the adored arms of Byblis? For what mysterious reasons should a feeling which he knew to be tender and good, capable of any sacrifice, be judged worthy only of every punishment? "Zeus," he thought, "had certainly espoused his sister; and Aphrodite Dionæa, with her brother Ares, had dared to deceive her brother Hephæstos." For he did not yet know that the gods had given intelligent morality only to themselves and that they troubled virtue with incomprehensible laws.

And Cyanis said to her son:

"I renounce thee as my child."

She beckoned to a centauress who was going toward the sea and made Caunos mount astride her.

The beast galloped away. For some time, Cyanis followed them with her gaze. Caunos, frightened, held fast to the shoulders, sometimes swallowed up by the masses of hair. The centauress galloped with long, powerful bounds; she fled in a straight line; she diminished in the green distance. Soon she passed behind a clump of trees, then reappeared, but smaller, like a dot which hardly seemed to move. At last Cyanis could no longer distinguish her.

Slowly, Byblis' mother returned toward the forest.

She was sad, but proud also, at having saved, by a violent separation, the destinies of her two children; and she thanked the gods for having given her strength to accomplish the unpleasant duty.

"Now," she thought, "Byblis, left alone, will forget her sacrificed brother. She will become enamored of the first one who seeks to charm her and, perhaps, a line of demi-gods will issue from the bed of an orderly marriage. Blessed are the immortal gods!"

But, when she returned to the grotto, little Byblis was no longer there.

II

WHEN Byblis found herself alone upon the little bed of green leaves where she lay, each night, beside her brother, she sought in vain for sleep; on this evening, the dreams would not visit her.

She arose; the night was sweet. A calm respiration slowly raised and lowered the profound masses of the forest. She seated herself upon a stone and gazed at the gliding water.

"Caunos," she thought, "Caunos. Why has he not returned? What attracted him and what detains him? Why has my brother left me?"

And, while speaking these last words, she leaned over the spring . . .

"My father!" she repeated. "My father! Where is Caunos? Tell me . . ."

A murmur of the waters responded:

"Far . . ."

Byblis, frightened, resumed quickly:

"And when will he return? When will he return here?"

"Never . . ." replied the spring.

"Dead! He is dead!"

"No . . ."

"Where shall I find him?"

". . ."

The spring was silent. The light whispering of the reeds again became monotonous. No divine appearance moved in the pure water.

Byblis raised herself, and ran. She knew by what path Caunos had departed with her mother. This was a narrow passage which wound among the trees and submerged itself in the forest. She did not often take it for it crossed a low ground which was infested with serpents and evil beasts. This time, her desire was stronger than her fear and she hurried on, trembling, at the best speed of her little, naked feet.

The night was not dark; but the shadows from the moon were black and, among the largest trees, Byblis had to feel her way.

She came to a place where the path divided. How should she know which road to choose? Upon her knees, she searched for a long time for a mark which would guide her. The ground was dry. Byblis could see nothing. But, as she raised her head, she saw, hidden among the leaves of an oak, a hamadryad with green breasts, who watched her, smiling.

"Oh!" cried Byblis. "Which way did he take? If thou didst see him, tell me . . ."

The hamadryad extended one of her long, branch-like arms toward the right, and Byblis thanked her with a grateful look.

Through that night, she walked for a long time. The path continued always, scarcely marked under the fallen leaves; it advanced, winding always, according to the ground and the trees, rising, descending, in the darkness, interminably.

At last, overcome by weariness, Byblis fell upon the moss, and slept.

On awakening, the next day, under a sun which was already high, she felt a strange softness along her extended hand. She opened her eyes; a yellow hind was licking it, slowly. But, at Byblis' first movement, the delicate animal bounded upon its slender hoofs, raised its two ears, and fastened upon her its beautiful, humid eyes which were dark and gleaming like water among the rocks

"Hind," said Byblis, "whose art thou? If thou belongest to the goddess Artemis, guide me, for I know her. At the full moon, I give her libations of goat's milk, and she knows it, hind, she loves me well. If thou art one of her followers, deliver me from the anguish I suffer, and be sure thou wilt not displease the good Huntress of the Night."

The hind seemed to understand; she advanced, spacing her steps so that the child could follow her.

Together, they crossed, thus, a great part of the forest and also two brooklets which the hind leapt at a bound but which Byblis could pass only by entering water up to her knees. Byblis was full of confidence. She was sure, now, of being on the right road; without doubt, this hind had been sent by the goddess herself, in gratitude for her devotion; and the divine animal would guide her across the wood to the well-beloved brother whom she would never leave again. Each step brought nearer the time when she would see Caunos again. She already felt, against her breast, the affectionate embrace of the fugitive. A little of his breath seemed to have passed in the air and to have enchanted the cooling breeze.

Suddenly, the hind stopped. She slipped her young head between two young trees where, at the same time, appeared the horned profile of a stag; and, as though she had accomplished her desired end, she lay down, her hoofs under her belly, and rested her chin upon the grass.

"Caunos!"

Byblis called.

"Caunos, where art thou?"

For her only reply, the stag made a few steps toward her, threatening her with his terrible horns which were twisted like ten brown serpents. And then Byblis understood that the hind, like herself, had been in search of her lover and that it is perhaps useless to depend on the good offices of those already fully absorbed by an intimate passion.

She turned back; but she was lost. She took a new path which descended rapidly toward an invisible valley. Her poor little feet,

wounded by the stones, torn by roots, slipped on the brown carpet of pine needles. At a turn of the irregular path, which followed the course of a brook, she paused before a divine couple. They were two nymphs, of different essences; one of them lived in the forests and the other in the water of springs. The oread had brought the naiad fresh offerings received from the men, and they bathed together in the stream, undulating and enlaced.

"Naiad," said Byblis, "hast thou seen the son of Cyanis?"

"Yes. His shadow passed over me. It was yesterday, at sunset."

"From whence did he come?"

"I know not."

"Whither did he go?"

"I did not see."

Byblis gave a long sigh.

"And thou," she said, to the other nymph, "hast thou seen the son of Cyanis?"

"Yes. Far from here, upon the mountain."

"From whence did he come?"

"I knew not."

"Whither did he go?"

"I have forgotten."

Then she added, raising herself amidst the rapid waters:

"Stay with us, young girl, stay. Why dost thou dream still of one who is no longer here? We have stored up for thee an infinity of present joys. There is no happiness in the future worth the trouble of pursuing it."

But Byblis did not at all believe that the nymph had spoken well. Although she could not express the ideas of her little soul, she could conceive of no other joy than the suffering of persevering in her search for happiness. During the first day of her useless journey, she had counted on the aid and the zeal of unknown people. Since she had seen them heedless of assisting her purpose she no longer depended on any but herself. And, leaving the winding path, she penetrated at hazard into the labyrinth of the wood.

Meanwhile, the two immortals repeated their wise words:

"Stay with us, young girl, stay. Why dost thou dream still of one who is no longer here? There is no happiness in the future worth the trouble of pursuing it."

And, long, long after, the child, always climbing the mysterious mountain, heard in the distance two clear voices calling together:

"Byblis!"

III

FOR a night and a day, Byblis walked over the mountain. She anxiously questioned all the divinities of the woods, those of the trees, those of the glades and those of the shadowy caverns. She related her sorrow with interminable confidences, she supplicated, she trembled, she wrung her little hands. But no one had seen Caunos.

She had mounted so far that the sacred name of her mother was no longer known where she passed, and the indifferent nymphs did not understand what she was trying to say.

She wished to retrace her steps, but she had lost herself. On all sides, a confused colonnade of enormous pines surrounded her. There were no more paths. There was no horizon. She ran aimlessly. She called desperately.

There was no longer even an echo.

Then, as her weary eyelids were closing, little by little, she lay down upon the ground, and a passing dream said to her, in a slow voice:

"Thou wilt never see him again, thy brother; thou wilt never see him again."

She awakened with a start.

Her hands stretched out, her mouth opened, but with such anguish that she had not the strength to cry out.

The moon had risen, red like blood behind the tall black lines of the pines. Byblis could scarcely see it. It seemed to her that a moist veil had spread itself over her long eyes. An eternal silence slumbered in the wood.

And then a swollen tear filled the corner of her left eye.

Byblis had never wept. She believed that she was going to die, and she sighed as though a divine relief mysteriously assisted her.

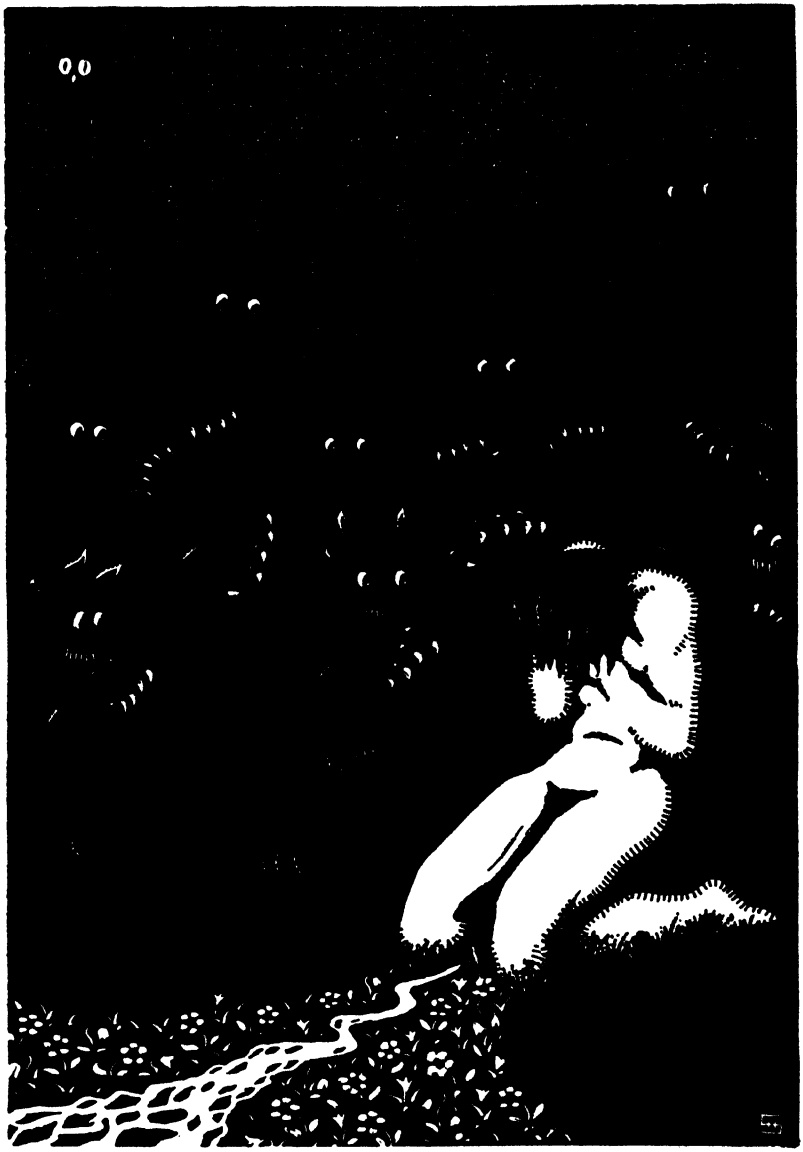
The tear spread, trembled, enlarged; then suddenly rolled over her cheek.

Byblis remained motionless, her eyes fixed, before the moon.

And then a swollen tear filled the corner of her right eye. It enlarged like the first, slipped through the lashes, and fell.

Two other tears were born, two burning drops which left damp lines on her cheeks. They came to the corners of her mouth; a delicious bitterness enervated the dejected child.

So, never again should her hand touch the affectionate hand of Caunos. Never again should she see the shadowy glow of his gaze, his dear head and his young hair. Never again should they sleep, side by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side, entwined upon the same bed of leaves. The forests no longer knew his name.

An outburst of despair dropped Byblis' face into her hands; but such an abundance of tears wet her burning cheeks that she felt as though a miraculous spring was bearing away all her sufferings, like dead leaves upon the water of a torrent.

The tears were born gently within her, mounted to her eyes, floated, overflowed, and, gliding in a warm sheet over her cheeks, inundated her narrow breast and fell upon her close-joined legs. She no longer felt them rounding, one by one, between her long eyelids: they had become a smooth, continuous stream, an inexhaustible flow, the effusion of an enchanted water.

Meanwhile, awakened by the moonlight, the immortals of the forest had hastened up from all sides. The bark of the trees had become transparent, revealing the forms of the nymphs, and even the shivering naiads, leaving their waters and their rocks, had poured into the wood.

They pressed about Byblis, calling to her, frightened, for the course of the child's tears had marked, in the earth, a deep sinuous line which moved slowly toward the plain.

But already Byblis no longer heard anything, neither voices, nor steps, nor the night-wind. Little by little, her posture became eternal. Under the flood of tears, her skin had taken the smooth, white tint of marble bathed by the waters. The wind no longer disturbed her hair lying along her arms. She had died away into pure stone. A shadowy light still lingered faintly in her vision. Suddenly, this went out; but the fresh tears still ran unceasingly.

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"It was thus that Byblis was changed into a fountain."

DANAË

or Sorrow

THE day was beautiful.

The sadness left by the story of the night before had vanished with the mist; the women ran in the wood; there were bursts of laughter upon the road.

The exuberance of Spring bent the branches of the trees and made the fields overflow along the narrow paths. The outspread flowers, grazed in passing, left yellow marks on the edge of the tunics. A sea of violets bathed the feet of the cedars: there the young people lay down in a group.

And, as the hour had come to people the deserted forest with fabulous personages, Rhea, a straightforward young girl, for whom words had no profound sense, thought to express the desire of all by demanding of Thrases "a story about happiness."

"Yes, yes," cried Lampito.

But Amaryllis exclaimed:

"No! oh no! not that, above all! One should not speak of happiness. He who tells of his happiness, abandons it, word by word. He who tells of the happiness of others, augments his own sadness. It is a story of sorrow which I shall tell you today. Unhappiness sows the seed of pity, which is gentle and beneficent. In the unhappiness of Danaë each of you shall recognize your own, and you shall become happy at the memory of lost sorrows."

Without replying, the others made a circle about her and she continued thus:

I

WHEN Danaë, the mother of Perseus, left the Argonian shores, she remained for a long time at the stern, watching the land gradually recede and the stretch of waters increase.

Her father had placed her, naked, in a long, black boat with her new-born child, and two little funereal oboli, so that she could pay her own and her son's passage on *that other* boat when the night of death should have filled their eyes, through famine, cold, or the tossings of the sea.

Although there was neither mast nor sails, the wind hurried along the light, hollow barge. A gull with curved wings followed it for some time in uncertain flight, then, wing-weary, returned toward the land.

Then Danaë felt that she was quite alone, and, her hands over her eyes, she dissolved in tears.

But she did not weep long for she had a simple soul into which sorrow had not yet entered. The little voice of her child made her turn, already smiling. She took the baby in her arms, lay down on her back on a woolen rug which covered the bottom of the boat and began to play.

She held the child like a wax doll, she amused herself with his great round eyes, his toothless mouth which tried to speak, the rosy folds of his wrists, and his nails which were so tiny that they might have been taken for the wings of flies.

With a quick movement, she nearly stifled him in her arms, she caressed his bald little head, his little legs, his little doubled-up feet; she made him walk upon her, jump, run, fall, roll. She enveloped him in her hair, and, with a finger on his lip, she made him laugh.

"Listen," she said to him, at last. "I will relate thy history."

It was not probable that the child could understand. However, he was of a divine race and nothing was impossible for those born of the great Olympians.

And she spoke thus:

"I am Danaë, the daughter of Acrisios who is king over the land of Arogs. My mother is the wise Eurydice, and I have no brother with winged arrows, and I have no sisters with ringlets of violets.

"I remember having played, when I was a little girl, on the banks of the Inachos, where Artemis was said to bathe, and in the forests of the Artemision where she hunted the yellow hinds. I had friends; I had slaves; when I passed in the streets, women stretched out their hands toward me. Then, suddenly, I was imprisoned, and I could no longer see either the water or the earth.

"I was imprisoned in a tower of bronze, so high that I could not hear even the uproar of the festivals of Dionysos. And the ceiling of my chamber was made of brazen bars, between which I could see the sky.

"And it was there that I grew up, alone with my nurse, between the sky and the rugs. I lived there for so long that I forgot the earth and the wind among the trees and the color of the water. I saw only the sky; but what cannot one see in the changing sky? In the morning, when I awakened, it was like a red curtain strewn with little green flowers. The clouds were born, passed, floated, mingled or scattered.

Sometimes, before they disappeared, I gave them names; but they were the friends of a moment and, like a cup of wine thrown into a river, they dissolved in the rapid wind. Behind them, the sky was very clear and, around the sun, almost white or perhaps of a color for which I had no name: the color of light."

The baby began to wail. She rocked him. He became silent.

"In the evening, there was a great sea of purple in which the outspread clouds bathed themselves, like beautiful women with long hair and yellow scarfs. At night, there were the stars.

"It was from above, it was from the distant sky, that there descended into me the mysterious rain . . ."

She closed her eyes and smiled gently, invaded by an idle remembrance. When she opened them again, the child was asleep. So she did not tell any more, she did not tell how her inexplicable pregnancy had suddenly reawakened the senile fears of Acrisios to whom a diviner had predicted that he should die at the hand of his grandson; she did not tell how, for forty weeks, she had felt growing within her the fruit of that marvelous love; nor how, with the child born into the world, the king now exposed them, she and he, to death by famine, by cold or by the tossings of the sea.

However, need she think of that? Had not the supernatural influence, which had brought about the birth of Perseus, saved her from the first peril and was it not one's duty to always submit to the majesty of the gods?

The child, awakening, moved his arms and began to cry. She recalled that she had not nursed him since morning. She bent over him and gave him her breast. The heat was overwhelming; Danaë feared that the strong light would trouble the poor little person, and, for the second time, she covered his face with her thick, soft hair.

Time rolled on, slowly—Argos and Tiryns had disappeared. To the right and to the left, the shores of the gulf, stretched to the horizon, were vaguely blended with the floating mists. In the distance a swift dolphin shot clear of the water, plunging in again headfirst. Sometimes green sea-wrack wrapped itself around the prow, its two ends threading out in a doubled wake. Danaë detached it with her hand, wondering whether the wet strands which she held between her fingers had not served as a coronal on the forehead of some sea god.

Evening came. There were no sails upon the sea. The sun was eclipsed by a resplendent cloud from which arose a wide shaft of light which seemed to issue from the waters. An immense shadow hid the Mediterranean. The waves softened as though overtaken by drowsi-

ness. The little boat scarcely moved: Danaë was not sure that it had not stopped.... Then the wind fell, suddenly.

Danaë, who had laid down the child, took him up in her arms to nurse him again. But she had forgotten that she herself had taken no nourishment since morning. Her milk was nearly exhausted: the child began to cry.

She looked at him, then at her breasts, and at the sea. Nothing about the sea frightened her except the silence; she shivered. On all the horizon she saw no living thing. It seemed that the world had disappeared and that she was forever alone. She dipped her hand in the water: even the water was motionless.

She wished to sing, but she no longer recognized her voice and she was suddenly silent.

Then she wept: she stretched out in the bottom of the boat where she could see only the changing sky, as in her room in the tower. And thus she fell asleep.

II

NIGHT ascended in the west, like a blue vapor. The stars appeared faintly, here and there, like little drops. The sea had become so calm that it reflected the uncertain glimmer, and the little boat seemed suspended in the centre of a celestial sphere.

Then the mirror was disturbed and, if Danaë had not been asleep, she would without doubt have trembled with fright. A hand had come out of the water.

It was not like the hands of the women of earth, for it was blue on the back and the palm was the color of gold, as though it had caressed the sun plunged beneath the sea.

The hand lifted and grasped the edge of the boat; the entire arm appeared and, soon, floating on the water, the first ringlets of green hair; then the watery eyes and the mouth and the glistening body emerged. And it was soft-cheeked Pherusa, one of the divine Nereids.

She took the child in her arms, not to steal him away but to save his life, for she placed between his lips the extended tip of her cool breast, and the child drank and was satisfied.

And after her there appeared the perfect Evagora, not less beautiful and with equally graceful hands and arms, born, like her, of old Nereus and the fair-haired Doris. She held in her hand a swaddling-band of bright purple with which she clothed the little person, so that the deadly breath of the night should not descend until the hour fixed in the shadowy dwellings beneath the earth.

After these, arose kind Antonoë who, in her turn took the child and cradled him upon the waters. Then Nossa and Cymothoë, Actinia and Protomedia, all four irreproachable; and these bore with them from the depths of the abyss, a bowl, so wide and so shining that the hardiest divers have never seen anything comparable to it. And Psamathis appeared, she also, Psamathis of the transparent hands, and Melita of the green nails and Thalia of the red ears. And they took up the sleeping Danaë and laid her in the wide-spreading bowl upon a bed of soft sea-wrack and flowers from beneath the sea. And Protia, who surpassed all her sisters in swimming, and Eucrata of the tender lips, and Saia, who blew the conch-shell, and Speia, who pursued the dolphins, pulled down the stern of the boat so that the sterile sea entered and, with a swirl, swallowed it up. Then all the other Nereids emerged suddenly: Eratia, who threw upon the sea the petals of the rose of twilight; Eunica, whose hair under the water checked the swift ships; Amphitrite, whose bright eyes appeared in the hollows of green waves; Galenis, who could smooth out the billows; Pontoporia, who agitated the waters; Nesais, who appeared as an island to the voyagers from the west; Themistia, who carried away the star Iryllis and put it in a ring for her white toe; Cymatolegia, who gathered and drank the frothy foam; Lysianassa, who ruled over the shadowy depths of the ocean; Hippothoë, who let the black ships pass between her naked legs without being touched by the highest masts; and Doris and Halimeda, who held each other by the hand; Evarne of the long eye-lashes and light-fingered Agava.

When they were all united together, like a great cloud floating about the moon-like bowl, the Old Man of the Sea appeared before them: this was Nereus, crowned with sea-wrack, the immortal who had generated this charming race of Goddesses.

He made a sign, and the procession of his daughters followed him; and, floating in their midst, carried along the bowl, filled with glaucous light, where white Danaë slept with the infant Perseus, saved from the inexorable waters.

And the appearance of divine figures continued unendingly. Proteus emerged, with his monstrous seals born of the beautiful Halosydnis; Atlas, who was to be vanquished by the child; Thaumas, the dazzling husband of Electra—father of the cerulean Iris and of the three virgin Harpies; Ino-Leucothea, who suffered immortality for love of her son, Melicertes; Glaucos, who loved Scylla; Charybdis, dangerous to sailors; and Phorcys, god of storms and of death upon the sea.

And the most terrible of these gods became quiet, as they led,

toward the shore, the young woman enveloped in her dream. The dusky throng of the Tritons, with heavy-lipped mouths and calloused hands, swam more gently than a school of little fish. They had stuffed the twisted mouths of their conch-shells with seaweed so that even the breeze of morning would not vibrate in a distant rumor; and they advanced cautiously as though they feared to disturb the sea. But the wake of this multitude stretched out to the two horizons.

III

WHEN Danaë returned to herself, her child was cradled in her arms and she herself lay upon a royal bed of purple byssus. At her first questions, she was told that the divinities of the sea had brought her to the Isle of Seriphos where Polydectes had recently become king, and that she was in his palace.

She lived there, bringing up her son, spinning wool and gathering roses. Her life was happy and uneventful. To remain faithful to the memory of the Gold, she had refused the hand of the king. She talked with no one except her old nurse who had come from Argos to rejoin her and who never left her.

The child grew. Twelve years rolled by. He had been given a bow and arrows, and a small, sharp sword. After that, he passed all his days in the chase, alone, and sometimes became lost in the vast forest peopled with beasts, some of which were divine. He accomplished miraculous killings in those sombre thickets.

One evening, he returned, running, wet with perspiration and spotted with blood; two goat's feet protruded from his quiver. When he saw Danaë, he cried:

"A good hunt, mother! I ran in the wood all day, pursuing this insolent little satyr who, the day before yesterday, mocked my bare lip and my pale legs. I followed his tracks in the damp earth and on the rocks scratched by his hooves; and I met him at the entrance of his cave. I threw my bow among the branches and we struggled, body to body. He was vigorous, mother; I smothered in his clasp. But I seized my bundle of arrows and, with one thrust, I plunged them into his lean side. He gave a great cry and fell upon the grass like a wounded boar. Then I cut off his two hooves and I bring them to thee as a trophy."

Danaë shuddered at the child's impiety, and the old nurse hid her eyes, for she saw, in this senseless act, the presage and notice of a

great misfortune to come. And, in fact, the fatal event arrived on the following day.

Danaë had the enjoyment of all the gardens, all the palace, all the riches of Polydectes, except one path, one door, one small vault.

For long years, she had reflected on the perpetual interdiction of this one point of the earth, and she had ended by imagining that the little closed vault held, for him alone, all the happiness she did not possess, all the unknown joys which she desired more than life.

On that following day, she penetrated the path.

She opened the door.

She descended the first flight of stairs.

The second.

To the bottom.

Her nurse hastened after her. She cried:

"Danaë! Danaë! Thou dost wrong to come here. Do not descend, Danaë. Thou hast been protected, thou knowest well. Why wilt thou do that from which thou art protected? There is but one place in the world where thou shouldst not go and it is that which thou wouldst see . . . Thou wouldst not go out, thou wouldst not leave thy chamber except when the sun had set or when a storm thundered. Yet thou wouldst not go to other cities. No one ever saw thee in the fields. Thou wouldst never have come here, thou wouldst never have wished to, if I had not told thee that Polydectes would protect thee. Why did I tell thee that? Why did I speak when thou didst ask nothing? I am sure that this will react against thee. Still once more, hear me, Danaë. I know why one would protect thee from what thou wouldst do today. I could not tell thee, but I know, I know, I know! It is concerned with thy happiness, I swear to thee by thy lovely hair which I saw lengthen, by thy lovely eyes which I often put to sleep, by thy lovely mouth which I nourished when thou wast naked in my arms like a little waxen Eros. Danaë! Danaë! Do not descend these steps, do not enter this vault, do not open the doors here, do not touch the locks nor turn the keys of bronze! It is thine unhappiness which is there: it is the sorrow of thy life. When one knows one's sorrow, it should be forever forgotten! When one knows it not, one should not search for it. Danaë! return, put out thy lamp, return to the day, go away from here, never return here, never think of it. Here thou goest toward death, here thou goest toward the night . . ."

Danaë spoke, in a slow voice:

"The oil has spilled upon my hands. It has fallen upon my naked foot. I tremble. Dost thou see, nurse? Take my lamp, I can no longer carry it. Oh! I am all covered with perfume. I should have poured it

all upon my hands. But we have need of the lamp. Light me, nurse."

The nurse wept:

"She enters; it was her destiny that she should enter. It was her destiny that she should be unfortunate. Have pity on us, merciful gods!"

And Danaë replied:

"I know something of what is behind this door. Sorrow, that is always the same thing. *It is a by-gone happiness which cannot be renewed . . .*"

And she continued, as though in a dream:

"What happiness have I ever had to equal this one? I know well what is coming. That is to say . . . I do not know all, but I divine something of it. Raise the light higher, nurse. I am going to open the door."

"This is not even the door of a tomb. It is something even more horrible . . . It is . . . oh! I cannot tell thee. Thou shalt see it, Danaë. It is thy destiny, as thou thyself canst see. No one can prevent thee. Thou couldst not prevent thyself from going in here."

"The door is not heavy. The hinges are smooth. It must be often opened, this door, is it not? How is it that anyone is so much concerned with my misfortune, when it appears as nothing to him? Or better; perhaps it is a misfortune for me alone and a happiness for all others.— The door gives way. I barely touched it with the tip of my finger and felt it turn itself . . . Seest thou, now, seest thou? Seest thou? . . ."

A pile of gold pieces rolled about her, through the wide opened door. She gave a frightened cry:

"Ah! . . . Zeus . . . Oh! oh! oh! . . . My lover!"

She threw herself upon the ground, in the outpouring treasure.

"Alas! Alas!" said the nurse. "Alas! It has come."

Danaë had thrown aside her tunic, her girdle, her embroidered ribbons.

"Adored Zeus! Beloved Zeus! Gentle Zeus! Then I meet thee again and, as before, in a prison of bronze. It was thee they concealed in this subterranean night, thunder-hurtling God! Since I was free, it was thee they wished to wall up, while I died in the sunlight, ignorant of the hiding place of thy splendor through which Perseus was magnified in my womb. Lover! Lover! I am here! Awaken! Quicken thyself! Arise! I am Danaë! Danaë! . . ."

And she rolled herself upon the icy metal.

"Thou dost not hear me? . . . Oh! how cold thou art! My hands seem plunged into snow . . . Ah! . . . Ah! . . . it falls back . . . it no longer knows me. This is not he, nurse! . . . Tell me that this is not

he... I have well divined this which has happened... I cannot see any more... My arms pain me..."

"Come, Danaë," said the nurse. "Come, thou shouldst go up at once. We should not remain any longer here."

AMARYLLIS ended.

There was a moment of silence; then an exclamation of disappointment from Rhea.

"And is that all?" she cried. "Thou art worse than Melandryon! What happened to her? Why did she say that her arms pained her?"

"Hast thou forgotten," said Amaryllis, "how Melandryon said that symbols were not to be explained?"

"But..."

"I do not think that story was so very sorrowful," Philinna interposed. "It seems to me that Danaë was fortunate. At the most, she was disappointed when she found the gold so cold; but, on the other hand, had she expected such happiness, up to that moment? Had she expected to ever see the golden shower again and to feel, through it, the living embrace of the god?"

"But certainly," said Rhea, "thou didst not mean to infer that she was dying. For we know that she lived in Argos with Perseus, long afterward, when he reigned there, after he had accidentally killed King Acrisios in fulfillment of the prophecy."

"If thou knowest that," said Melandryon, "or believest it to thine own satisfaction, why dost thou question? It was Amaryllis' story and she ended it, doubtless, according to her thought. Interpret it as thou wilt. As for me, I am more interested at this moment in the cool water of yonder spring."

SUPPLEMENT

THOSE who have read Pierre Louÿs' Spanish romance, "Woman and Puppet," know that this Author could give to a modern theme the same interest he bestowed by preference on the antique. He could also, on occasion, blend the two.

Of the two following pieces, "Spring Night" is taken from "Archipel," a volume of travel-sketches published in 1906. "A New Sensation" was first published in 1899 and later incorporated in "Sanguines."

SPRING NIGHT

WRAPPED in her light cloak, behind the gate of the garden, Nephelis sat waiting.

Under the trees, the night was so profound that she could not see her hand before her eyes, and only the fragrance of the trees revealed their hidden presence. All slept, the men far off, the birds hidden, the interwoven branches invisible. The silence of the earth was as pure as the blackness of the shadows. Nephelis sat motionless, her hands clasped over her knee, her head on one side.

She did not wish to move. Unaccustomed, as a wife, to the artifices of seductions, she did not stir a fold of her cloak, for fear lest the perfumes of her body might be lost in the air stirred by the movement. And, knowing well that she had come too soon, she waited patiently, satisfied at being there, intoxicated with hope.

Gently, a finger tapped the outside of the door.

Already!

Noiselessly, she removed the heavy bar and opened the door on its oiled hinges. She heard a step on the path, but saw nothing except the black night.

"Do not look for me," she murmured. "I am here. I will precede thee; come quickly; I am afraid of the slaves, lest one of them see us. Follow me. Beyond the thickets, thou wilt be able to see my shadow."

She walked on tip-toe. Her little sandals barely touched the sand or the mosaic pavement. A branch, which she grazed, made her shudder. There was a furtive rustling through the vast silence, and the stirring flowers threw out their perfume.

The first, she entered the chamber, ran to a niche where she had put a screen over an earthen lamp to veil, without extinguishing, it; and, when she had released a little of the light, she turned.

"Gods!" she cried, "Gods! Gods! Gods! It is not he!"

The man had advanced to the centre of the floor. She recoiled

toward the wall until her back struck it heavily, and her hands wandered uncertainly over its surface.

"Who art thou?"

"I am not *he*, as thou hast said. Art thou quite sure of that? There is a *he*, is there not, and the rest of the world? I, I am the rest, humanity, the crowd, of which nothing is wanted."

Nephelis regarded him, almost fainting. He was a bony man, hairy and bearded, his heavy beard accenting his leanness. His head seemed made of hair. Four teeth were missing from his upper jaw, so that his moustache fell mingling with his beard, and this detail was horrible. His thin neck projected from a cloak of wool which was sufficiently dirty and fantastically draped. His legs appeared shorter than his body. He was neither large, nor small, but the lamp, set on the ground, doubled his body in an immense shadow, half on the wall and half on the ceiling.

He crossed his arms violently and thrust his hands under his arm-pits.

"Aha!" he exclaimed. "The perfumed bed! rose petals! an amphora of cool wine! Someone was expected, even though that one was not me. When the husband makes war, the wife has a debauch. Ha! Ha! Coronals of flowers! . . . But I smell myrrh, which nauseates me . . . And this lamp with its black smoke . . . That smacks of prostitution in thy house, dost thou hear me? . . . Hello! Take off thy robe and practice thy business! Here is a drachma."

Shooting across the chamber, the piece of silver struck Nephelis in the belly. She stifled a cry.

"Miserable one," she said, in a thin voice, "thou shalt know what it will cost thee to speak thus to me. Yes, I have a husband, and I have a lover, but the door of the garden has opened again; my lover is there, in the passage; he is coming; he approaches; and if he finds thee here he will kill thee like a worm."

"He will kill me?" said the unknown. "How will he do that? I have been dead these hundred years. Thou askest my name? I am the King of Egypt, embalmed."

Nephelis passed her hand slowly over her face, feeling a cold chill of fear . . .

"I am lost," she exclaimed. "He is mad."

The man, seeing her pale, resumed, smiling:

"Do not cry out, my pretty friend, or I will kill thee; and for thee, who hast not yet died, this will mean more than it would to a corpse like mine. Look at my mummied flesh."

With an abrupt movement, he threw off his vestments and appeared nude.

"Thou didst just say that the gate had opened again. That is impossible. The bar is in place. No one is in the garden, no one in the passage. Practice thy business, my girl, I have given thee a drachma. And do not cry out or, by Zeus, I will slay thee at once."

At that instant, Nephelis would have welcomed death. Her fright far surpassed that which the dead feel at the sight of the eternal Lethe . . . But death by this man—Oh! what could be worse!

She did not cry out.

With a supreme effort, knowing that the insane should not be contradicted, she breathed out a few phrases, painfully articulated by her dry, cold tongue:

"Yes, thou art King of Egypt . . . thou art covered with little bands . . . But it is beneath thy dignity, Lord, to remain in the house of thy servant . . . Shall I show thee the path? . . . Thy queens, fairer than women, sing at the gates of the garden."

The madman started.

"King! King! Nonsense! Who said I was a king? Do I look like a man? Is it not evident that I am a god? And how could I have entered here, poor fool, if I had not been a god? The door is locked; I told thee, the bar is in its sockets. I did not enter by the door. I am the emanation of that black amphora. I am Bacchus! Bacchus! Bacchus!"

He clamped the coronal of roses on his head and began to dance wildly.

Imperceptibly, Nephelis slipped along the wall, seeking to reach a place from which she could take flight. The madman saw nothing, spinning around in the intoxication of his bacchanal; but, as she stooped toward the lock, she felt a bony hand descend upon her shoulder. For the first time, he touched her. She recoiled once more to the depths of the chamber.

"Ah!" he exclaimed, pausing. "Thy skin is fresh, my girl. Why art thou not disrobed? Take off thy robe! I have paid thee."

He walked toward her and drew the loose, thin robe away from one of her breasts.

Nephelis flattened herself against the wall. She tried to speak, but not a word came from her trembling, frightened lips . . . The madman's fingers grasped the admirable breast and pressed it: a thin jet of milk spurted out.

At sight of this, he paled. His voice changed and became like that of a little child.

"Mamma," he cried. "Mamma! Why hast thou not nursed me, these hundred years? What have I done that thou shouldst give thy breast to another, to another whom thou awaitest in a bed of roses and perfumes? Is it because I no longer have teeth, that thou wilt not nurse me? Mamma! Why hast thou left me?"

And, holding with his hands the despairing Nephelis' arms, he quickly set his lips to the nipple and sucked it thirstily.

A start of horror straightened the chest of the young woman.

"Monster! It is my child's milk thou drinkest!"

She shook herself free and grasped the man by the throat; but, in an instant, she was subdued.

"Ha! Ha!" he cried. "I told thee no one could kill a dead person. On the other hand, thou shalt see that it is easy to kill a living woman ... Ha! Ha! No! Do not cry out. I will not slay thee. This is a game; it is a festival. Give me thy hair-ribbon."

He tore the band from her long hair which fell silently, and, seizing from behind Nephelis' two wrists, he bound them tightly upon her loins.

The young woman's teeth chattered. Once more, she wished to cry out, but a last hope sustained her ... The garden door had not been closed ... *He* was coming, the lover, the saviour; *he* would deliver her ... Ah! how she wished for him! In what a desperate burst, all the energy of her desire strained toward him!

Meanwhile, the madman had removed her girdle and detached the clasp and silver buckle on her right shoulder. Her vestment sank down. In vain Nephelis closed her knees. The man snatched away the robe and, grasping the unfortunate girl about the waist, threw her upon the bed where she fell, moaning.

A breath of perfumes mounted from the shaken couch.

"Ah! That smell of myrrh!" the madman cried again. "Thy kennel is infected, daughter of joy! Ha! Out with the myrrh! Down with it! Down with it! ... I am Psammetichus, son of the Sun. Myrrh is the odor of the Night. I am the conquering King, the Highest, the King! the King! Myrrh is the odor of filthy caverns. Out with the myrrh, daughter of the Night! By the horns of Hathor and by the jaws of Pasht! Down with it! Down with it! Down with it!"

He subsided, his head bent.

Nephelis, cowering at the extremity of the couch, watched him, wide-eyed.

A great calm followed. The man was silent. Outside, the same nocturnal peace brooded over the deserted garden. Then *he* was not

coming! Gods! Perhaps *he* had come, *he* had knocked, *he* had not passed the door, *he* had gone . . . gone . . . A cruel anguish contracted Nephelis' breast.

And the madman recovered himself.

"Thou art beautiful," he said, softly. "How long hast thou been my wife? Thou wert not like this when I was king. Thy blond hair has become black. Thy narrow flanks have become larger . . . And thy legs! . . . Oh! thy legs are very large! . . . Open them! . . ."

He continued talking to her, resting his hand on a marble tabouret which held vials of perfumes.

"Fear nothing," he said. "I am old. Thou seest, my girl, I am an old man . . . I have been dead an hundred years. Do not turn away from a mummy. I wish only to kiss thy mouth, and to sleep, to sleep upon thy breast, oh mother."

He advanced his bony hands slowly, as though imploring her. But a nervous spasm shook him from head to foot. He leapt upon the bed, over the young woman and fell on the other side.

"Aaaah!"

At last she had cried out! A cry long like an agony, a rending of her whole soul, a despairing plaint for rescue, to the gods, for a miracle, for life!

"Help! Help!" screamed the madman. "Stop struggling, daughter of the Night! Do not close thy teeth so, my kiss shall penetrate thee! Ha! the myrrh! the myrrh! Thou shalt conceive, be sure! Stars issue from thy breast like bees from a hive! Ha! ha! ha! ha! ha! For I am old . . ."

Nephelis had freed her right hand and, with a movement so quick that the madman saw nothing, she seized a heavy object from the tabouret and struck him on the temple.

She drew herself upright on the bed, her mouth open, her hands before her face, with a sort of laughter more frightful than any moaning. The man had fallen under the blow but, for her, he was not dead. She seized quickly, from a slender vase, her long hair pins, ten or twelve sharp points of which any one would be mortal and, twenty times, she plunged them all into his lean chest, between his projecting ribs, into his stomach, abdomen, eyes and cheeks.

And when the slaves, awakened by her cries, hurried in, they found her trampling upon the corpse, covered with blood, entirely naked and with her hands raised toward the sky, like an impossible Andromeda who had triumphed over the Monster.

27 December 1905.

SANGUINES

TRANSLATED BY

JAMES CLEUGH

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THE WEARER OF PURPLE

I

IN the green gardens of Ephesus, the white city, we were employed, two youthful apprentices, in the service of the aged Bryaxis.

He had just seated himself in a stone chair, as pale in color as his own face, and was silent, scratching the ground with the end of his worn staff.

Out of respect for his great age and for his great reputation, still more venerable than his years, we remained standing before him, leaning against two black cypresses and not venturing to open our mouths so long as he said nothing.

We gazed at him without moving, in a sort of awe of which he seemed to be aware. We were glad that he had survived all those we would have wished to know; we loved him to show himself to us, who were simple children born too late to hear the heroic voices of the past; and foreseeing the future, when he would be gone, we silently sought to recognize the invisible connection between his person and the glory of his achievement. That forehead had conceived, that very thumb had moulded in the clay of the preliminary model, a frieze and twelve statues for the tomb of Mausolus, the five colossal figures erected before the city of Rhodes, the Bull of Pasiphaë, a work over which the eyes of women dream, the tremendous Apollo of bronze and the Seleucus Triumphant of the new capital.

The more I contemplated their author, the more it seemed to me that the Gods must have fashioned with their own hands this sculptor of light, before descending to his presence that he might reveal them to mankind.

Suddenly we heard the sound of racing feet, a whistle, a laughing exclamation, and young Ophelion sprang into our midst.

"Bryaxis!" cried he. "Listen to this! The whole town knows it

already. If I am the first to tell you, I'll present our Lady Artemis with a broad bean! But first, greeting! I had forgotten."

He gave us a rapid wink, which might pass for a greeting, unless it meant: Get ready for a surprise: and began at once:

"I suppose you knew, aged one, that Clesides was painting a portrait of the Queen?"

"I had heard so."

"But have you heard the end of the story?"

"There is a story, then?"

"I should say so! Then you don't know? Clesides arrived eight days ago from Athens for that precise purpose. He was conducted to the palace, but the Queen was not ready: she condescended to be late. At last she appeared, accorded the painter a bare greeting, and began to pose, if pose it could be called. It seems she fidgeted the whole time, on the pretext that too much love-making had given her the cramp. Clesides continued to draw as well as he could in the midst of all this twitching, and was in a very bad temper, as you may imagine. His first sketch was not even made, when suddenly the Queen wheels round and announces that she wants to pose from the back!"

"Any reason?"

"Because her back, so she said, was as perfect as the rest, and ought to show in the picture. Clesides protested in vain that he was a painter, not a sculptor, that panels are not looked at from behind, and that it is impossible to draw a woman so as to be seen from every side in one picture. She replied that it was her will to be painted so, that the laws of Art did not apply to her, that she had seen the portrait of her sister as Persephone, and of her mother as Demeter, and that she, Stratonice herself, would pose by herself for all three Graces."

"Not a bad idea," said Bryaxis.

Our friend became heated.

"Suppose Clesides had refused then? He could have done so, I presume. One does not give orders to an artist. That little thing gives them to us in a manner we are not going to put up with. Her father would never have behaved like that. Why, when he was besieging Rhodes and Protogenes was working there on his Iasylus—"

"I know," said Bryaxis. "Go on."

"In short then, Clesides was very angry, although he did not show it. He finished his study of the back; the Queen rose. She asked him to return the next day; he accepted the invitation and left her. Good."

Ophelion folded his arms.

"The next day, whom do you think he found? A serving-woman

on a stool! 'Stratonice,' says she, 'is tired this morning. She will not pose any more, master, and I am to be her substitute until the portrait is finished. Thus has she decided!' "

We burst out laughing, and Bryaxis himself joined in our mirth.

Ophelion continued gaily:

"The slave was not bad looking. Clesides was scrupulous enough to give her a stiff dose of cramp in order that she might bear a closer resemblance to her mistress. Then he explained dryly that he did not require her any longer, and returned to his lodging with his drawings."

"He was right that time!" I exclaimed. "The Queen was really making a fool of him."

"On the way back, as he passed along the quay, he noticed a certain sailor who, so he had been told, was a secret visitor to the Queen, although no one could prove it. It was Glaucon; you know the man I mean. Clesides summoned him to his lodging, paid him, and got him to pose. Four days later he had finished two rude little pictures, which showed the Queen in the arms of this fellow, first from the front and then from the back—"

"Just as she had wished," I interrupted.

"Pretty well. Last night, nobody knows just when, he fixed the two paintings on the wall of the palace of Seleucus: no doubt he managed to get away by sea after the publication of his revenge, for there is no trace of him anywhere."

We all cried out:

"The Queen will die of rage!"

"The Queen? She knows already, and if she is furious in reality, she conceals it wonderfully well. All through the morning an enormous crowd passed in procession before that scandalous advertisement. Stratonice was told of it, and also wanted to look. Attended by eighty members of the Court, she halted before each painting, stepping forwards and backwards in order to criticize the picture by turns in its detail and in its entirety. I was there, and as I followed her movements with terror, wondering which of us she was going to put to death when her wrath should explode: 'I don't know which is the best,' says she, 'but both are excellent.' "

Bryaxis, in the midst of our delight at this, merely raised his eyebrows, wrinkling his aged countenance into the lines of surprise and approbation:

"She is evidently as witty as she is impudent," said he. "The story is really a curious one. But why are you so proud of it, my children? It seems to me that the artist's rôle is inferior to that of the model, in the anecdote I have just heard."

"If the Queen had dared," said Ophelion, "she would have had Clesides pursued beyond the seas and killed like a dog. But in that case the whole of Greece would have considered her as a savage, and she likes to believe herself an Athenian because she happens to have been born in a Parthenon which has been turned into a brothel. Stratonice holds Asia in her hand like a bluebottle, and she has given ground before a man whose sole weapon is a lump of wax. Henceforth the Artist is the King of Kings, the only inviolable being under the sun. That is why we are proud!"

The old man made a slight grimace of disdain.

"You are young," he answered. "In my time, the same formula was current, and perhaps with more reason. When Alexander timidly endeavored to explain 'why' he liked such and such a painting, my friend Apelles silenced him by saying that he was making himself ridiculous in front of the boys who were grinding the colors. And Alexander apologized. Well! I never thought stories of this kind were worth the telling. Whatever may be the respect or the arrogance shown by the King to contemporary painters, the pictures are no better and no worse for it: all that is therefore of no consequence. On the other hand, it may be a good and even a great thing if an artist dares and can place himself, not above any king whose army happens to pass by his house, but above the laws of men and above the laws of Heaven, upon the day that his muses order him to trample under foot all that is not actually themselves."

Bryaxis had drawn himself up.

We murmured:

"Who did so?"

"No one, perhaps," said the old man with a dreaming look in his eyes. "No one, except possibly Parrhasius. And then, was he right? I thought so, once. Today, I do not know what to think."

Ophelion cast a glance of astonishment in my direction. But I could tell him nothing.

"We do not understand you," I said to Bryaxis.

He decided to give us a hint.

"The Prometheus," he muttered in a low voice.

"Well?"

"Don't you know? Don't you know how Parrhasius came to paint the Prometheus of the Acropolis?"

"We have never heard how it was."

"You have never heard of that terrible drama? Of the tragedy of death and of shrieks whence that painting emerged in blood like a newly born infant?"

"Speak. Tell us the whole drama. We know nothing of it."

For a moment Bryaxis rested his gaze upon our young faces, as if he hesitated to inflict upon our hearts such a recollection.

Then he decided:

"Well, yes! I will tell you."

II

WHAT I am about to relate, my children, took place in the very last year of the hundred and seventh Olympiad, the very year that Plato died; quite fifty years ago now.

I was at that time in Halicarnassus, and had just finished my portion of the work on the tomb of Mausolus the Long-haired: a thankless portion, if ever there was one. Scopas, who was in charge of us, had chosen to decorate himself the eastern front of the monument, which meant that at the hour of the morning sacrifices, our Master's marbles had the full benefit of the sun and actually one saw nothing else but them. He had allotted the side facing south, which was a little less interesting and twice as long, to his companion Timotheus. Leochares had undertaken the western face; and I had got what nobody wanted, the north side, which required a vast amount of work, and was in perpetual shadow. For five years, then, I carved Victories and Amazons that lived, while they were in the sun, like real women, but each time that I had to place one forever in the gloomy region of the Mausoleum, it seemed that I was witnessing her death, and I wept, my little ones.

At last my task came to an end. I busied myself with my return to Attica. That year, as now, the Ægean was unsafe. War everywhere. Hate between city and city. Athens, by the way, had been defeated. On the day I wished to set out, I could not find any shipowner who cared to go to the Piræus. The Carians, like good traders, were going over to the conqueror, and since the capture of Olynthus had led to the fall of Chalcis into the hands of the Macedonian, all the merchants of Halicarnassus were setting sail to Eubœa, where they intended to sell robes from Cos and courtesans from Cnidus.

I, too, set out for Chalcis, telling myself that the Euripus was not broad, and that I could soon reach Athens from Aulis by Tanagra and the Acharnian road.

The sea voyage was unpleasant. I had rather a bad time in my corner, though I took up little enough room. My name, no doubt, had then a different sound from that which it has today, and the

Mausoleum was too new to demand an estimation of its worth. The other passengers were content to know that I was an Athenian citizen, and that was quite enough for them to ridicule me, since Athens was out of luck.

One morning when the sun had already risen above the crests of the eastern heights, we landed at Chalcis in the midst of an immense crowd. I plunged into it with delight.

In reply to my inquiries, I learned that outside the gates a slave-market quite out of the ordinary was being held. Philip, after the fall of Olynthus, had razed the town to the ground, and enslaved the entire population of about eighty thousand. The sale had been going on two days, and it was calculated that it would last three months.

The city was crammed, too, with foreigners, purchasers, and sight-seers. My informant, who was a wine merchant, had no objection to these swarms of people; but he told me that his neighbor, who sold, as a rule, only the most expensive slaves, had been ruined in one night, so quickly had prices fallen. I can still hear the innkeeper saying, with much gesticulation: "Then, a Thracian lad of twenty! Every one knows how much they are worth, by the Gods! When you bought twelve of them to work a field, you paid a full twelve bags of gold stamped with the owl! [1] Well, now go and look at the prices. The quotation has fallen to fifty drachmæ! You can judge by that of the rest! It is unheard of! There are three thousand virgins in the market: they are being sold off at twenty-five drachmæ apiece: don't think I am guessing, the price is twenty-two, twenty-five, or twenty-eight drachmæ if their skins are particularly white. Ah, Philip is a great king!"

I was disgusted with the fellow, and leaving him, I followed the crowd beyond the open gates into the vast sloping meadow in which the Olynthians were penned.

With great trouble, I was shouldering my way through the swaying groups of people, and wondering in which direction to continue so difficult a progress, when I saw passing before me a fanciful and majestic procession, before which the crowd drew apart.

Six Sarmatian slaves advanced two by two, each carrying a load of gold, and with swords stuck in his belt. Behind them a little negro held horizontally, like a libation-cup, a long crook of rose-colored cedar with a gold riband: the sacred staff of the Master. Finally, gigantic, weighty, crowned with flowers, his beard saturated with perfumes, his shoulders upheld by two pretty girls, wrapped in a mantle of purple of enormous extent, and crushing the grasses with his great

[1] The bird sacred to Athene.

feet, Parrhasius himself appeared, like another Indian Bacchus, and his glance fell upon me.

"If you are not Bryaxis," said he, frowning at me, "how comes it that you permit yourself to appropriate his countenance?"

"And you, if you are not the son of Semele, who has given you those vast curls, that dionysiac stature, and that purple robe woven by the Graves of Naxos?"

He smiled. Without even disengaging his arm from the charming support which increased the appearance of its bulk, he held out to me, across one of the courtesans, his mighty hand, like a golden platter, loaded with rings, and clasped my own upon a bare breast.

"Chariclo," said he to the girl on his right, "lend an arm to my friend, and let it embrace him pleasantly. On with our walk; it will soon be too hot for your complexion."

Arm in arm, then, we all moved on. Parrhasius imparted to our pace a vast and regular rhythm, pompous as a hexameter, in which the short steps of the women might be said to correspond to the beat of the dactyl.

In three words he asked after my work and my life. At each of my answers he said quickly, "Excellent!" in order to cut short my explanations. Then he began to speak of himself.

"You must understand that I have taken you under my protection," said he, "for not one Athenian citizen except myself is safe in the hands of the Macedonian, and if the slightest quarrel had brought you before a court of law, I wouldn't have given two oboli this morning for your freedom. Henceforth you may rest assured."

"I am not," I answered, "of a timid nature; but I can scarcely doubt that even here if you gave your name—"

"I have done so," he declared. "I announced myself. When Philip heard that I was doing him the honor of visiting his new city, which he is peopling only with rascals, he sent to meet me, at ten stadia from the bridge of the Euripus, an officer of his household, who presented me with the royal bounty, including six colossi of the North and the two handsome girls you see—strength to clear my way, grace to adorn my person."

"Are the ladies from Macedonia?" I inquired.

They burst out laughing.

"If you call Rhodes Macedonia!"

With a generous gesture Parrhasius concluded the subject:

"They will attend you this evening. I have others, left behind with my baggage; but you may be alone, my friend; accept from my

hand these roses. The skin of their young bodies should be extraordinarily effective against a carpet of dark purple."

We were now close to the great slave-market. He stopped and looked at me.

"By the way, you don't ask what I am looking for here!"

"I did not presume."

"Can you guess?"

"I certainly cannot; I do not think you require a slave, since Philip presents you with his. Nor a woman, since these—"

"I have come from Athens to Chalcis to find a model, my young friend. Ah, I thought that would surprise you."

"A model? Why, are there none left between the Academy and the Piræus?"

"About four hundred and forty thousand for me," said Parrhasius, with pride; "in other words, the whole population of Attica. Nevertheless, I am looking for a model in the Olynthian slave-market. You will understand why, when I tell you—"

He drew himself up.

"I am painting," said he, "a Prometheus."

As he uttered the great name, his mouth opened wide, and all the horror of his subject appeared for a moment in the knitting of his brows.

"As you know, there are studies of Prometheus in every portico. Timagoras has sold one. Apollodorus has attempted another. Zeuxis thought he could—but why recall so many miserable daubs? No one has ever painted a Prometheus."

"I can well believe it," I replied.

"We have been shown naked peasants bound to wooden rocks, with their faces twisted into some sort of indescribable grimace which makes one think of the toothache; but Prometheus the Fire-Smith, Prometheus the Creator of Man and his struggle with the Eagle-God between the Caucasus and the Thunderbolt—ah, no! Bryaxis, that has never been done. That mighty Prometheus I see as clearly as I do your face, and I am determined to nail his image upon the wall of the Parthenon."

So saying, he withdrew himself from the support of the two women, took his gold staff from its diminutive bearer, and traced great lines in the air.

"I worked for two months; I had found magnificent rocks on Crates' estate on the promontory of Astypalaia. All my studies were finished. The background of my landscape, ready. The line of the figure, in place. Suddenly I was held up. I could not find a head. Of

course, if it had been a matter of a Hermes, of an Apollo, or of a Pan, any citizen of Athens would have been proud to pose for me; but to take as model a man whose genius is like light upon his face, and to bind such a man by the feet and by the wrists upon the framework of a stage property, you can see well enough how impossible that is. One can only subject the limbs of a slave to dislocation of that kind, and they have all got heads like animals! They might be called Enceladus or Typhon, but not Prometheus. Why? Because we lack slaves who come from the free Hellene class. Well, Philip is providing us with them; I have come for them to the place where he sells them."

I shuddered.

"An Olynthian?" I said. "A conquered ally? Where are you going to paint this picture?"

"At Athens!"

"On the soil of Athens your slave will be free."

"He will be what I wish."

"But then, if you treat him as a prisoner, are you not afraid of the laws?"

"The laws?" said Parrhasius, with a smile. "The laws are in my hand like the folds of this mantle that I cast over my shoulder."

And with a magnificent movement he swathed himself in the sun-lit purple of his robe.

III

THE Olynthian slave-market stretched before us. As far as the eye could reach, and forming in one direction six wide parallel rows, platforms of boards had been raised upon low trestles which were about on a level with the middle point of the thighs of the passers-by.

The population of a whole town was collected there, in face of a second multitude: one merchandise, the other purchasers. Eighty thousand men, women, and children, their hands bound behind their backs, their feet tied loosely with cords, awaited, most of them standing, the unknown Master who was to conduct them to some mysterious quarter of the Hellenic world. One soldier was in charge of forty, and took the part of salesman. Behind the tables, servants, picked up in the suburbs, passed round the bread and water necessary for the sustenance of the enslaved host, and a loud and continuous uproar, like the ceaseless voice of a carnival, arose.

Parrhasius entered the principal fairway, where on either hand were exhibited, naked as a people wrought of marble, the young men and women who had been considered worth a high price. To my aston-

ishment, I could see nothing mournful in their looks, which seemed more inquisitive than lugubrious. There is a limit to human suffering, and in youth it is soon reached. Since the ruin of their homes, these splendid creatures had completely exhausted the quota of days and nights which it was possible for them to devote to apprehension or to despair. No trace of such emotions was now visible in their appearance. The young men, no doubt, had regained confidence in the prospect of future escape. Perhaps the girls were thinking of the lovers to whom they were to be subjected, and were innocent enough to desire them, whoever they might be. In a word, whether it were ignorance or bravado, they seemed to put a good face on the matter.

The crowd surged about them, more anxious to examine than to buy. Few made their decisions quickly in the distraction of so extraordinary a market. The slaves were freely handled. The muscles of a leg, the delicacy of a skin, the firmness of a budding breast, or the breadth of a manly fist were carefully tested. Then the group would pass on to the next platform, hoping to find something still better.

Parrhasius halted for a moment before a young girl of remarkable height, whose tall white figure was an exact harmony.

"That is a beautiful girl," said he.

Instantly the salesman sprang forward.

"She is the most beautiful in the market, lord. See how upright she is, and how white. Sixteen yesterday—"

"Eighteen," corrected the girl herself.

"You lie, by Zeus! She is but sixteen, lord. Look at her black hair, gathered up with a comb. When she loosens it, it falls to her knees. Look at her hands, at her long fingers which have not even touched a distaff. She is the daughter of a Senator—"

"Do not speak of my father," said the girl gravely.

"Whether I said so or not, you could tell she was," declared the salesman. "She is as beautiful as a Nereid, as supple as a sword, as gentle as a hind in a wood, and lastly, what is worth all the rest, virgin as on the day she was born."

And with a rough and cynical hand, he proved to us the truth of his words.

Parrhasius struck the dry ground with the end of his heavy staff.

"Virgin or no," said he, "that did not trouble me. It was enough for me that she was beautiful. Free her of these degrading shackles, and let her put on her robe at once. I purchase her. What is her name?"

"Artemidora," said she.

"Well, Artemidora, know that you are henceforth in the train of Parrhasius."

She opened a pair of wide eyes, and murmured with naïve hesitation:

"You are—perhaps—the Parrhasius who—"

"I am he," replied her master.

And dismissing her to the custody of his servants, he continued his progress.

Then he deigned to explain his purchase.

"Stretched on the Caucasus, that girl would make a delightful picture, but it was not with the idea of finishing by her aid the Prometheus of which I have told you, that I bought her. She will serve me as model for certain small pictures dealing with sexual subjects, with which I relieve the tension of my mind in my hours of leisure, and which are far, as you know, from being the least admirable of my works."

For a long time we continued our walk among the trestles. The multitude had increased. The sun was becoming less and less endurable in this vast shadowless plain filled with a sea of people.

Artemidora had put on first her white tunic and then her virgins' belt drawn high beneath the breasts, and her hair was hidden in the end of a bluish veil which swathed her whole body. She often turned back to look at us, and I noticed then that with her raiment she had suddenly assumed what was practically a new personality. Her face seemed altogether different. She watched us with anxiety, as if she was wondering which of all these men was to insult her modesty, and already forgetting the nudity in which we had seen her, she continually twitched the folds of her veil with that delightful backward thrust of the left elbow which attempts to dissimulate the curve of the hips.

We were already half-way down the principal fairway when Parrhasius stopped.

"No," said he, "what I want is not here. A youthful frame and a fine head do not go together. Besides, Prometheus is not a boy. Let us turn off to the right and leave it to chance: it is more probable that I shall find my man among the slaves to be sold at a lower figure."

Scarcely had we gone three paces into the second lane to the right when he stretched out his hands and cried: "Behold him!"

I turned with curiosity.

The man to whom he thus drew my attention was about fifty. Well proportioned and of great height, he had a fine forehead, strongly marked and prominent brows, a nose at once powerful and of geometrically exact design, wide nostrils, and deeply hollowed ears. His hair was gray, his beard still brown and crisply curling, as striking

as the rest of his features. The powerful sinews of his neck formed a sort of pedestal which lent, in some curious way, an additional authority to the intelligence of his eyes.

Parrhasius addressed him:

"What is your name?"

"No man."

"I didn't ask you for a literary allusion, my good fellow, but for the name you received from your father. You will tell me that, I suppose?"

"For a month my name has been No man. If I am of an ancient stock, it is not my pleasure to reveal it."

"Why not?"

"Nor does it please me to give the reason, son of a dog."

Parrhasius, beside himself, became more purple than his mantle. The salesman, very much alarmed, extended his arms in a gesture of supplication.

"Do not listen to him, lord. He speaks like a madman, and it is pure malice on his part, for he has more brains than I have. He is a physician. For knowledge and skill he had no equal in Olynthus. I am simply telling you what every one repeats, for he was celebrated even in Macedonia. I have heard that during the last thirty years he has cured more Olynthians than we managed to kill the day we took the town. He will be a valuable slave when you have chained him and made him feel the whip; he still plays the insolent, but he will change his tone like the rest. Then, if you know how to manage him, you will not make the acquaintance of death till your hundredth winter. Give me thirty drachmæ and Nicostratus will be your property for life."

"Nicostratus?" repeated Parrhasius, turning to me. "I do, in fact, know the name. My indifference is complete in regard to his medical knowledge. All my drugs are in my cellar, and one cures me very well of the indigestions given by another. When, as sometimes happens, I have a cold, I do not make use of any other plaster than a fair warm-breasted girl to recline upon my bosom, and I am quite confident of living for a hundred years without the aid of this apothecary."

Turning to the salesman, he ordered: "Take off his clothes."

Nicostratus, powerless but disdainful, made no resistance.

Parrhasius continued to issue orders:

"Face front, arms down. Good—sideways—back—now right side; front again; 'tis a bargain."

He clapped me lightly on the shoulder and said in a low tone: "Superb, my boy!"

And I did not answer, for I experienced an uneasy feeling which was almost one of envy.

Fifty years have passed—the space of a human life. I have seen thousands of models, never one comparable to this Nicostratus of Olynthus.

He was the statue of Man in all his greatness, at the age when strength becomes power. Parrhasius called him Prometheus, but any name of those that are eternal would have been no less fitting for his new slave. With that man in my studio for a year, I could have made enough preliminary studies to fill my whole career with statues of Zeus, of Pluto, of Poseidon, or of the fifteen gray-bearded Gods who are called the Lords of the World. He evoked all Olympus. When he stretched forth his arm, it held the Trident, and when he raised it, there was the Thunderbolt. The lines of his pectorals, where they joined the shoulders, were so majestic that all his gestures seemed divine.

Ah, I thought, Parrhasius offers me women, as if I were going to pass my evenings between the pillars of the Ceramicus, and it is clear that he does not understand that I would renounce love itself in return for his Nicostratus. Will the Gods ever inspire him to send me the man, were it but for a day?

Such were the pangs of jealousy that I secretly suffered; but I half consoled myself with the reflection that, if not in marble, at least in paint, a medium almost as pure, the deathless splendor that dwelt in him would be preserved.

Nicostratus was, in fact, lost for marble; I never had him as a model. The unfortunate man only posed once, and you shall hear how.

IV

I RETURNED alone, on horseback, through Attica. During my five years' absence, my creditors had sold what little property I had, and I put up at one of the inns in the city, in very simple fashion, for the long weeks which would have to elapse before I could find a new home.

Parrhasius had followed me at a few days' interval. When he heard of my modest habitation, he desired that I should accept no other hospitality than his own, and sent word that he expected me. The next day I called upon him, unaccompanied, to decline his offer.

He lived half-way between the Ceramicus and the Academy, in a palace constructed of marble and bronze, near the small house occupied by Plato. His gardens stretched right down to the blue borders

of the Cycloborus, and in the opposite direction, rising towards the road, they surrounded the white building with trees, which served merely for ornament.

Owing to a weakness, surprising in a man of his standing, Parrhasius was ostentatious in the display of wealth. His fortune was enormous, and he saw to it that no one had any doubt about the matter. In addition to this, he extracted its due proportion of delight from every pleasure, and desired to experience continually the freshness of marble, the fine texture of silk, the still more delicate material of virgin flesh, the color of purple, so appropriate an adornment of the human countenance, and the incorruptible and sunlike quality of gold. For these reasons his house resembled the palace of Artaxerxes.

He welcomed me at the threshold of the great interior court which he used as a studio.

Erect, and draped as usual in his robe of red silk, a fillet like that of some Olympian God upon his forehead, he opened his great arms to receive me. I passed with him into the illustrious apartment, the womb of masterpieces, experiencing a deep emotion at finding myself there once more.

"My Prometheus?" he replied to my question. "No, I do not feel that it is ripe for execution yet. That fellow Nicostratus requires a certain amount of study, and I foresee that my first conception of the subject will break down as soon as I introduce his figure into it. In a few days we shall see."

I asked him if he was taking a holiday, but the question showed how little I knew him. Painting was his very life. Returning from his journey at midnight, he had begun a picture the following morning.

"Come," said he to me suddenly. "I am glad you have the chance to see it: that little sketch of mine is a marvel. I have never done anything finer."

It was another trait of his character to estimate his own works at their actual supreme worth, and to understand the admiration devoted to his great name by the entire population of Greece.

The panel which he had begun rested in a slanting position on an easel of sycamore wood, whose twin supporting pieces, at the point where they should have met, curved backwards in the form of golden swans' necks.

I bent forward respectfully, and perceived a rather peculiar subject, which, however, did not surprise me in the studio of Parrhasius.

His picture represented a vivid woodland landscape where a sleeping nymph, arrows in hand, reclined upon her side. A satyr, stooping before her, was in the act of raising her tunic to the girdle with an

expression of bestial and greedy delight. Behind her, a second satyr, kneeling, was making a direct assault upon the virgin, without producing any impression upon her youthful slumbers, which must have been very profound. Such was the picture.

As I raised my eyes, I perceived a few yards away, lying upon a bench, the abashed Artemidora between the two Sarmatian barbarians who had been posing with her for the outline of this sketch of life in the raw. Parrhasius explained:

"Yes, I am fond of these pictures dealing with intense feeling, and I do not represent man's desire except at the moment of its paroxysm, and of its fulfilment. Socrates, who had begun by being a bad sculptor before becoming a good philosopher, wished to see me paint the emotion of sexual love in looks and thoughts.[1] It was an absurd criticism. Painting is design and color; it only speaks the language in gesture, and the most expressive gesture is that from which its triumph proceeds. I have painted Achilles at the moment when he is in act to slay. His anger, unexpressed in movement, I leave to the poet. Still, enough of that, we understand each other."

He seated himself before his easel and commanded: "Recommence the pose."

At this Artemidora raised her black eyes in our direction, and in a voice which rendered me uneasy, murmured: "Before him?"

But Parrhasius was not listening. He was singing already. With his thin brush, whose handle was of ivory and hollowed like a reed, he added the last touches to the sketch in order to accentuate still more the purity of its impeccable design. Then two of his young apprentices brought him his instruments.

"As you see," said he to me, with a smile, "I no longer paint in distemper. Here are the irons and the wax in accordance with the new procedure. I shall beat these young people of the Sicyonic school on their own ground!"

And actually one would have said, to watch him, that he had always employed the method of Polygnotus which had recently returned to favor. His little wax-boxes were arranged in a small coffer already stained with use. He dipped carefully therein the thin rod, previously heated in the brazier, brought forth a tiny drop of colored wax, placed it in position, and mixed it with the rest with a sureness of touch that drew from me from time to time a smile of enthusiasm.

[1] There is a slight anachronism here. The year in which these events took place is stated in the first paragraph of Chapter II to be that of Plato's death, namely, 347 B.C. Socrates was executed in 399 B.C., and thus could not have known Parrhasius as an adult.—Translator's note.

As he painted, he told me how the wax was mixed with the colors, and which colors were the right ones, to the exclusion of all the rest. His white came from the island of Melos, that of Samos being too thick. He liked Indian cinnabar, which was more solid and also more costly than that of Ephesus. Flame-colored sandarac and armenium, with its faint blue tint, were suitable for the habiliments of women. He realized the value of the ivory black recently discovered by the young Apelles, but preferred for his own part the black, easier to mix, which was manufactured, when one could get it, from the burned human bones taken from ancient sepulchres.

The day passed in this way without my noting the flight of the hours, except when Parrhasius gave the order: "Rest!" and Artemidora, whose blushes deepened as the time wore on, hid her face in her hands.

Towards the end of the day he rose, calling to the apprentices: "Heat the sheet!"

And turning to me, he said: "It is done."

The red-hot sheet, emitting sparks, was brought to him. He seized it by the eyebolt with long-handled pincers and moved it to and fro very slowly above the panel, which lay in a horizontal position. The wax rose to the surface and imprinted on the dry wood the multicolored life of the picture.

And that is how, between the dawn and the dusk of a single day, the "Nymph Surprised" of Parrhasius, which is now at Syracuse, was completed.

Parrhasius eyed his work with careless satisfaction, and shaking his beautiful and expressive hand, cried out as though to an audience of a hundred persons: "Yes! It is an exercise before the battle!"

Inattentively I asked: "What battle?"

He seemed astonished that I had not understood. With long strides he crossed the room and flung open a door. Nicostratus, in chains, looked up at us. At the sight, Parrhasius drew himself to his full height, and plunging his fingers into his beard, murmured as though to himself alone: "My battle, as of a god, against this human soul."

I WAS busy for a whole month at Athens with personal affairs, which prevented me from returning to visit Parrhasius.

The city was in deep mourning since the fall of Olynthus. The slave-market of Chalcis, the sale of an allied people, the scandal and

insult offered at the very gates of Attica, was the subject of every conversation, the thought that filled every silence.

We could do nothing against Philip. Crates did not want war, and Demosthenes himself no longer demanded it, but Æschines, on the way home from the Peloponnese, had met by the roadside flocks of Olynthians being driven like beasts, and it had been enough for him to relate that passage of a host of slaves for the indignation of the populace to be aroused, at his words, against the guilty cities.

One day, worse befell: it was discovered that, in the town itself, one of the citizens was treating an unfortunate Olynthian woman as if she had been a captive. The man was arrested, tried, and condemned to death immediately.

I was alarmed at this, and saw that a similar fate threatened Parrhasius. I left all my affairs to look after themselves, and went down to his palace in order to warn him if there were still time.

Doors were closed and curtains drawn when I arrived before the walls of his house. The slave did not want me to enter, and I had to insist, to show my anxiety, to declare that my business was a matter of life or death to his master. I got in at last, and running down the great empty gallery, lifted the hanging of the doorway.

I shall never forget the slow, grave look that Parrhasius turned upon me when he perceived my entrance. He was painting in an erect position, gigantic before a panel of black wood which was almost the same height as himself. The sky, which was ominous of storm, gave a superhuman aspect to his unusual stature. The serenity of his countenance was such that its characteristics were lost: the very wrinkles had disappeared, as may be observed in the corpses of very old men recumbent in the peace of death.

He did not speak to me nor look at me again. Holding the warm rod between his fingers, he carried the drops of wax between the box and the upright panel with a hand as sure and as steady as if he had created the world with blots of color.

Then, as I followed his eyes, fixed by turns upon his work and upon a certain spot in the vast room, I perceived the naked and struggling form of Nicostratus, his four limbs spread out upon the hummock of an actual rock, all his muscles standing out in the effort to free himself from the four ropes which bound him.

For a long time I stood there motionless, holding my breath, forgetting what I had come to do and say. My whole attention was absorbed by the marvel of what I saw. My other senses abandoned me, and I had fewer thoughts than one has in a dream.

Suddenly Parrhasius uttered two words, at least I imagined I heard them. The words were: "Cry out!"

His voice was as calm as his gesture and his face. "Cry out!" repeated Parrhasius.

Nicostratus burst into a violent fit of forced laughter, which shook the room. He exclaimed that he would not! That he was master of his features! That they could not be bound with ropes, like his limbs, to the rock! That he would prevent this picture being painted! Then he foamed at the mouth with rage, uttering a volley of abuse.

Not a line in the countenance of Parrhasius moved. He set down the rod he was holding, took up deliberately another, white-hot from the brazier beside him, and measuring the exact spot where the vulture of his picture was gnawing the liver of Prometheus, he said to a Sarmatian slave:

"Take this. To the right. Under the bottom rib. Touch lightly, without penetrating the skin."

Nicostratus watched the fellow advance upon him. He managed to smile, but was very pale. The flesh shriveled, and he did not utter a word. But, in a moment or two, his eyes darkened. A terrible sweat broke out upon his forehead. He began first to shriek, then to moan in a trembling voice, like a little child sobbing.

Parrhasius, impassive, observed the reaction of his features.

How long did it last? I do not remember. I think, until evening. Nor do I know when I had the strength to drag myself from the room, for I was faint from head to foot. At the very moment I passed through the doorway there was a sudden silence, then a voice at the end of the apartment:

"The fool!" cried Parrhasius. "He died a second too soon!"

When next day it became known in Athens how Parrhasius had achieved the "Prometheus Bound" which he destined for the Parthenon, a cry of horror arose from the whole city. Crowds swarmed out upon the road that ran beside the Cycloborus, and began to assault the house of the painter, whose doors were closed.

"An Olynthian! A Freeman! Taken by the Macedonian!"

"Prison for his murderer!"

I mingled with the hostile crowd, not in order to save my friend, for I too considered, at that time, that he deserved every punishment that could be devised, and the shrieks of Nicostratus still resounded in my ears. Yet I followed the mob, thrust hither and thither in the tumult, and arrived with it beneath the walls of the besieged mansion.

For a long time the shouts continued. The house seemed dead.

Not a slave on the threshold. Not a voice behind the curtains which hung, drawn and motionless, between the columns.

At last two curtains on the first floor were parted, and Parrhasius himself appeared, his arms folded upon his royal robe and his forehead still bound with the sacred fillet.

A storm of shouts arose.

"Assassin! Barbarian! Ally of Philip!" yelled the mob. "Where is the Olynthian? We will bury him like a victorious general. And for you, poison, poison!"

Parrhasius allowed their anger to escape and to subside. Then seizing, at his feet, by both sides of the panel, the "Prometheus" which he had just painted, he raised it slowly and as though participating in a religious rite, at first above the balustrade, then above his own head, so that he was concealed by it, and the Work appeared in place of the Man.

An abrupt shock thrilled through the mob, and they came nearer. They beheld a prodigy; the picture of human suffering and of humanity's eternal defeat by pain and death seemed to throb into life above their heads. Before their countless eyes the height of tragic grandeur was unfolded there for the first time. The crowd shuddered. A few men wept. A silence as of a temple spread to the farthest of the multitude, and as the cries of menace attempted to break forth again, a thunderous acclamation extinguished them in a roar that is the voice of Fame.

DIALOGUE AT SUNSET

ARCAS

GIRL of the black eyes...

MELITTA

Touch me not!

ARCAS

Nay... I come not near, seest thou not, sister of Aphrodite, girl of the clustering hair, like massed grapes. I stop by the wayside, and I can go no farther, seest thou not? Neither to those that await me, nor to them I have left.

MELITTA

Go! go! Thou wastest words, goatherd that has no herd, wanderer in aimless paths! Canst thou keep the road no longer, then begone by the fields; but come not into my pasture, thou whom I know not; or I cry for help!

ARCAS

To whom, then, wouldst thou call in this solitude?

MELITTA

To the Gods! They will hear me.

ARCAS

Ah, child! The Gods are farther from thee than I now; and were they even at thy side, they would not forbid me to say that thou art beautiful, for thy face is their pride: they know it for their masterwork.

MELITTA

Enough, goatherd, begone. My mother has forbidden me to listen to any man's words. I am here to watch my woolly flock and see that they crop the grass till sunset. I must not hear the voices of the boys who pass along the road with the wind of evening and the winged dust.

ARCAS

Why?

MELITTA

I know not. My mother knows. 'Tis not yet thirteen years since I was born upon her bed of leaves; and I should indeed be foolish if I did not do all that she cares to bid me.

ARCAS

Child, thou hast not understood thy mother, who is so good, and so wise, and so fair, and so venerable. She spoke of the outland men who sometimes cross the countryside, their shield on their left arm and their sword in their right hand. They would be cruel to thee, for thou art weak and they are strong. In the cities they have taken in the hateful times of war they have killed many a young virgin almost as beautiful as thou art, and they would not spare thee, if they found thee on their way. But I, what harm could I do thee? I have only my sheepskin on my shoulder and my switch in my hand. Behold me. Am I so terrible?

MELITTA

Nay, goatherd. Thy words are soft, and long would I listen to them. But the softest words are treacherous, I have been told, when the mouth of a young man murmurs them to one of us.

ARCAS

Wilt thou answer if I ask thee a question?

MELITTA

Ay.

ARCAS

Of what wert thou dreaming, under the black olive tree, when I passed?

MELITTA

I will not tell thee.

ARCAS

I know what it was.

MELITTA

Tell me.

ARCAS

If thou wilt let me come near. Otherwise I will not speak. I can speak it only in thine ear, since it is thy secret and not mine. Thou wilt let me come near? And take thine hand?

MELITTA

Of what was I dreaming?

ARCAS

Of thy marriage girdle.

MELITTA

Oh, who told thee? . . . Did I speak aloud? Art thou a God, goatherd, to read from so far off in the eyes of girls? Do not look at me so! Do not try to read what I am thinking now. . . .

ARCAS

Thou wert dreaming of thy marriage girdle and the unknown man who may loose it, with some of those soft words that thou dreadest to hear about thee. Will they, too, be treacherous?

MELITTA

I have never heard them.

ARCAS

But thou hearest mine, and thou seest mine eyes.

MELITTA

I do not want to see them any more.

ARCAS

Thou seest them in thy dreams.

MELITTA

O goatherd!

ARCAS

When I take thine hand, why dost thou tremble? When mine arm closes about thy breast, why dost thou lean towards me? Why does thy frail head seek my shoulder?

MELITTA

O goatherd!

ARCAS

How couldst thou be so almost naked in my arms, were I not already almost thy husband?

MELITTA

Nay, thou art not he; let me go, let me go, I am afraid; away, I know thee not! Let me go; thy hands hurt me, let me go, I desire thee not!

ARCAS

Why speakest thou to me, child, with the lips of thy mother?

MELITTA

Nay, 'tis not she, 'tis I that speak. I am good; leave me, goatherd. I should be ashamed to act like Naïs, or like Philyra or Chloë, who did not wait for their wedding day to learn the secrets of Aphrodite and to give birth in secret, none knew how. Nay, nay, I will not yield! Thou canst tear my tunic; I will not yield, goatherd! Rather would I strangle myself with my own hands.

ARCAS

Again why? And what have I done to thee? I have touched this tunic, I have not torn it. I have kissed thy girdle, I have not loosed it. Well, as thou wilt! I forsake thee, I set thee free, I let thee go.... Begone.... Why goest thou not?

MELITTA

Let me weep.

ARCAS

Thinkst thou then, I love you so little as to force thee against thy will? Would I have spoken thus to thee, while thou didst listen, did I ask of thee but a moment of pleasure such as every shepherd girl could give me? Have my eyes not taught thee ... But thou regardest them no more, these eyes of mine. Thine own thou hidest, weeping.

MELITTA

...

ARCAS

Yet, hadst thou willed it, I could so well have passed, here at thy feet, a lifetime long of love and tender words. I would have laid my two arms about thy body, my head upon thy breast, my mouth on thine; and thou wouldst have loosed thine hair about our kisses, to give me pleasure. Hearken! Hadst thou willed it I would have built a green shelter for thee with flowering boughs and cool grasses, still full of singing grasshoppers and gold beetles, rich as gems. There wouldst thou have prisoned me, each night, there on the rich couch of my out-

spread mantle would our two hearts have beaten forever, one upon the other.

MELITTA

Oh, let me weep, still weep . . .

ARCAS

So far from me?

MELITTA

In thine arms—in thine eyes.

ARCAS

My love . . . the evening falls, and the light passes, as on toward the sky. . . . Already the earth is dark. Afar, we can only see the long, milky way of the stream that glitters like a river of stars about our meadow. . . . Yet is it too bright for us. . . .

MELITTA

Ah, yes, too bright . . . take me hence.

ARCAS

Come . . . the wood, through which we glide, under its caressing boughs, is so deep that even by day the divine ones fear to enter it. We never see, along its paths, the cleft hoofs of satyrs follow the light-foot nymphs. Here, through the leaves, we see not the green eyes of hamadryads holding the fearful gaze of men. But we shall not be afraid, for we are together, thou and I . . .

MELITTA

Nay, I fear not. I cannot help but weep, but I love thee and I follow thee. There is a God in my heart! Speak to me! Speak on! There is a God in thy voice.

ARCAS

Let thine hair fall about my neck, thine arm about my waist, and thy cheek against mine. Walk warily, there are stones here. Lower your eyes, here are roots. The moss is slippery under our bare feet, and the earth is cold. . . . But thy breast is warm beneath my hand.

MELITTA

Seek it not. 'Tis small, 'tis young, 'tis not fair. The autumn of last year, it was yet no more than on the day of my birth. My friends

laughed at me. It was in the spring I saw it grow, with the buds on the trees.... Caress it not so.... I cannot go farther.

ARCAS

Nay, come.... We are in shadow here. I can see thy face no more. It is not thou, it is not I. Give me no more thy lips: I would see thine eyes once more. Come to the old tree down yonder, that stands in the light of the moon. Its great shadow reaches to our feet: follow the shade.

MELITTA

See, the tree is a big as a palace.

ARCAS

The palace of thy marriage rites: it opens for us two in the depths of holy night.

MELITTA

I hear sound . . . the palms . . .

ARCAS

The rustling palms of the marriage train.

MELITTA

These stars . . .

ARCAS

They are the torches.

MELITTA

These voices . . .

ARCAS

They are the Gods.

MELITTA

O goatherd, I cross this threshold virgin as Artemis, who lights us from afar through the blackness of the boughs, and who, perchance, hears my vow. I know not if I have done well to follow thee whither I have followed thee, but a breath was in me, a spirit which thy voice has brought to birth . . . and thou gavest me happiness, like an immortal, when thou gavest me thine hand.

ARCAS

Girl of the black eyes, nor thy father nor mine has made ready for our union at the altar of their hearths, bartering thy wealth and

mine. We are poor, hence we are free. If there is one that marries us this evening, lift up thine eyes: 'tis the Olympians, protectors of shepherds.

MELITTA

My husband, what is thy name?

ARCAS

Arcas. And thine?

MELITTA

Melitta.

Biarritz, 1903.

A NEW SENSATION

I

ABOUT four years ago, perhaps five, I used to occupy for several days a week an inconvenient but out-of-the-way and picturesque ground-floor flat in a street which led at one end into the little park of Monceau: I took no interest in this detail, as the gate was closed every evening before midnight, and I was unable to go there at the precise hour when I enjoy walking in the open air.

One night, when I was there, in silent colloquy with two blue porcelain cats squatting upon a white table, I was trying to make up my mind between two methods of employing my solitude; I was either going to write a strictly regular sonnet while I smoked cigarettes, or I was going to smoke cigarettes while I contemplated the paper on the ceiling.

The important thing is always to have a cigarette in one's hand; objects must be enveloped in a heavenly and delicate haze which bathes both light and shadow, effaces solid angles, and by its scented spell imposes upon the restless mind a variable rhythm whence it may fall to dreaming.

That evening I both intended to write and desired to do nothing; in other words, it was an evening like all the rest; and it would assuredly have ended before a virgin sheet of paper and an ash-tray full of corpses, had not my thoughts been suddenly interrupted by an unexpected ring at my front door.

I raised my head. I was convinced that on Friday, the ninth of June, I did not expect any one at this hour of the night; but as a second followed close upon the first, I went to the door and unlocked it.

On opening the door I saw a woman standing there. She was wrapped in a voluminous mantle of natural serge, resembling a traveling dress, but figured with interlaced ornaments, like an opera-cloak. It was gathered about her neck by a circular, tufted trimming, above which her head just showed; it was a completely brown face, surmounted by light-colored hair. Her features were young and sensual, and had a slightly mocking expression; there were two very black eyes, a very red mouth.

"Will you please allow me to come in?" she said, putting her head on one side.

I made way for her with the astonishment which can only be felt by a man who sees, at an hour when one scarcely receives any but the most intimate feminine friends, a woman enter his abode of whom he has not the slightest recollection, and who addresses him in familiar terms in the first words she utters.

"Dearest," I said to her timidly, when I had followed her into my room; "Dearest, don't be angry with me, I recognize you perfectly well, but unfortunately, somehow or other, I can't for the moment remember your name. Would it be Lucienne now, or Tototte?"

She smiled indulgently and, without answering, took off her mantle. Her dress was of sea-green silk, adorned with enormous irises woven into the fabric itself; their stems rose tapering up her body as far as the square opening at the breast, which displayed both nipples bare. She wore on each arm a small gold bangle in the form of a serpent with eyes of emerald. A collar of large pearls in two rows gleamed upon her bronzed skin, emphasizing the base of the supple and rounded neck.

"If you recognize me," said she, "it is because you have seen me in dreams. I am Callisto, daughter of Lamia. My tomb was left undisturbed for eighteen hundred years in the flowery woods of Daphne, near the hills where once stood the luxurious city of Antioch. But in these days tombs are great travelers. I was brought to Paris, and my shade followed the stone which held my delicate ashes. I slept for a long time, imprisoned in the icy vaults of the Louvre. I should be there still had not a great pagan, a venerable man, Monsieur Louis Ménard, who is the only man who remembers, today, the sacred rites and gestures, pronounced before my tomb the traditional words that can give a brief nocturnal existence to poor dead women. For seven hours, each night, I go wandering in your squalid city . . ."

"Oh, my poor girl!" I interrupted. "How changed you must find the world!"

"Yes and no. I find the houses black, the costumes ugly, and the sky mournful (what a singular notion that was of yours to come and live in such a climate!). I find that life is more stupid, and that people seem less happy; but one thing that absolutely astounds me is the reappearance at every step of everything I used to know. Really! In eighteen hundred years is that all you have done? Nothing more original? Nothing better, positively? Is what I have seen in your streets, in your fields, in your houses everything, absolutely everything? What a sorry business, my friend!"

The astonishment of my expression was a sufficient answer. She smiled, and went on to illustrate her meaning:

"You see how I am dressed?" she said. "I am wearing the robe that was buried with me. Look at it. In my time dresses were made of wool, yarn, and silk. When I returned to earth I thought I should find that all those ancient fabrics had not only vanished but been forgotten. I supposed (forgive me) that after so many years men would have discovered stuffs marvelous as the sun or the moon, and more voluptuous to the touch than the skin of a virgin or of a fruit. But no; what are your dresses made of? Wool, yarn, and silk. . . . Oh, I know you have invented cotton goods, and you wrap up negroes in them, as you don't like the state in which those people walk about. I expect it is extremely moral of you. . . . Are you very fond of cotton? Are you proud of discovering it? Personally I cannot even bear to feel the thing under my hands, it is so sticky and hangs so badly. Anyhow, have you any material which drapes better than wool? You have not. Anything finer than linen? Brighter than silk? . . . Tell me yourself."

She continued:

"In my time foot-coverings were made of leather. . . . Slippers, colored shoes, furred indoor slippers, and high boots were known. . . . Your cycling shoes too, open, with a strap rather high up, that was a Phrygian fashion. Now look at mine; they are made of olive morocco, gold-tooled like a bookbinding. You had better admire them. You will not find any so fine where your lady friends buy theirs."

She went on again:

"In my time there were two precious metals used for ornaments —gold and silver. Have you people found a third? They were employed in the manufacture of necklaces, rings, bracelets, ear-rings, diadems, and brooches. I found all these articles again in the Rue de la Paix, identical with ours. We were acquainted with pearls, emeralds, diamonds, opals, moonstones, rubies, sapphires, and all the variously tinted silicas which come from Arabia and India today as they did then. Now, have you by any chance produced one precious stone in eighteen centuries? Just one, tell me just one, I beg of you! A stone I never knew, a ring I never put on my finger; a new jewel, even one mounted in gold, as mine are, since you have no rarer metal to offer me, but one that clasps a gem invented by yourselves?"

Her voice had gradually become more excited, until it assumed a tone of reproach and scorn. I made a gesture, a much calmer one.

"Callisto," I answered, "you seem to me to attach far too much importance to the ornaments that women load themselves with, and for which there is no excuse but that of employing, in their difficult

selection and meticulous arrangement, a stagnant and idle existence. It is quite clear today, after ten thousand years of fruitless efforts by all nations, that a girl can never be made more beautiful by the art of the tailor, of the embroiderer, and of the jeweler, than she is at the moment when she displays herself naked as the Gods created her. I have no doubt that the Greeks were acquainted with that simple costume. . . ."

"Better than your people are."

"You did not invent it: you need not flatter yourself. I recognize that nowadays it is disguised even more badly than when you were born; but does the difference between bad and worse amount to much? It is impossible to dress a woman. That is an axiom with which we cannot dispense. If æsthetic truths could be demonstrated theoretically, Monsieur Poincaré would have already proved mathematically that it is useless to employ the human imagination in the quest for a solution of this problem, which is as certainly chimerical as the trisection of angles. For my part I do not worry myself over a failure which is persistent because it is eternal; and I am content to admire a woman in her primitive purity (which is also immutable), with the antique emotion of those who touched the body of Helen."

She looked at me more steadily, bending her head towards me, and said slowly:

"Are you sure, presumptuous one, that women have not changed?"

II

I DO not know whether I actually saw, in my confusion, what she did immediately after uttering these words.

How she took off her rings, slipped down four bracelets, unfastened her necklace, and let her robes fall at the same time as her heavy hair, I really could not say. It was all so rapid and so dazzling that the recollection of it in my mind is that of a burst of splendor full of shadows.

Up till that moment I had not believed with conviction in the reality of my adventure. Apparitions, which were long supposed to be supernatural, and which are now with less reluctance considered as obeying certain profound and mysterious natural laws, exhibit themselves sometimes with the signs of a material substance which is not denied by any of our senses and which can mislead the most sceptical mind or even one simply forewarned against its improbability.

I had been wondering for the last hour whether I were not being mystified by one of the wilder of my lady readers; some foreigner,

I thought, who is immodest and bold enough to visit, at night, a bedroom to which she has not been invited, no doubt wants to make me forget the vulgar intention that has brought her here in the contemplation of the care that she has taken to dissemble it under a theatrical costume. I had answered her in the way that she seemed herself to suggest, with the indulgent reserve, in conversation, of one who through deference or curiosity is unwilling to tear away too soon the veil of a laboriously concocted and interesting comedy.

But as soon as she was naked, I understood that she had come to me from the depth of the past....

I remember very well that the moment I was certain of it I began, if I did not finish, all the movements with which an invincible religious instinct inspired me. I held on to my chair to prevent myself going on my knees, and I gazed at her with bent head, with a feeling as though I were committing sacrilege, and that so miraculous a personage ought not to be contemplated with eyes accustomed to behold living women.

Callisto was tall. The torso was spare and rounded, the waist high, the legs very long. Her limbs were articulated with a fragile nicety which enchanted me; and one could conjecture, even under the muscularity of her thighs, the dainty bones. Every hair had been plucked from her skin, but it was spotless, innocent of rouge, and shone as if just bathed, having a uniform light brown tint, almost black at the nipples, at the elongated borders of the eyelids, and in the short line denoting the organ of sex. I am really unable to explain why her beauty could not have been produced either in this climate or even in this age, for the evidence of it did not arise from the appearance of any particular detail, but simply from a harmony and perhaps from a kind of brightness about her. In order to assert a difference between her and the women of my own epoch, I was compelled to rely, without any other proof, upon my personal discernment, just as a collector distinguishes the genuine from the counterfeit without sometimes being able to show that he depends upon any special feature for the establishment of his conviction.

As if to place herself within my reach she lay down upon a couch.

"You might at least have been able to perfect the female form," she began again, with a smile. "And yet, as you see, the races of mankind have degenerated. Why do your physicians, who are contemptuous of ours, allow your mistresses, today, to be less beautiful than my sisters? The earth on which we live has not been swallowed up. The river Orontes still flows from the depths of the cedar-wooded mountains. Smyrna survives. Sparta is dead, but Athens has been brought back

to life. O vainglorious and sickly age, why dost thou substitute for the women of Ionian stock the mongrel Levantine, and why hast thou not created choice breeds of women as thou createst families of roses? Thou canst not. Thine experiment is that of a child. Ours was that of the Gods."

As she talked—for I was scarcely in a state of mind to argue with her—a terror such as one hardly ever knows except in some fit of cold shudders, when one is half asleep, constricted my temples. I trembled lest she should suddenly vanish, like something fluid, some empty flash of light, and I wondered whether it were only my sight that could have the illusion of her bodily presence; whether I could, by placing the end of finger on the tender skin of one of her lips, touch her.

"Come along!" said she, laughing. "I am not a ghost. Give me your hand."

And, arching her loins on the couch, she drew my arm round her body, which rested, with a voluptuous weight, upon my fingers.

Then, with unflagging pertinacity, she resumed her lecture.

"A thousand years before my beauty existed, men coupled with women in practically the same way as goats did with their mates. You have read Homer? Neither Argos nor Troy knew any other pleasure except that of the simple and brutal act which satisfied the animals. Briseis was ignorant even of the kiss upon the mouth. Andromache never proffered her breast to other lips than those of her newborn babe. Never upon the flesh of Helen's sides did an open and nimble palm arouse the thrill which is born of the caress of a human being."

She closed her eyes.

"And then, suddenly, in one day, the ancient East, where I was born, took from the Gods, like a fire that can never grow old, the only gift which distinguished them from the other inhabitants of the earth: they invented voluptuousness.

"O days of flowing sap! Youth of the world! For the first time the lips of a man and a woman abandoned the savors of fruits for those of each other. The great burning soul of Aphrodite inspired the bodies of lovers, and each day a new pleasure—a new pleasure, do you hear?—came down from blue Olympus into the wide beds filled with their enamored cries. An unbridled intoxication ruled: from Babylon to Mount Eryx every perfume, every silken fabric, every flower, every art, and every woman joined the triumphal procession which entered upon the discovery of delight. Girls who were at last liberated from a hereditary barbarism became conscious of their senses and their desires, opened their nostrils to the rose, and their entrancing

bodies to human mouths. For centuries the treasure of sensualities grew. In my time at Antioch and at Alexandria women were still adding to its riches. I, I myself, Callisto, daughter of Lamia, invented this. . . ."

But I had started away from her.

She laughed.

"Now I've frightened you! Well, suppose you tell me something; come! While I was asleep in the grave for nineteen hundred years, what unknown delight has been your conquest? I asked you just now to tell me of a new pearl. Now I am asking you to tell me of some way of making love that I have not experienced. Doubtless, after all this time, some quite new kinds of enjoyment must have been made known. I await your invitation to partake of them."

She was firmly entrenched in the ironical position she had taken up, and I could well believe that in her long nocturnal wanderings about the city she must have tried in vain to complete her education; and so I made no effort in that impracticable direction. I merely said:

"You must be patient. We began by forgetting everything, you see. Now we are making the old discoveries afresh. The process is called the history of modern civilization. A few years after your death the world was involved in unprecedented calamities which might have proved irreparable. What happened was, first of all the birth and the singular fate of a religion which, at its origin, was morally admirable; but when it became distorted by Jews, who were sometimes over-boorish and sometimes over-clever, it sterilized the effort which had been made by your race and sowed salt on the ruins of Athens. Next came the inroads of the barbarians; when the flood of Judea had rotted the wood of the vessel, the rats entered into it and gnawed it to pieces. That state of affairs lasted until the dawn of a new day when men saw arising from the East, like a ray of early morning light, the books which had been saved from the wreck and were being brought back from Constantinople. We took a hundred years to read them. Since the study of them began, life has gone on for barely three centuries. But time is on our side, perhaps. Give us time, Callisto."

She smiled mockingly.

"Will you find," she answered, "the tradition of Rhodopis in the byways of your museums? Have your archæologists, who understand so well the politics of Pericles and the strategy of Alexander, re-established the science of Apasia and of Thaïs? Are they sure that the tomb where the delicate dust of Phryne lies at rest does not hide forever the secret of a lost delight? I still possess that tradition. Would you like to know it? I surrender it to you. . . ."

III

WHATEVER may be the feelings of curiosity which the girls who will read this fragment of recollections may experience, I shall not continue further with the description of what followed; first, because I have already written, on the evidence which I took from Callisto, a whole book with the title of *Aphrodite;* and, secondly, because a certain modesty would still perhaps prevent me from communicating in the first person the details of a night which was immoderately exciting.

Callisto rose about midday. She drew my attention quietly to the facts that the sun had already risen, and that we had to blame a perfect lighting system for not having observed it.

"You do away with Night, you no longer know Dawn," said she in a melancholy tone. "Once, the gleaming pageant of sunrise was the reward of long and exhausting vigils. But now you pass all your lives in a light without variations, and you no longer know, even, how to look upon the Dark."

I became anxious.

"Midday! . . . But you told me that, for you, life was limited to the hours of the night. How am I able to keep you here still?"

"That is a matter of private arrangement between myself and Persephone," she replied, with a peculiar smile. "Let us talk. I have not yet finished reviling your epoch."

I was a little tired and, at the same time, nervous. "No more of that, I beg of you," I said. "Let us speak of ourselves, shall we not? Let us abandon the world, whether it is better or worse than it was. . . . You are all that interests me."

"In that case, listen. You are not convinced. I shall continue until you confess. Really, I am returning very vexed from my second voyage on earth. I ought to have stayed in the grave with the dream of a purer age, in which I grew up surrounded by delights. I feel the need of telling some one what deceptions I have undergone in the course of my journey, and how angry I am with your century on account of all the surprises which it has not given me. I tell you, the world is a young man who promised well and who is in a fair way to spoil his life."

"I don't know . . . I think, all the same, that we have thought and created a great deal since your death. The century in which we live is not so very contemptible."

"It is! By reason, to some extent, of its impotence, but still more on account of its complacency. No! You are neither thinkers nor creators! You are Phœnicians, clever at reproducing models invented

by my race, but you do not find them anywhere but in our civilization, and you only exist in our shadow."

She gesticulated.

"Walk through the streets of Paris. On every side our eternal soul breaks forth in the façades of monuments, in the capitals of columns, and in the aspect of statues. After the construction, during the course of a barbarous and paltry Middle Age, of some wretched buildings which are already in decay (thank goodness!), you, the men of modern times, being incapable of creation, returned to our ruins; for the last four hundred years you have been making mosaics of stone with the fragments of our temples. One column discovered in Sicily begot two thousand churches and as many railway stations. You cannot even give a new architectural form to new requirements. You make, with the brass of your cannon, yet another copy of Trajan's column, and you erect concert halls in the style of the Corinthians. In succession to ourselves, sculptors of marble and founders of casts of bronze, you discovered nothing, not a single natural stone, not a single chemical alloy, which was better suited to reproduce the human form. And the solitary great sculptor you have had only became what he was because people discovered underground a torso by Apollonius, a headless, armless, and legless wreck; a piteous ruin, but a created work, that—a creating work. Schoolboys!"

She took two books from a shelf and threw them on the carpet.

"Your thought, like your art, is a parasite upon our corpses. It was not Descartes, it was Parmenides, who said that thought was identical with being. It was not Kant, it was Parmenides, again, who said that thought was identical with its object. And in these two phrases the schools of the present day are completely contained; they will never get rid of them. In all the directions in which your science becomes general—that is to say, philosophical—it rests, even today, upon the foundations which we laid. Euclid's masters settled once and for all the unalterable relations of line. Archimedes employed the integral calculus long before your Leibnitz, who is also indebted to us for his metaphysics. Instead of meditating on the fall of the apple, your revered Newton might have confined himself to reading a page of our Aristotle, in which his theory of universal gravitation had been set out two thousand years before. On the subject of the constitution of matter, which is the problem of God, Democritus knew as much as Lord Kelvin; his hypothesis is still the only one admitted. Finally, at this moment, when you are on the point of achieving the concept of a universal and central science, whose law would suffice to explain the entire collection of Phenomena—what is this science, and what is this

law? They are those definitively expressed, two thousand four hundred years ago, by Heraclitus. Fire becomes movement, movement becomes fire, and there you have the world."

My strength was at an end.

"O Callisto," I begged, "hear my winged words; you are much too learned. I had certainly heard that the courtesans of antiquity were women of rare intelligence, but it was not that, I am sure, that made them so beautiful. Today, if Madame de Pougy, in spite of her excellent literary gift, wished to discuss with Monsieur Boutroux the subjects which engross his attention, she would not succeed in interesting him so much as an Aspasia in converse with Xenophon. And yet I prefer the former, because she would rather expatiate on a dress than on a law of thermodynamics, and that is a topic which goes better with her supple figure. Besides, the charm of a woman is always increased as soon as she stops speaking; that, however, is a very special truth, whose evidence is only apparent to the male sex."

She waited in silence until I had finished; then, with triumphant pertinacity, she resumed:

"However that may be, in two thousand years you have discovered neither—"

"We have discovered America," I interrupted patiently.

"That is not true!"

"Callisto, don't talk nonsense."

"I repeat and I maintain that America was discovered by Aristotle, and that this is not a paradoxical thesis but an historical and obvious fact. Aristotle knew that the earth was round, and (as you can read in his works) he had advised the exploration of the way to the Indies 'in a westerly direction, beyond the pillars of Heracles.' Columbus took up the project again. But it has always been considered that the glory of a discovery redounds to the credit of the brain which conceives it, and not to that of the laborer who gives it practical effect. When Leverrier discovered Neptune—"

"Good," said I, in the last stages of lassitude. "At least you agree to that; we did discover Neptune."

"And suppose you did ! Discover Neptune! You are an amazing person! Since yesterday I have been begging you to tell me of a new pleasure, a conquest on the road to happiness, a victory over tears. And you tell me you have discovered Neptune! I return to life after twenty centuries, anxious about everything, jealous of the marvels that I supposed to have been invented, wondering whether I shall not have to weep all through my ghostly eternity for too early arrival in the world; and you tell me you have discovered Neptune! A pleasure! A pleasure!

Of the mind, of the senses, what do I care! Am I to descend to the Elysian plains again without taking with me the thrill of a new sensation?"

She stretched out her hands . . . then added abruptly: "Besides, it was Pythagoras who discovered Neptune."

I collapsed.

"There is no doubt about it," she explained relentlessly. "Pythagoras had found that the solar system must comprise ten stars. I do not know upon what basis he calculated his figure; but considering that his disciple Philolaus was to discern later on, without the use of any magnifying instrument, and many centuries before Copernicus, the double movement of the earth about its axis and about the central fire, and considering that, of course, you cannot understand how such a discovery was established by the sole aid of reason, you have not the right to a preconceived opinion that the hypothesis of Pythagoras was advanced rashly and confirmed by accident. I conclude."

I had abandoned the struggle.

"Will you have a cigarette?" I asked.

"What?"

"I say, will you have a cigarette? Of course, I know, cigarettes too come from Greece, for it was Aristotle who—"

"No. I won't go so far as that. I confess that we were ignorant of that silly habit, which consists in filling one's mouth with smoke of burning leaves. But I suppose you don't mean to offer me that pastime as a pleasure?"

"Who knows? Have you tried it?"

"Never! Why, are you one of the practitioners of that ridiculous business?"

"Sixty times a day. It is actually the only regular occupation with which I have agreed to burden my existence."

"And you like it?"

"I really believe that I should be content not to touch a woman's hand for positively a whole week, rather than be cut off from my cigarettes for the same period."

"You exaggerate."

"Hardly."

She became thoughtful.

"Well! Give me a cigarette."

"I was offering you one."

"Light it. What do you do? Inhale?"

"Girls puff at them; but that is not the best way. It is better to

inhale, as a matter of fact. Take a whiff. Close your eyes. Now another. . . ."

In a few minutes Callisto had reduced her little twist of oriental leaf to ashes. She threw away the half-finished stub, where the paint of her lips had left a reddish stain.

A silence ensued.

She even avoided looking at me. She had taken the square packet in her hand, which shook a little, I thought, as though she were agitated by a faint emotion, and after she had examined each of its four sides, she did not, I observed, return it to me.

With slow movements and with the care one uses in handling very precious articles, she placed it near the ash-tray on the edge of a brightly colored divan, and disposed her tawny person at full length beside it.

A LANDING FROM THE ROADSTEAD OF NEMOURS

MONSIEUR WALTER H——, whose name is too well known today to be written in full, was once my friend for twenty-four hours, on a day when both of us nearly died.

We had each embarked, without knowing one another, on an Atlantic coaster, the *Ville de Barcelone*, serving the ports which lie between the white city of Tangiers, Gibraltar, and Oran. There was storm everywhere. The Spanish papers we had bought at Malaga contained accounts of the loss of the finest cruiser of the fleet, the *Reina-Regente*, which had gone down in those latitudes at the base of a waterspout with four hundred and fifty-five officers and men. I can still see the newspapers with their funereal aspect and their immense lists of dead, filling the black-bordered front page, from the admiral in command down to the scourers of the ship's wells.

We sailed the same day, in the midst of a false lull, which did not last half an hour. As soon as the vessel had cleared the dark-green edge of the open sea, it leaped and plunged, leaped again, still higher, rolled on to its right side, and shuddered from end to end under the bursting of the hurricane like a little frightened bird.

A wave passed over the ship and broke with its whole weight upon the decks. Another washed the vessel from stem to stern. Then came another, then a hundred others. All night we heard the crash of the heavy billows on the bridge, and the groaning of its planks. Sometimes we were tossed up on the crest of a sea like an eggshell in the spray of a fountain, and then the screw emerged and raced in the air with a harsh hissing sound like that of a siren in the midst of the gale. At moments, between two minutes of deafening uproar, we passed through silences so deep that we thought we had already foundered. Incomparable hours they were, of grandeur and of tragic beauty.

The next morning, when I went up on to the bridge at the end of the storm, a tall dark-skinned Moroccan, enveloped in a white burnous whose folds fluttered in the breeze, approached the captain.

"When we come Melilla?" said he.

"Melilla?" returned the master. "Not for some time yet, my friend. In a fortnight. Next voyage."

"What you say, a fortnight? I go Melilla today."

"Yes. Well, you will have to go from Nemours. We made a straight run past Melilla. I should have sunk my ship if I had put in last night with the weather we had."

The Arab gnashed his teeth in a fury. He growled out a "*Jekrab beitak*," in which all his anger snarled for expression: then he walked off along the bridge, gripping the nettings and gazing darkly at the coast of his native land, which shut in the eastern horizon.

The dining saloon, when I opened the door, was empty, or nearly so. Two other passengers, out of the fifty on board, had been able to leave their cabins. The first was a lady and an intrepid traveler, the aged Marquise de S——, the mother of a French deputy whom Monsieur Jaurès was already attacking. The second was Monsieur Walter H——. The latter addressed me with the cheerful good humor which follows bad nights at sea and resembles a smile of convalescence. "I have just spent five years in Morocco," he told me. "And I am going to Persia by way of Marseilles, Constantinople, and Batoum. Tell me, do you like the Arabs?"

After this opening we were at once in sympathy.

Walter H—— was at that time twenty-nine years old. His face was tanned by the African sun and closely shaven in the Oxford fashion, but it was French enough in outline and expression. He had been over all the roads in Morocco, and even some way into the Sahara. He spoke Arabic so perfectly that one day in the suburbs of Oran I saw him surrounded by natives, who took him for a Mussulman dressed as a European. "Ah," said he, "you will only know the real Arabs when you get right down to the country between Fez and Marrakech, below the Djebel Aiachin.[1] Everywhere else the Arab, as a Turkish, French, or English subject, has already lost, with his independence, the nobility of his character. The most important sections of the race, merchants of Tripoli, Tunisians grown tame and clothed in their bluish silks, officials or respectable property owners of Algiers, they are all slaves under the yoke of Europe; and around them there swarms the poverty-stricken and cowed populace which would no doubt revolt if an opportunity arose, but meanwhile is content to beg."

"While in Morocco itself—"

"Oh, there! There you have an ancient race which has never

[1] A mountain.

been enslaved since the beginning of the world. I believe that is unique in the history of mankind. Eight millions of free men still survive there, sons of the great conquerors who once galloped in a single raid from the Indian seas to the basis of the Loire and established themselves almost in the very positions where they halted. They are the ancient Saracens! You must go and see them; they are superb!"

Meanwhile the vessel had cast anchor in a roadstead whose lines composed a harmonious pattern: the village of Nemours lay along the Mediterranean seaboard; Nemours, the only spot in Moroccan territory under the French flag, the only valley which Marshal Bugeaud could get the Sultan to cede, after the victory of Isly.

We stepped down into a boat, which was to put us ashore. The discontented Moroccan whom I had caught sight of on the bridge followed us and seated himself on the central thwart.

I looked him over; he had let the white cowl of his burnous fall back, and his fine head, supported upon an admirable neck, was erect. His features comprised every detail which is considered necessary for nobility of expression. A conscious majesty radiated from his brows and cast its shadow upon his black eyes. His thin lips and the formation of his nostrils bore witness to the purity of his lineage.

Walter H—— got him to talk. His name was El Hadji Omar ben Abd-el-Nebi, caid of Sidi-Mallouk. On former occasions, returning from Tangiers, he had reached the home of his tribe by way of the port of Melilla, the footpaths of the Riff, and the banks of the river; but being prevented from following his usual route, he was now in some anxiety about the road from Nemours to Lalla-Marnia, for the powerful tribe of Oudjda was unfriendly to his own people.

I pointed to a pair of pistols which stuck out of his yellow sash, and observed: "You are armed."

He made a disdainful grimace and shrugged his shoulders.

"Crackers," he muttered.

At that moment we reached the shore.

Then, when we were all three on solid ground and walking through the flowery valley ascending from the village, El Hadji Omar undid a fold of his white mantle, grasped with caution, almost with respect, the cutlass lying concealed along his thigh, and held it out horizontally.

"There is a weapon for you," said he.

The cutlass was two-thirds of the length of a man's arm. The hilt was short but substantial, and gave a good grip; the guard was simply a strip of copper over the butt. The color of the blade appeared

a very dark blue, laced with the gold ornaments of its delicate damascening, and quite plain at its cutting edge.

El Hadji Omar tested it with his thumb and first finger. His hand ran down as far as the keen point and rounded it with a swift skimming movement as if passing over a flame.

"With this," he added, "my brother killed a man and a woman with a single blow. With a single blow of the hand. It's a good bit of steel."

A man and a woman? We wanted to hear the story. The Moroccan hesitated. At last he allowed himself to be persuaded.

We sat down on a green sloping bank in a corner of the valley, where the earth was covered with flowers. Vegetation of prodigious luxuriance invaded it from the sides of the mountain: turpentine-trees and dwarf palms, phillyreas, nettle-trees. Bushes of myrtle, mastic, and tree-brier surrounded jujube-trees covered with spring foliage. Tamarisk and hare's ear mingled on the bank of a rapid streamlet where oleanders swayed to and fro.

And this was the tale we heard in that valley paradise.

. . . . . .

El Hadji Omar had had a brother, Mahmoud ben Abd-el-Nebi, who had preceded him as caid of Sidi-Mallouk.

Mahmoud had already married three wives, and he had long dismissed any idea of further nuptial unions when he met a strolling waif of a girl, and all of a sudden fell madly in love with her.

Her name was Djouhera. Djouhera is a word which means "the Pearl." She came from the plains of Tunisia, and wore the costume of her native village: a simple tunic of red, split open on the right side, and exposing the breast where the drapery falls away. She was a shepherd's daughter, that is if her mother's story was true, for nothing definite was known about either of them, except that they had the appearance of two unbelieving gypsies. But nothing on earth or in dreams was lovelier than Djouhera.

Accordingly Mahmoud was not mad the day he found this girl by the roadside, but rather cursed with ill-luck; for she was walking with uncovered face so that every one could see her mouth, and was that not enough to bring a man ill-luck? It was quite natural that Mahmoud should carry her off in the first place so as to get possession of her, and should then marry her so as to make her love him, if God willed. But God did not will.

Djouhera gave nothing to Mahmoud but her small unconcerned person. In return she procured everything she wanted, even the divorce

of his first wives and the consent of the caid. She became absolute mistress of her husband and his household. And when she had no more conquests to make she enlarged the sphere of her ambitions, desired to have other men as well.

Who were, then, her lovers? And who could count them? Never had the wife of a caid led so debauched a life. In the evenings she went up to the terraces, her face uncovered, her robe open, and if a man saw her she smiled instead of taking to flight. The young men of the tribe found one after the other that she always welcomed any one who happened to be on the spot. She used to take the first man she met to a place near a little door at the bottom of her garden under the low spreading branches of a rose-colored almond-tree, and she was never detected, for she was so prompt to experience the pleasure of her sex that her tenderest assignations only lasted for the period of one embrace.

Now, one evening, in the midst of one of these fits of furtive excitement, Djouhera fell in love.

The shock of it came upon her like a stirring of puberty, all in a moment, to her great astonishment. It was a certain Abdallah, a lad as poor as she herself had formerly been, one who slept in summer on the ground and in winter in the mosque, who transported her from voluptuous sensation to veritable passion. She eloped with him, on horseback.

For days and days Mahmoud searched for some trace of them, but without success, for the girl had set off dressed as a man, and rode as hard as a lion-hunter. Desperate as he was, Mahmoud had definitely decided to forgive her rather than lose her, however disgraced he might be by so doing, for his love had scattered to the void every particle of pride he possessed.

But he did not know that he was to see what he did see.

When, at the end of his pursuit, he entered, at last, the room at the inn where he had discovered that Djouhera was, the lovers were so intoxicated with each other that they did not hear his footsteps. Mahmoud cried out twice, "Djouhera! Djouhera!" then, without knowing what he was doing, stabbed with a single thrust the young man, the woman beneath him, and the floor below.

The man expired instantly. Djouhera uttered a cry which, though faint, was yet long as a cry of ecstasy. She opened her dying eyes wide, turned her head, and murmured:

"O Mahmoud, God sendeth thee.... I prayed God to let me die in the midst of my happiness. 'Tis He who hath armed thy hand. ... O God, how lovely a night is this my last.... Thou, Mahmoud,

thou shalt die in pain, in old age and sickness.... And I, I pass away in a swoon of bliss.... Take thou my blessing, Mahmoud; my blessing, Mahmoud; my blessing..."

Again and again she repeated, right up to her last breath:

"Take my blessing, Mahmoud; my blessing, blessing...."

El Hadji Omar, having finished his story, drew the cutlass for the second time from its sheath. I imagined I saw, indistinctly, reflections of crimson light upon the blade. Then we continued our walk through the long flowered valley. At our feet an Arab urchin was teasing in the dry sand a little black scorpion, furious and convulsed.

THE IMPERSONATION OF ESTHER

As I glanced through the red book-catalogue, I perceived half-way down the page the following amazing item:

MANUSCRIPT.—Fragment of a private diary (1836-1839), by Mlle. Esther van Gobseck, Netherlandish philosopher. . . . 50 *fr.*

Interesting document. Contains unpublished matter on Fichte.

The principal romantic types of which the public retains any recollection often acquire a celebrity which surpasses that of historical personages of the same class. However little of a Balzacian the reader may be, he will allow me to presume that he is not unacquainted with Esther Gobseck. If he himself had read this advertisement there cannot be the slightest doubt that he would have manifested the greatest astonishment.

An hour later I was in the shop, and the document was my property. I would not let them wrap it up, and began to examine it in the cab that took me home.

My acquisition was a sort of account book, covered with paper ornamented with flowers. On the first page Mademoiselle Gobseck, or rather her namesake, had painted in water-color in a shy and discreet style two bunches of roses tied with an azure ribbon. A swallow and a butterfly, which were exactly the same size, hovered above this composition, and about the middle of the sheet was elaborately penned:

IInd Book of my Diary
Begun 5th March 1836 (*My birthday!*)
Finished.....

The catalogue had told the truth. Mademoiselle Gobseck did speak of Fichte; if not because she had known him (the great Johann-Gottlieb had died in 1814), at any rate because she had had the honor of listening to his son Hermann during a visit to Prussia.

Also, the advertisement had properly described this lady from the Netherlands as a philosopher.

Philosophy and Mademoiselle Gobseck were inseparable, but in the progress of this sympathy between an abstraction and a reality the former supplied scarcely anything, while the latter believed that she

received a great deal. The zeal exhibited by Mademoiselle Gobseck in her evolution from pure to applied reason was equaled only by the obstinate resistance opposed to her efforts by her slow cerebration. The theses and antitheses which confronted one another in her mind did not come into contact anywhere else in the field of human intelligence, and she drew from them syntheses which were chiefly remarkable for the surprise which they did not cause her.

But nothing discouraged her. Mademoiselle Gobseck experienced in regard to philosophy that *Liebe ohne Wiederliebe*, that unrequited passion, which is universally regarded as incomparable, both as feeling and as expression. She loved to regulate her life at each juncture according to her principles, or I should say, according to the principles of her masters. She was careful not to believe in the deceptive criterion of her senses, in the disastrous counsels of her tastes, or in the fallacious babble of her personal opinions. Nothing seemed to her true, legitimate, or credible which was not, to begin with, founded upon some philosophical teaching. This was the price of her mental tranquillity.

The years 1836 and 1837 did not bring about any notable event in her life. The little town, where she passed days untouched by either sorrows or joys and perfectly free from surprises, supplied a calm horizon to her punctual meditations. In 1838 she visited Prussia, undertaking the journey for purposes of study and improvement, and being spared, apparently, any kind of adventure while making it.

Having set forth this preamble for the reader's information, I shall confine myself to transcribing the final pages of the diary which lies before me, without emphasizing in any other way their extraordinary content.

I.

28*th March* 1839.

Mina came to see me at half-past five this morning. As a rule we never meet before daybreak, although we both get to work early. I went to open the door to her, with a candle in my hand and my hair down my back, a state I do not care to be seen in, but I was doing my hair at the time, and did not expect her.

"What's the matter?" I said to her.

And she answered: "Oh, Esther!"

I felt very anxious, made her sit down, and asked her whether she were not ill, whether her grandfather were worse, or whether perhaps her little sister . . . but it was not herself she was worrying about. it was myself, alas!

She was holding two books in her hand, and she held them out to me, saying: "Read it yourself."

I read: H. DE BALZAC, *The Woman of Breeding*, and then said:

"What is it about?"

"You may well ask," she returned. "Let me tell you that these two volumes contain three stories, and that the third discusses you in the character of a lost woman."

Her words were so blunt and unexpected that I immediately felt faint and lost consciousness. As soon as I was capable of listening to her again, Mina continued:

"Yes, yes, it's terrible, but you must read it, Esther, you must. The woman is Dutch, I tell you; she is called Esther, like yourself; Gobseck, like your father: it's your name, it's you, I say, on every page of this horrible book. If the sale of the hellish thing continues you will be disgraced, girl; do you understand? You must act at once, go to Paris, speak to the author. . . ."

"Merciful heavens! What an awful thing to happen to me!"

Mina showed me a few pages. The third story was called "The Torpedo." [1] . . . Esther Gobseck . . . Esther Gobseck. . . . It really was myself, my father's name . . . and in what company, good God, in what houses! Oh dear, what an awful thing! Oh dear, oh dear! I shall never survive it! Oh dear! To think that I have lived as I have done, so circumspectly, for twenty-seven years, and sometimes at the cost of such struggles with my natural inclinations! To think that I have sacrified everything to fortify this house of purity where my soul was to reside, I thought, my mind to cultivate itself! To think that I have even renounced the felicities of marriage only to see myself at last morally contaminated, sullied, by a Frenchman whom I do not even know, dragged under my own name through the mud of the gutters of Paris. . . . Oh dear, what an awful thing to happen!

What am I to do? What am I to do now? How shall I be received by this novelist if I dare to visit him? Do I even know whether I shall be respected in the house of a man licentious enough to write such infamous things? And then, who can say whether it is not all done for revenge, whether it is not some plot hatched against me? I have enemies in the town, although I have never done any harm to any one. Some of them have a spite against my family, others

[1] The first part of *Splendours and Miseries* appeared under this title in October, 1838, at the same time as the *Woman of Breeding* and the *House of Nucingen*.—P. L.

against my money, others against my learning. And besides . . . besides . . . the damage is already done. . . .

II.

Paris, 12th April.

I have come. I really do not know what I am doing here, but I have come. . . . Mina wished me to, for the sake of my honor. She told me that there was still time to take steps to avoid a more serious misfortune. If only she were with me; if I could make this terrifying visit with her. But I am alone here in this town, where for six months my name has been infamous.

III.

13th April.

Where does M. de Balzac live? How can I find out? I went to his publishers this morning and asked this question. An employee said: "Who are you?" and as I dared not say my name, he replied grossly: "Oh, a creditor, then? Oh well, when one is asked Balzac's address, one says one does not know it."

I went away. At my hotel they did not even know this gentleman's name. He is not as celebrated as Mina told me he was.

And yet his novels are in all the bookshops. This evening I saw "The Torpedo" in the Palais-Royal, and I fled, hiding my face. I always feel that the passers-by are staring at me, that they recognize me in the streets.

IV.

15th April.

At last I know. Monsieur de Balzac: aux Jardies, Sèvres, on the way to Ville-d'Avray, after the railway arches.

I shall go tomorrow morning early, to be sure of finding him at home.

Oh, shall I have enough courage?

V.

April 16th, midday.

I do not think they were deceiving me, but what a curious man this writer is!

At seven o'clock I took the Sèvres omnibus at the Carrousel, and had myself put down at the Ville-d'Avray arches.

I found the house without difficulty. It stands half-way up a hill, below a park, facing south, with an admirable view stretched before it. Everywhere trees, forests, and valleys. The morning mist was so fresh and sweet round about me that I felt I was full of strength and decision to be firm when I rang at the gate.

A servant lets me in:

"Monsieur de Balzac?"

"Monsieur has just gone to bed."

"Is he ill?"

"No, Madame. Monsieur goes to bed every day at about eight in the morning. Monsieur works at night."

Really, I do not believe he was deceiving me. In Paris one sees few who lead a normal existence. The French are all so queer.

"Madame could return at six in the evening," the servant told me, "if Madame really wishes to see Monsieur."

So I shall return, but this day of waiting upsets my nerves and deprives me of all my energy. Now I am afraid, I am exhausted with impatience and apprehension.

VI.

16th April, evening.

If today is not a dream, I shall either remain mad or shall die from it. I do not myself understand how I have the courage to write an account of it after having lived through it; but it does not matter, I write mechanically, without seeing, with a buzzing in my head which robs me of my reason.

I went to see this man at six o'clock, I think—I do not know now. Ah, why did Mina make me read those pages of which I might, perhaps, have been ignorant! Why does fate hang greedily over my head? Ah, poor me! poor me!

The servant asked me whom to announce. I gave my name; I hoped that thus Monsieur de Balzac would know immediately what was the purpose of my action.

For five minutes I remained alone in an antechamber in which there were no seats. The four walls were white, and on the plaster was written in charcoal: *This is a fresco by Delacroix. This is a bas-relief by Rude. This is a Gobelins tapestry.* I do not know what else. It occurred to my mind that I was in the house of a madman; but

no, it is not he that is mad. It is I that am mad, this evening. He is right, he is always right.

A door opened, I took a few steps, I saw no one. And suddenly a terrible voice called out to me from the end of the room:

"Who has given you permission, Mademoiselle, to take the name of Esther Gobseck?"

Oh, that voice; it still echoes in my poor demented mind.

I raised my eyes. A man stood before me, stout, ugly, and yet magnificent, with long straight hair such as I have seen the Prussian students wear. He was on his feet behind a desk, where there were quite ten thousand sheets of paper, piled up in wilder confusion than the waves of the sea; and from beyond that ocean he examined me with black pupils whose brilliance shone full upon me, even though he had his back to the light.

"Oh, Monsieur," I murmured, ready to faint. The words died upon my lips.

He struck the desk with his fist, and repeated again and again: "Who authorizes you? Who authorizes you?"

Then, although I do not know how I had the strength to do so, I succeeded in murmuring: "Monsieur, I *am* Esther Gobseck."

He threw out his chest to its full extent, crushed me with a look which I could not bear to meet, and burst into a roar of laughter which shook the walls like the concussion of a bomb.

"You!" said he. "You! Esther Gobseck!"

I bent my head.

"Mademoiselle," he continued in a calmer tone, "this jest of yours is detestable. If you desire to hide your identity from me you are at liberty to do so. Take a pseudonym or don't mention your name, but don't steal some one else's! A name is the most sacred property which a human being can possess."

With a trembling hand I opened my pocketbook, and handed him my passport containing my official description.

"Please examine it, Monsieur. The documents are signed by the burgomaster."

He read it through, read it a second time, said over and over again: "Strange . . . curious . . . singular . . ."

Then he stared at me for a long time till, pale as I had been, I blushed furiously.

"The thing is in order," he observed at last. "There is nothing more to be said. You are Esther Gobseck . . . extraordinary as it may seem."

He crumpled up a sheet of paper, and threw it into a basket,

then sat down, and turning round suddenly towards me said: "That being the case, you will give me at once some information which I require. What furniture had you in your bedroom at the time you joined the Opéra as a junior ballet-girl?"

"A junior ballet-girl!" I exclaimed indignantly. "But, Monsieur, I have never been a junior ballet-girl! I am a Fichtean philosopher."

He lost his temper, and struck the table for the second time.

"Mademoiselle, I tell you once more, this facetiousness of yours is out of place. One thing or the other: either you are not Esther Gobseck, as I thought at first, or if you are Esther Gobseck you are 'the Torpedo.'"

"The Torpedo; I?" I stammered in bewilderment.

"But of course! And the Torpedo is not a Fichtean philosopher!"

After a pause he got up, pointed in my direction, and made the astounding observations which I shall now try to write down, if I still have the strength. The authority of his tone was such that I did not interrupt him for a single moment.

"You were born in the year 1805; your mother was Sarah van Gobseck, your father unbeknown. The former, who had been ruined by Maxime de Trailles, was murdered by an officer in a house at Palais-Royal, in the month of December, 1818. At this date you were thirteen years old, and already for several years, under the direction of your mother Sarah, you had led the unhappy life of a young prostitute under the age of puberty. It was at that time you joined the Opéra. Several patrons of the place supported you, among whom was Clément des Lupeaulx. It would be very vital to me to know what furniture you had in your bedroom at this period, but as you will not tell me, let that pass. In 1823 there was a scheme to send you to Issoudun to the aged Jean-Jacques Rouget, who was on the point of marrying his cook, and whom it was desired, by your agency, to divert from such an unsuitable union. The project was, however, never realized. I pass over the financial embarrassments which depressed you in your eighteenth year, embarrassments which compelled you to have recourse to a disgraceful expedient. At the end of this year, 1823, you met Lucien de Rubempré by chance at the theatre; you entertained him at your apartment in the Rue de Langlade. You adored him, he loved you, and I need not inform you how, through the medium of Vautrin, the baron Nucingen made both your fortunes, yours and Lucien's together. Now, listen carefully."

I listened, overwhelmed with horror.

"Nucingen is odious to you, my girl. He is thirty-eight years older than you are. He is antipathetic and even repulsive to you. You endure

him with growing aversion. Listen carefully: on the thirteenth of May, after a reception given in his honor, you will swallow a black pearl, containing a Javanese poison, and you will die immediately. That is the fate I have reserved for you."

Alas! I was trembling like a leaf.

"How do you know, Monsieur?" I gasped.

"How do I know?" he shouted. "What a ridiculous question! Why, I created you!"

VII.

17th April.

I am slowly recovering my reason.

I see it all now. The situation is clear. There is a conflict of two opposed certainties, just that, and nothing more.

I believe (I *believe*) that I am twenty-seven years old, that I was born at Maestricht in 1812, that I bear my father's name, and that I have always lived an honourable life; but actually what proof have I of all this? None.

No rational principle, no truth of experience, no sense-datum supports such an interpretation of my existence. There are, then, only two presentations to my consciousness which I can investigate in order to obtain an adequate understanding of my past: my own memory or the testimony of others. Now in the case under consideration these presentations are mutually incompatible. It therefore remains to determine which of the two must prevail over the other.

Well, I still feel myself too weak, mentally, to accord the supremacy to my personal certainty. The man who spoke to me yesterday dominates me, I cannot doubt it. To suppose his mind inferior to my own would be an obvious piece of folly on my part. His perspicacity has clarified my distracted judgment. I have lived my days in a state of hallucination of which I was not even conscious and which, by a phenomenon which is inexplicable, provided me with fictitious memories at the very moment I lost those which were true.

The duplication of my personality is so complete that I cannot discover the precise date when the metamorphosis of myself took place, for I have no means of doing so but a memory which is vitiated through and through. I feel myself living in the state of mind which is proper to dreams, accepting as probable events which are chimerical, together with a whole long series of memories which Monsieur de Balzac, by his formal testimony, reduces to non-existence.

VIII.

18th April.

So, I am one of those women.... Heavens! How little I suspected it! I did not see the truth. But it would be madness to deny it, madness! The evidence of it is corroborated by the intervention of my own sensations. I am not physically pure; my chastity is only intellectual; I have the imperious senses of a courtesan; my body is devoured by an internal fire. How can I deny it, alas! And how deny all my frailties! And all the frailties of my will!

IX.

19th April.

This evening I went out to fulfil my destiny; but what a strange metamorphosis is mine! I have totally forgotten all my previous habits. The mere thought of returning to them terrifies me, and my timidity stifles me at the very first word.

A stranger whom I ventured to accost took me, no doubt, for a beggar, because he tossed me fifty centimes and did not invite me to follow him. Perhaps I have not the right clothes... perhaps not the right voice either.

X.

5th May.

The end is coming, the end of my miserable destiny. I know well, though I dare not write it, I know only too well the reason why, this next thirteenth of May, as Monsieur de Balzac foretold, I shall pass from life to death by swallowing a black pearl...

A black pearl, containing a Javanese poison.... Where can I find it, this black pearl, which has eternity within it? I go from shop to shop, to chemists, to herbalists.... I am offered poisons, but not that one.... (Ah, God, the horror of life, and how sweet death will be to me!).... I must have a Javanese poison, a Javanese poison in a black pearl.... Monsieur de Balzac ordains it so.

. . . . . .

(The manuscript ends here. Forty-one blank pages follow.)

THE CONFESSION OF MADEMOISELLE X

THE REVEREND FATHER DE COUÉZY disliked being asked certain questions, even in a perfectly serious way, on the subject of his experiences in the confessional. But scarcely a day passed without his being cross-examined on such points by some one.

He might have been called a society man, provided that the epithet did not involve any reflection on his character, for he was seen almost as often at church as in a drawing room; and if there were, in fact, anything in his conduct to which exception could be taken, one must remember that a mass is a shorter ceremony than a call or a dinner. The Reverend Father de Couézy was a thoroughly religious man.

The paramount trait of his plump and keen physiognomy was, in the first place, intelligence, and, more specifically, perspicacity. When he observed any newcomer, his little eyes slowly traversed the entire figure of the person who was to be made known to him; then his eyelids closed with a peculiar fluttering movement, resembling that of lips murmuring the phrase: "Right, that's enough, I understand the sort you are."

The whole of Paris went to be confessed by him. Ladies in throngs selected him as adviser to their consciences, which are invariably, with good reason, in a state of alarm. He was known to be enough of a man of the world not to send a penitent to Rome if she had only relapsed peacefully into an adulterous relation which was perfectly free from disturbance; and at the same time his indulgence was sufficiently limited to make it impossible for any repentance, however trifling, which might be laid at his feet, to have an absolute assurance of being pardoned in advance. When ladies consent to sin, they would not thank you for telling them that their faults are non-existent.

Well! When the Reverend Father de Couézy, on one of his visits, left the drawing-room sofa for the leathern armchair of the foggy smoking room, when he slipped unostentatiously into the midst of masculine conversation, it so happened that his presence immediately transformed the surface of the talk without altering its basis, except that a certain reticence entered. He was commonly regarded as a

purveyor of information, although he indignantly refused to play the part. The tactful, in their attempts to obtain confidential communications from him by leading such observations imperceptibly from the general to the particular, used to begin with the following phrase, or something like it: "Now, Father, you know this age better than any one; what do you think of its morality?"

Then he would exclaim, waving his hands:

"What a question! I can tell you nothing, nothing at all! We are not supposed to derive anything from any one confession but the experience necessary for an adequate understanding of those which follow, and thus to acquire a just, or perhaps I should rather say, a judicious outlook on difficult cases. Moreover, if we are forbidden to reveal any particular confession, even an anonymous one, still less ought we to summarize in public all the avowals we hear, extract their quintessence, and pass it on to curious minds on the pretext of philosophizing."

On the day on which I heard him utter this sentence one of us caught up its final word.

"But suppose such philosophizing were good for the soul?"

"It can only be disastrous to it, Monsieur; as all moral systems are which rely on descriptions of the errors to be avoided. Man is only completely demoralized in countries which suffer from a superfluity of moralists. To declare the prevalence of a vice with the object of inspiring horror of it is to forget, in the first place, that your listener preserves a recollection of the example you give him, which recollection will serve him as an excuse if he falls into the aberration in question. Accordingly, I shall be very careful not to tell you what I know in regard to the morals of my time, for your own would be the worse for it, and I should be more distressed over that than yourselves."

We shyly agreed that the sentiments expressed by the Reverend Father de Couézy were admirable. However, the same voice as before persisted:

"Not every one is so reserved as you are, Father. I recently met a Jurist who has been vicar of Sainte-Clotilde, quite near here, for two years. He is appalled at what he has heard during his two years confessing the inhabitants of that district. Appalled. He makes no secret of it. On all sides he finds adultery, seduction, abortion, infanticide, poisonings of father or husband . . . terrible things happen in family circles, and no one knows anything of them outside the confessional. Every budding scandal is suppressed while it is still in incubation. There are others which are acknowledged, welcomed, and even imposed at will. We can all see spreading everywhere, like a plague, a

vice which was almost unknown in former days among the upper classes. . . . You know which one I mean, Father?"

"Oh, there are many such," answered the Reverend Father de Couézy quietly. "I don't know exactly which one you refer to."

"Incest. Yes, really; I mean actually that. Which of us ever heard incest discussed twenty years ago? When I was young we only knew of its existence from the Bible. If a man had injured his sister or his daughter, he would have been considered a lunatic and confined as such, the penal code not anticipating the case. And today, positively, it is the fashionable failing. There is nothing else heard now in the confessional, if my information is correct. A girl's first lover is her brother. We are going back to the age of the Ptolemies. The brother initiates, instructs, perverts, seduces, is accepted as a paramour. If by any chance there are only girls in the children's room, their crime becomes more complicated or more simple, I leave you the choice of the term. . . ."

The Reverend Father remained silent.

"Come, let us have an opinion," repeated the speaker. "Am I rightly informed? You confess the whole of the Rue de Varennes, do you think I have blackened the picture of contemporary morals? In the matter of incest, especially, have I slandered the girls of today? Do they make such avowals, I ask, such confessions?"

The Reverend Father de Couézy set his elbows back on the arms of his chair, with a very subtle smile faintly indicated about his eyes; it was addressed, apparently, to himself. . . . Then he observed in a very low voice: "Yes, and they boast about it too."

When he raised his eyelids again the Reverend Father perceived that he had not been understood. Our expressions were those of people who expect a serious reply and are met with a jest. A little hurt, he proceeded to expound his meaning:

"If I were speaking, in this place, to confessors, I would need to say no more. My thought would have been sufficiently well comprehended; but it is natural that you should have no idea of all the intuition that we have to employ to discriminate between the false and the true, considering on the one hand the reservations people make in regard to the facts which they conceal, and on the other hand their exaggerations in regard to the errors they submit."

"Exaggerations?"

"They are very frequent. . . . You must, in the first place, clearly understand that the confessional is only mysterious and formidable to the parishioners who avoid it. The members of the congregation, who come every Saturday and kneel upon its little bench, end by acquiring

a familiarity with it of which you have no suspicion. We do try to put them at their ease, of course, we have to do that; if we did not encourage them we should never be able to find out anything; but often enough it happens that our affability defeats our object, and I will tell you how that occurs."

The Reverend Father de Couézy lowered his voice: "At eleven years of age young girls begin to come to us. They confess, at first, their small sins—temper, greed, or laziness; then, all of a sudden, at about thirteen or fourteen, they reach the age when they commit a new sin, the avowal of which causes them the greatest embarrassment. Some can never bring themselves to tell us about it. Next, as on the one side there is no instance of any of them reforming in this respect before marriage, and as on the other side they soon understand that an unmerited absolution places them in a more serious state of impenitence than if they simply remained impenitent, they struggle for a year or two, then desert the confessional: that type is lost for the Church. . . . As against these we have a number of girls who brace themselves to the ordeal with a facility which amazes us. In its origin this is not immodesty on their part, far from it; it is the result of piety, humility, submissiveness, mortification. But, even so, all these feelings soon become transformed. Imperceptibly the actual avowal itself comes to be a pleasant habit. . . . In cases where there is complicity in the sin, if it can give occasion for the story of an adventure, if a girl friend, a boy cousin, or a male dancer is involved, interminable narratives result, and the more we repeat the admonition, 'My dear child, no details, please!' the more they answer: 'Father, I must explain everything, otherwise you won't understand!' "

We looked at each other without a word.

"Well, now, this is the point I wanted to make. Certain girls of an excessively nervous type are immoderate in their self-accusations. They tell us more than actually happened. Perhaps, subconsciously, they regard as equally real the sins they have on their souls and those they have in their heads. They assign themselves vices that they dare not undertake. They reveal to us as having occurred in detail, on the sofa in some little drawing room, scenes which did, in fact, commence there, but ended only in their own imaginations. . . . That is the kind of thing that newly appointed confessors have to be informed of, or we should have them too rigorous in their judgments of the customs of the age. Of the tales that we are told, the worst ones are 'rigged.' Once more, then, the confessional is not an extra-terrestrial place; there, as elsewhere, people boast about everything, even about the evil they have not done."

The Reverend Father threw himself back in his chair with the air of a man who has just settled a dispute.

However, we were not convinced. The speaker's previous adversary took it upon himself to notify the fact:

"I have no doubt, Father, that you are an extremely expert psychologist, and better qualified than any of us to fathom people's secret thoughts. Men whose vision can penetrate in that way to what lies behind the pupil of the eye possess a gift that is as invaluable as it is rare, and yet there are limits to its operation even in cases where it exists in its completest form. What is your fundamental resource when you unmask a falsehood? Merely your own judgment. There are neither proofs nor witnesses to be had in the confessional. Can you be certain that during the course of those solemn confessions, in which you do not believe, your judgment escapes the influence of a preconceived optimism? Don't you ever imagine that such and such a scene is apocryphal in consequence of its improbability? The physicians whose business is psychopathy lay down the axiom that everything is possible. You do not appear to be of their opinion."

The Reverend Father shook his head vaguely, with a gesture which implied: "That is not the point." Then, after a deliberate pause, he said simply: "I have proofs."

We all asked him, with our eyes, what they were. He came to a sudden decision, and crossed his legs.

"After all, I think I may tell the story," said he. "Just now I pleaded the inviolability of the secrets entrusted to me. But I once received a confession from a woman which I can reveal without committing sin; you will agree with me later on."

He lifted his head, leaning it against the back of his chair, with a smile which made the circuit of our faces in a faintly complacent manner, as though he were taking account of the curiosity he had aroused. Finally he began his narrative:

"At a period which I shall not specify, I was taking duty in a Parisian parish which I shall not name either; it will be sufficient for you to know that my church lay very far from St. Thomas's, and that my flock was composed of poor people. One day, as I was awaiting, in front of the confessional, the time at which my penitents were due to make their appearance, I saw advancing towards me a very elegantly dressed personage, whose elegance was, however, of a sober character, and who was certainly not a parishioner of mine; there are certain hats which are hardly ever worn except between the Invalides and Palais-Bourbon. She had the face and figure of a girl of twenty-eight; in any case I need not describe her. At my invitation she knelt

down and, after a preamble in which she informed me that her confession would be a most serious one, told me the following story:

"From the age of twelve she had avoided taking the sacrament. At seventeen, while she was traveling alone with her father in the interior of Italy, she arrived one evening at a crowded hotel in Pisa, where they were compelled to take a single room, with two beds, between them: the occurrence was disastrous to their virtue. Thenceforward for the rest of their tour they did not register any longer as 'Monsieur and Mademoiselle' but as 'Monsieur and Madame,' in order to be free, wherever they went, to occupy the same room. Up to this point of the narrative there is nothing out of the way about it, as you will admit."

There were several exclamations.

"On their return," continued the Reverend Father de Couézy imperturbably, "the situation remained the same, in greater secrecy, no doubt, for the girl's mother was still living, but without any kind of interruption. Under the pretext of taking long walks together the guilty couple went to a hired apartment, where the error of their ways could escape observation. I pass over, naturally, the details of these misdeeds, although the penitent did not spare me the description of any of them. But, suddenly, the father died. . . . In the course of the next two years the moral health of the girl became seriously impaired. Her senses, fully awakened as they were, were restrained with difficulty under the supervision of her mother. Several projected marriages came to nothing. Nervous disorder supervened, accompanied and followed by positive suffering. One night, incapable of further resistance to the temptation of sin, she rose, entered the bedroom of her younger brother, aged fourteen, and without employing any kind of stratagem or pretext, in a dumb frenzy, took advantage of him in his bed. She related this terrible scene to me, the violence of it still evident in her voice, told me everything, struggles, refusals, prayers, the child's Christian resistance, his inability, in spite of all, to control his sensations, his final surrender. For fifteen days she kept him in subjection, less hostile but tormented by a growing remorse, and in the end the boy's first confession rescued him from her for good. The more she begged him to give in, the more obstinate he became, locking himself in his room and threatening to tell everything. Then, gentlemen, she poisoned him. . . . Getting her information from a process described in a popular serial, she obtained a slow poison, leaving no trace, and painless, but destroying the sufferer by inches. She saw her victim go into a decline and pass away under her own unforgiving eyes. Every day she gave him, mentally, the choice between

crime and the grave, without revealing whose hand was raising the stone, and at last let it fall upon him."

. . . . . .

The eye of the priest traveled over our faces with a tragic glitter in it, remained for some time bright with horror, then, still looking straight at us, took on an expression of open amusement.

For our own part, as we listened to the story, we had forgotten, right up to the end, that the confession with which it dealt was suspected of being untrue. The tone of the narrator had been so positively affirmative that we had lost sight of the occasion and the object of the tale.

"Was there any truth in all that?" asked some one.

"Not one word. Nothing, absolutely nothing, not one scene, not one detail, not one person, not one fact, nothing, literally nothing, really what we mean when we say nothing.... Six months after receiving this confession, I left the parish for another; the girl's mother became a penitent of mine, and I myself became an intimate friend of the family. Such coincidences do occur, do they not? I learned successively that Mademoiselle X. had never traveled in Italy; that her father died when she was two years old; that she had always been the only daughter; and, lastly, that her reputation was unimpeachable. So, not only was the story false, but it was physically impossible that it should be true in either of its sections, since neither accomplice had ever existed. So the whole piece of fiction that you have just heard, the first incest, the second, the hotel at Pisa, the apartment in Paris, the bereavement, the scene of violence, the child's confession, the struggle, the poison, all, together with the thousand and one details that I have not mentioned, all, I repeat, was born in the brain of a Christian virgin who did not even go to dances, to such an extent did she shun temptation."

The Reverend Father de Couézy rose, and, terminating his lengthy visit with a piece of Latin and a piece of sly humor, said:

"*Lasciva pagina, vita proba.* With those four words, so perfectly explicit, it is possible to paint the moral portrait of a girl in her teens."

THE STRANGE ADVENTURE OF MADAME ESQUOLLIER

WHEN Madame Esquollier had left the Opera, followed by her young sister, Armande, and was seated in her closed car, she asked her: "Well, what was your impression?"

"In the first place, physically, he is delightful!"

"Good. You need not go on. You are caught, my dear. Kiss me. It's settled."

They embraced each other tenderly; but Armande protested:

"No, no! You're in too much of a hurry, Madeleine. What does it matter whether I like him or not? He doesn't like me. He spent a whole hour criticizing me, while I, like a little fool, did my best to deserve it."

"What do you mean?"

"It seems my frock is too pretty. It's more suitable for an actress than for a young girl."

"Impudent young rascal!"

"That's not all, dear. He thought it strange that I should be taken to the Opera on a ballet-day. His father and mother were introduced to each other (from a distance) one evening when 'Zampa' and 'Rendez-vous Bourgeois' were being presented. Those, at least, were respectable plays, he considered. Unluckily, I told him that the subject of 'Zampa' was rape, and he stared at me as if he were being suffocated. I also told him that 'Rendez-vous Bourgeois' was a lesson to young girls in the art of introducing gentlemen into their bedrooms, and he turned quite pale."

"But why—"

"I don't know. I was a mass of nerves. I felt that he was in love with me, and I took a delight in scandalizing him so that he might continue to love me with all my faults. But I think I went too far."

"Whatever did you say to him?"

"I showed him, in a corner of the stage, the two little Italian girls you told me of the other day, and I told him, as a secret—"

"That it was a romance?"

"Yes."

"That was very indiscreet of you."

"Wasn't it?" sighed the girl.

"What did he say then?"

"He asked me, between whom."

Madeleine burst out laughing behind her gloves, and finally announced, without troubling herself about her sister's feelings:

"My child, that boy is a perfect jewel. I shan't let you miss the chance of such a husband. You must marry him. He's a treasure."

She broke off abruptly:

"Good heavens! We've been traveling for twenty minutes. Which way is he taking us?"

Armande rubbed the moisture from the window and said: "I can't see anything. It's pitch-dark."

"What? Pitch-dark in the Champs-Elysées?"

She leaned forward in her turn, strained her eyes into the darkness, and perceived dimly the grayish surface of a road, but no houses.

"I—I don't know where we are," she stammered. "We've left Paris—Alexandre must be mad—we must stop him."

With a quick movement she touched the button of the electric bell.

But scarcely had the shrill vibration of the sound broken the silence, when a rapid double click was heard from the driver's seat, and the car plunged forward, with a hiss like that of a huge serpent, at top speed.

II

THE shock threw the two sisters back into their seats, and at the same moment they both exclaimed: "Good heavens!"

Madeleine bent her head and looked through the mirror in front at the driver's seat.

"Good heavens!" she cried again. "It's not Alexandre!"

"What?"

"We're kidnapped. It's not Alexandre driving."

"I'm going to jump out."

"Armande, don't be silly. We're doing forty. You'd be killed."

If they had not been together, both would have jumped, all the same, but through a feeling akin to that experienced at the edge of an abyss, when the peril of our companions makes us more giddy than our own danger, Armande and Madeleine both thought at the same time: "I could jump, but she would be killed."

Each sought and clasped the other's hands, and held them tightly enlaced upon the leather cushions.

The speed of the car continued to be excessive. Crossing a small channel-stone, an abrupt shock flattened the springs, two of the wheels raced in the air, and for a brief minute the whole vehicle wavered, jolted, and staggered, then the car went on at the same rapid and uniform rate, like a river that has broken its dam.

Motionless at the back of the coupé, the two sisters, frozen with terror, had fallen silent. Madeleine, as became a woman who had nothing to learn of life and of mankind, was thinking: "If it's only *that!* If they don't kill us!"

Armande had not even the support of the lesser evil hoped for by her sister. She was not so innocent as not to know precisely what was in store for her, and the poor child was going mad with horror. Ah, she had formed so poetic and at the same time so clear an idea, of the first love that was to come to her; she had dreamed for so many nights of what she meant it to be, so as to keep it worthy of her proud and sentimental little soul! For so many nights she had sworn to cherish at least that, even at the price of scorning all the rest! She had already caught a glimpse of her ideal in the white mist of a delightful dream on the eve of her betrothal, and now all was going to be plunged into the dark depths of this dreadful adventure.

"Ah!" she cried, all of a sudden. "Madeleine! I'd rather jump! It's a better end—"

But at the same moment the car slowed down, turned, ran under an archway and through into a great empty courtyard, and stopped before a flight of steps.

Madeleine murmured: "Too late, little one."

A man of about forty, bald, perfectly dressed, and obsequiously polite, opened the door, and bowed to them.

Armande screamed: "Kill me, please, kill me!" and added, with childish inconsequence, "but don't come near me!"

"Mademoiselle," returned the unknown, "I shall not come near you in any way, but please follow me, we have not much time. It is useless to call out; the house stands alone in the middle of a forest."

Madeleine emerged first. Armande followed, but was so faint with apprehension that she missed the steps, and had to be assisted. The fitful light of the moon, which had just risen, turned to silver the evening-cloaks, the two pallid profiles, the carefully dressed heads. They went up the steps and entered the house.

The whole building was lit up. Their unknown host, preceding his victims, crossed a flagged hall, two drawing rooms, and a smaller

apartment. He made his way along a corridor which seemed to go all round the mansion, and confused their sense of its conformation. Finally he opened a last door, signed to the two ladies to precede him, and closed the door upon them without entering himself.

In the room where they found themselves, an ancient dame was standing, dressed completely in black, and she also bowed to them.

"Madame, Mademoiselle."

Then, without further preamble, her dry tones enunciated:

"Kindly allow me to remove your dresses."

"To—to—" stammered Madeleine. She did not finish the phrase. The old lady had already unfastened the clasp of the cloak, drawn the pins from the waistbelt, and let the skirt down over the first petticoat. With the same dexterity, her thin fingers undid the hooks of the bodice, and the shoulder-pieces slipped down the delicate powdered arms.

"You also, Mademoiselle," she continued in the same dry tone.

Armande, who was already pale, became livid. She cast a despairing look at her sister, who had thrown herself upon a settee, shaken from head to foot by a nervous convulsion. Without resistance, strength, or courage, she abandoned herself like a dead woman to the despoiling hands. The old lady, carrying the two dresses over her left arm, went out quickly and locked the door behind her.

The girl had remained standing. She fell on her knees before a chair, burst into sobs, and began to pray. She prayed almost aloud, weeping into her clasped hands, with a terrified, stammering, and pitiable earnestness. She invoked the three saints who had always protected her, promised candles to one, alms to another, an altar-vessel from a good jeweler's to the third. She took an oath to attend mass for nine days, to fast throughout Lent without asking for dispensation, and made a vow, if she should marry, not to deceive her husband for the whole of the first year, right up to the three hundred and sixty-fifth day, whatever might happen.

Time passed. The clock in the room struck four.

Writhing on her settee, Madeleine flung up her stiffened arms, and struck the seat with her clenched fists.

"I can't stand it! I can't stand it! It's horrible, this waiting! I shall be dead with fright when they come! What do the brutes want us for, then? Why don't they come? Why don't they come?"

Then an access of tenderness threw them into each other's arms.

"My darling! My Armande, my little Armande! My dear little sister! Don't be afraid, sweetheart, I'll protect you, I promise. I don't

care about myself, but I won't have them touch you, and they shan't. I'll cover you with my own body—"

There was the sound of a step in the passage beyond.

"My God, my God, here they are!"

III

THE key was inserted in the lock with so harsh a sound that Armande gave a shriek of anguish, as if the assault upon her young virginity had already begun.

However, when the door opened, there was revealed merely the old lady, carrying the two dresses on her arm.

The others recoiled to the farther end of the room.

"Madame, Mademoiselle," said the dry tones, "be so good as to allow me to dress you."

"What?" exclaimed Madeleine. "But I—but then—"

The septuagenarian took no notice of the stupefaction of the ladies, which probably did not surprise her. Wonderfully skilful in the fastening of hooks, as she had already shown herself to be experienced in the undoing of them, she replaced the dresses as she had found them, arranged the openings at the neck, fluffed out the laces, drew down the folds of the skirts, and left the room with a bow.

In her place, the unknown re-entered. He was in evening dress, bare-headed and gloved; perhaps a little more like a butler than a man about town, but then the difference is sometimes so small! Let us say that he had the appearance of a business man who goes into society.

"Ladies," said he, with composure, "I had at first intended to have you driven back home with a word or two of apology, but without any further explanation of your mysterious kidnapping. But feminine curiosity is an element with which one cannot reckon too closely. If I do not tell you my secret, you will try to discover it, and in ruining yourselves, you will also ruin me. My interest is then to tell you so that you may proceed no further in the matter."

He closed his eyes, reopened them, and continued, with a smile:

"You ladies are wearing, tonight, the two prettiest frocks in Paris."

"Ah, heavens!" exclaimed Madeleine, striking her forehead. "Then, that was it!"

"One of my customers, a young foreign lady, saw these two frocks on Monday at the Opera. She wanted two exactly the same at any price. I could, of course, have copied their outward cut and the

elegance, which was peculiar to them, without the aid of any stratagem, for the glance of a dressmaker photographs a bodice with the precision of the lens of a camera, but your dresses are covered with two embroidered designs of a fantastic quality, which absolutely eludes even a professional decorator. It was impossible to reproduce them without spreading the skirt and the bodice, *so as to eliminate the folds*, upon a cutting-out table. I had, therefore, ladies, to obtain the dresses in question."

He took a chair by the back, tilted it towards him, and continued:

"The simplest way was to ask your maid for them, bribing her with an appropriate sum. I certainly thought of it, but, unfortunately for me, the girl is stupid. In the event of discovery and legal proceedings (one has to foresee every eventuality) she would never have resisted a five minutes' examination by counsel. Had I used her, I should have been arrested with her, and that would have been a sad end for an artist of my standing. I preferred to take my chance once for all, and to kidnap the robes and their contents at the same time. That, at least, was worthy of such a man as myself."

The two sisters, struck dumb by such audacity, looked at each other without uttering a word.

"Accordingly, I bribed your chauffeur, and put my own in his place. The exchange was effected in the congestion of the Rue Auber during a block which I had foreseen, and which always occurs as people leave the theatres. The same devoted servant (I am speaking of my own now) will drive you home. Two ladies may very easily return from a dance at six in the morning without causing any astonishment. You will not, therefore, be at all compromised. On the other hand, your most obvious interest is to maintain absolute secrecy in the matter, for I need not tell you that your version of the story would be repeated by your friends—with a certain flavor."

Madeleine did not seem to hear the insult. She was overcome with joy at their escape from this awful nightmare, and, besides, felt reduced to a mere figurehead before the assurance of this extraordinary man.

She leaned towards Armande.

"It's a providence that my husband is away. What a piece of luck that shooting expedition was!"

"Shooting expedition?" said the dressmaker. "I believe my own information is more reliable. It was indispensable that your respected husband should be absent on the night of the execution of our plan. An extremely fashionable person fell in love with him—"

"What?"

The other finished with a bow.

"That was the most expensive item of all."

IV

THE next morning Madame Esquollier did not, in fact, speak of her adventure, for she slept until two o'clock, worn out with fatigue and the stress of various emotions. But her best friend, Madame de Lalette, having by that time forced an entrance, she felt an irresistible impulse to unbosom herself in the sympathetic presence of the other, and so revealed the dramatic episode of the previous night.

When she had told the whole story to the very last word, she took both her friend's hands and made her swear to tell no one, explaining at length that she could not apply to the law, owing to the fact that the investigation of the matter would involve her certainly in ridicule, and perhaps in scandal; that, as she was not going to prosecute, it was better to hush it up altogether and not to tell a single soul what had happened, for people would understand still less why she did not take proceedings if the story became public. In short, she counted absolutely on the discretion of her dear Yvonne. Madame de Lalette gave the required promise.

Unfortunately, the story was too good to be kept to herself. Women only respect trifling confidences in the hope that they may be trusted, one day, to hear confessions of real importance, and to spread them abroad. The same evening Madame de Lalette happened to be at a house where twelve of her friends, each as discreet as herself (which was saying a good deal) were assembled. Under the seal of deadly secrecy she narrated the story of the strange kidnapping.

The tale was cunningly told. Not for a moment did she allow her hearers to divine that the adventure was to end in comedy. From the beginning the effect was gripping. Cries of "How horrible!" arose. Each pictured herself carried off in the phantom car by the mysterious chauffeur. The impression made was so deep that it persisted right to the end of the story: a chorus of indignation greeted the last speech, that of the wicked dressmaker.

"Really," said one, "one can no longer be surprised at anything."

"Kidnapped from the Opera!"

"Paris is becoming impossible!"

"We live in the midst of brigands!"

An old maid did not fail to observe that the fortunate conclusion of the adventure was due to a miracle, for if little Armande had not

made her vows, things would have turned out quite differently for her.

Another declared that she would not dare to go out now without an escort, after sunset, and that she would always keep a stiletto in her bodice, a poisoned stiletto, with the word "Muerte" engraved on the blade, since real life was now melodrama.

Madame de Lalette was the only one who said nothing. She added no commentary on the tale, now that it was told.

"Well, Yvonne, what do you think of it?" inquired a shrill voice.

She made a little grimace of indifference.

"I? Oh, well, I think—I think—"

"Well?"

"I think it was a great deal of trouble to take, to explain getting home at seven in the morning."

At that there was a simultaneous explosion of wild hilarity from the twelve friends, and in the midst of the exclamations, the laughter, the shrieks, and the clapping of hands, was heard the piercing note of the shrill voice, chirping delightedly: "Oh, dearest, what a wicked woman you are!"

AN ASCENT OF THE VENUSBERG

IN the month of August, 1891, after hearing at Bayreuth "Tannhäuser," "Tristan," and, for the ninth time, "Parsifal," I lived for a fortnight or so in the green valley of Marienthal, near the ancient city of Eisenach.

The room which I occupied had a window opening westwards on to the heights of the Wartburg, and had a view, to the east, of Mount Hoersel, called by priests and poets, in the old days, the Venusberg. The actual Star of Wolfram was visible in the clear sky of that Wagnerian countryside.

I was at that time of such a sinful disposition that after I had once leaned from the western window, looking towards the towers of Luther, I never had any idea of respecting the experience, even in dreams. It was the Venusberg that attracted me.

Amid all the neighboring mountains which, in their clothing of black fir-trees or damp meadows, spread a pattern like a garment upon the earth, the Venusberg alone was bare, and looked exactly like the swelling breast of a woman. Sometimes the floating red gleams of twilight gave it the purple tinges of human flesh. It quivered; positively seemed to be alive at certain hours of the evening; and at such times one would have said that Thuringia, like a goddess reclining in a tunic of green and black, was letting the blood rise, in her passion, to the summit of her bare breast.

I spent whole long evenings watching, day after day, this transfiguration of the hill of Venus. I watched it from afar. I did not approach it. It was my fancy not to believe in its existence in nature, for it is an exquisite pleasure to simplify reality to the abstract appearance of its symbol, and to remain at a distance from which the eye is not compelled to see things as they really exist. I was afraid that on the day I set foot on the actual soil of the mountain, the illusion would vanish once for all and never return.

However, one morning I started . . .

At first I followed the Gotha road with its intersections of bridges and green rivulets, later a field path. I had not raised my eyes from the level of the meadows when I arrived, three hours afterwards, at their boundary. Then I looked up.

Seen from near at hand Mount Hoersel was reddish in color, and appeared stripped of all vegetation, without trees, grass, or water; it seemed to be consumed by an internal fire, as if the curse of the legend were still arresting at its base all such new green growths as gave life to the other mountains. The path I took was all pebbles and dead lichen, sometimes scarcely visible in a wilderness of rocks, sometimes clearly marked between tall weather-worn crags. It rose to the very summit, where a small gray house had been built, with thick walls to resist the wild violence of the winds.

I went into the building and learned that lunch was to be had there. Lunch on the Venusberg! It was the final blow to my expectations. I received it, to my shame, willingly enough, for, in spite of my disappointment, I was hungry.

The two daughters of the innkeeper, who was absent, served me, at a little table, with a *Wiener Schnitzel,* which was, perhaps, more Saxon than Viennese, and a bottle of rather sour Niersteiner. I was in the midst of the most commonplace reality. The clean, bright room, the white curtains at the windows, the freshly scrubbed tiles of the flooring, a well-lighted bedroom visible through an open door, all ended by convincing me that I was not being entertained by witches, as for a moment, alas, I had hoped. The two girls were practical people who did not propose to take any part in the damnation of the district.

It is true that at the end of the meal the elder of them discreetly withdrew, whereupon the second girl immediately produced an inviting smile which was a proof of her obliging disposition; but in German inns the maids hardly set any limits to the favors they consider due to a young tourist on his travels, and as a general rule it does not follow that they have made a compact, in the shadows, with an accursed goddess.

We talked. She was good enough to understand my German, though I spoke it something like a Cameroon nergo. I asked her for a certain quantity of topographical information regarding local matters of which I knew nothing. She answered me with great readiness.

"Do not forget," said she, "to visit the grotto."

"What grotto?"

"The Venushoehle."

"There is a grotto of Venus, then?"

"Certainly! That is what they call it; I don't know why—the Venushoehle. You must not leave the mountain without visiting the Venushoehle."

Uneasily, and actually with a sort of jealousy in my mind, I

desired to learn whether many foreigners were in the habit of coming to see the grotto, whose name alone had given me so distinct a thrill . . .

The girl answered sadly: "No one at all! You know, the mountain is not high enough to tempt expert climbers and at the same time it is too high for people who only want a stroll. We never see any foreigners. Just occasionally, a hunter from Eisenach comes here for his lunch or to sleep; but you are the first Frenchman I have seen since I was born. . . ."

"Which is the way to the grotto?"

"Take the left-hand path. You will be there in five minutes. You may find a man seated on a stone at the entrance. Do not pay any attention to what he may say to you; he is out of his mind."

. . . . . .

Actually, then, there was a grotto of Venus in the side of the Hoerselberg! In that case the Tannhäuser country had perserved the whole apparatus of its terrible legend!

. . . The grotto of the Goddess did, in fact, exist. And so did the man.

It was small, in the form of a vertical ellipse crowned with slender brown brambles, and seemed the necessary symbol of the mountain, like a further vindication of the old Germanic tale, still more striking than the fleshlike appearance of the Venusberg on the horizon. . . . The interior, as I stared into it, was dark, narrow, and low-roofed. Pools of water, bays of gloom, covered the indistinctly seen ground of the place. It would certainly be difficult to go right into it without getting muddy, but some strange incomprehensible spell drew me on into its damp nocturnal air. . . .

"Where are you going?" said the man suddenly.

"To the end of the grotto. . . ."

"To the end of the grotto? But there is no end, Monsieur. It is the Orifice of the Earth."

"Quite so," I answered patiently. "I shall not go far. I shall soon be back."

His long hollow cheeks turned purple. He struck the stick he held in his clenched fist against the earth.

"Ah, you'll soon be back! Ha, ha! You think you can go in there and come out when you like! Perhaps you mistake this grotto for a climber's goal or a geological curiosity? Are you from Cook's or from one of the Natural History museums? Do you want to write your name on the rock or gather stones for your collection? . . . You think you are going to find subterranean lakes here, or blind fishes, or

architectural stalactites and vaults of rock all covered with crystals! You're going to study the speleology of the Venushoehle! Ha, ha! That's capital! But you're as mad as the rest, then! You don't understand! You don't *know* . . . that Venus dwells there herself in the flesh with her millions of nymphs about her, more alive than you are, because immortal!"

"Monsieur," I answered, "I believe what you tell me; but you little know me if you imagine that the presence of Venus can keep me from entering this place."

"Hell-fire!" he shouted.

"I am quite willing to deserve it as the price of the favors she bestows."

The madman made a brief gesture which evidently meant: You do not understand me at all. Then he seized his head in his hands and went on speaking: "Hoerselberg! Hoellenberg,[1] rather! They shall come to thee without foreboding of thine eternal horror, thou that awaitest the innocent, thou that dost punish the chaste, thou that shalt consume in eternity the wretched niggards of the flesh, thou Furnace! They shall have lived their solitary lives in revolt against the great, the divine law, and they shall know not thy dreadful kindling until the day when, by the might of the Sword, the Bearer of Souls shall plunge them into the abyss. They have eyes and they see not, they have ears and they hear not, they have mouths and they . . . God! They are mad, mad, mad!"

Suddenly, turning towards me, he shrieked: "How can you dream that the Venusberg can bring men to damnation, when *the Venusberg is Hell itself!*"

I stirred slightly.

"Alas!" he groaned. "Alas, O God!"

He drew his hands from his eyes down on to his beard.

"Alas! Must I be the only living thing that knows the Truth, the Truth, the Truth. . . . Must it have been in vain that all the Patriarchs set up Venus, in relation to God, as His own fearful antithesis, and must none have ever known that she was Satan? It shall have been in vain, then, that the antique tradition depicted Satyrs with those horns, that black tail, those goat-legs, those cloven feet: none shall ever have guessed that they were Demons. And as for the eternal flames, no one on earth shall ever have understood that there are thousands of millions of naked women dancing there. . . ."

He struck the ground.

[1] Hell-mount.

. . . "There! Under our feet!"

He shivered to the very nape of his neck.

"Since man was first able to think, since man first wrote and taught, he gave out, he repeated, he cried aloud, that there is no worse torment than love. How could he not foresee that in the world of eternal torment that torment alone would be his? And what other could he imagine more awful?"

He assumed an attitude, then, of prophecy, and shook his hand before his staring eyes:

"Ay," said he, " 'tis there . . . there. . . . From the day on which we shall be nothing more than rotting corpses and souls mad with terror 'tis there we shall go in our myriads, we, all of us, all of us sinners, to burn with the terrible fire of Lust. Each day, each hour, we shall long, to the point of agony, for women more beautiful than women are, and at the moment of possession we shall see them vanish, as on earth, into the empty vapors of a dream. But what is here a spasm, an anxious fear, a cry, a sob, enough, indeed, to bring a curse upon some human life through the birth of the memory to be, shall be, there below, the perpetual shudder, the unbroken anguish, the torture, of years, of centuries of centuries. . . . Ah, God! Such is the fate that I must meet."

He fixed his eyes upon a stone on the ground. Shaking his head, he continued, in a frightfully changed tone:

"I have lived evilly, Monsieur; this was the way of it. I was born of Protestant parents on Mount Wartburg, the very place where Luther, more than three centuries ago, set up his accursed doctrine. My youth was pious, my life austere and honorable. Nevertheless, from my fourteenth year I could not look at a woman without being assailed by desires of terrible intensity. I mortified them. I had appalling struggles from which I emerged, at daybreak, with my forehead streaming with sweat and my jaws trembling. I believed I could remain pure by living without love, insane fool that I was, blind to my own passions! To remain pure I would have killed myself with my own hand rather than commit sin. Those who have not experienced such nocturnal conflicts between religious duty and the frantic caprice of the body have never experienced suffering! And I struggled thus for a shadow, and I know now I struggled against God! Later on I married, Monsieur, but married only in the eyes of the world. My wife and myself had sworn to unite our souls alone, in order to preserve them, as we thought, in a state of grace. That was how little by little I damned myself by my mistake in telling a lie, each day, to the law of life; and henceforth *it is too late* for me to follow the strait path of my

lost youth. I am virgin. Ah! Woe to all virgins! For the love they have rejected all their short lives will justly torture them in the infinity of the wrath to come!"

. . . . . .

He seized my arm.

"Hark ye! . . . the sun is setting. . . . This is the time. . . . Every evening I come here, and the Goddess sings a sweet song. . . . She calls me from afar . . . she draws me to her. . . . I come as on the day of my death, as on the day of my final downfall into the Venushoehle. . . . Ah, do not utter a word. *She is going to speak to us.*"

I do not know whether the calm tone of these last words or the expression of the man's face or the grip of his hand persuaded me that he was telling the truth—but a quick shudder passed over me, and I listened attentively.

It was an unfamiliar feeling. I was waiting, not on chance, but with an absolutely exact anticipation, the event foretold by the lunatic.

I cannot compare my state of mind to anything better than the sensation of a traveler who, having seen the lightning and knowing the distance between himself and the storm, expects to hear the thunder of heaven at a preordained second.

The time which separated me from the miracle diminished first by a quarter, then by a half, then by three-quarters; and at the precise instant when I perceived that it was at an end a breath of perfumes bore to our ears the languishing echo of a . . . Voice . . .

THE VENETIAN BLIND

"WELL, here is my secret," she said to me, at last. "As you seem so anxious to know, my dear, I will enlighten you, this evening, as to the reason I have never wished to marry.

"Your question shows more affection than the silence of others, into which I read sometimes so many injurious reservations. It is a fact that every one knows of the wealth of my family in all its branches; and when a rich girl does not marry it is always because she is vain, ambitious, ugly, or immoral: People are at perfect liberty to assume one or other of these suppositions in order to pass judgment on my life, if they do not, in their charity, adopt all four at once.

"Believe me, I did not refuse my suitors on their own account. It was the mere husband, the male, the official or unofficial lover, whom I shunned with a sort of terror which is only just beginning to subside now that my fortieth year has me in its safe keeping. . . . Don't make any guesses yet; my story is not one of an unfortunate love-affair; no, no, I have never loved; I grew old too soon, one evening, when I was seventeen. . . .

"Listen. The tale will not be long.

"After all . . . perhaps you will hardly understand why an event so trite, so much a matter of common knowledge, robbed my life of all the pleasures I might have experienced in after days. It was such an incident as is reported in newspaper paragraphs: you can read of such things on the third page of every paper, and it is not even the case that I took part in the scene which I am going to describe to you. If in my solitary existence I have shuddered over it for so long, that is because I saw the thing happen with my own eyes, within a yard of me. You, who will hear it as an anecdote, will feel nothing of what I felt."

. . . . . .

Mademoiselle N. leaned her forehead upon her hand and began as follows, her eyes fixed upon the ground, without once looking up at me:

"Twenty-five years ago my mother and myself were living in an old-fashioned private house in the shadow of Saint-Sulpice. It was quite an ordinary house: no courtyard or outbuildings; all the windows

looked out on to the street, which was, however, as quiet as a path in a forest.

"One midsummer night it was stiflingly hot in my room, and I could not sleep. I did not dare to open my window for fear of waking my mother. After an hour of insomnia, I got up, put on my slippers, and went down the great staircase in my nightgown to the drawing room on the ground floor.

"Here . . . but you must clearly understand the situation of the drawing room. The house had once had a garden which also ran parallel with the street. This property had been sold to builders, and the Council had taken over part of it for road-widening purposes. Accordingly, one window of the drawing room opened upon a dark corner, in a recess, a mysterious and gloomy spot where the rays of the street-lamps did not penetrate.

"On entering the room I observed that this window had not been shut. The venetian blinds only had been closed. Faint with the heat and nearly suffocating I climbed up on the ledge, held on to the slanting laths of the blind with the tips of my fingers, and inhaled the delicious freshness of the night air with the whole of my body, from head to foot.

"That was the last moment of unalloyed pleasure I have ever had.

"I had not been there a minute when a couple appeared on the other side of the street.

"The man drew the girl into the secret shadows of the corner. He was a sham workman, one of those who work three weeks and loaf six months for the reason that their good looks enable them to despise honest labor. Her I recognized at once. She was a girl of fifteen to whom my mother had been very kind, and who was employed at a place to which I had often been. She had on a black skirt which was too short, a jacket of gray material, and wore no corsets (in any case she hardly needed any). The short plait of her hair was caught up on the top of her fair head, and fastened with a pin.

"Her companion, who had his hands on her shoulders, asked her hurriedly:

" 'Well, here then? What about it?'

"She answered, her face pallid:

" 'Let me go . . . let me go . . .'

"It was clear from the tone of her voice that she had repeated the the phrase two hundred times since they had left the restaurant.

"The man resumed:

" 'Now look here, kid, you told me yes; and yes it's going to be. Can't change your mind like that. When you've said a thing, you've

said it, haven't you? We're all right here; why don't you want to?'

" 'No . . . not there . . . not there . . .'

" 'Well, where d'you want, then? You haven't got a bean, nor have I; I can't afford a room for you. If you're coming to the *fortifs*,[1] carry on, then, we're in for an hour of it.'

"She made a negative gesture. The man became excited.

" 'Z'line, tell me straight. Are you going to let me, yes or no? Because, if it's no, you know I can get others. . . .'

"The poor child burst out crying. She wept so violently against the blind on which I was leaning that I could feel every convulsive leap of her poor distracted young heart.

" 'Yes, I do love you,' she said. 'But not in that way, not in that . . . I don't know how to say it, but love isn't that. . . . I love you . . . because you are kind to me, because you speak differently from the others, because I am so glad when I see you coming. I love you so that I want to put my arms round you, to do that as much as you like, every evening, always! But when you talk about the other thing, no; can't you understand I don't want to . . . especially with you . . . it seems to me it would be wicked.'

"The man shrugged his shoulders and started swearing.

" 'Ah! Damn your bloody bitch's eyes . . .'

"And so on: I can't tell you it all.

"Then, drawing from under his coat a knife . . . a knife . . . I mean a butcher's knife . . . a thing like a sword, he drove it into the blind level with my breast, and said in a violent undertone:

" 'Now then, it's between you and me. You do the jumpy business and I'll sting you.'

"The girl braced herself to resist. An atrocious scene followed. . . .

"The street was absolutely deserted, and the silence so unbroken that only the silence of a countryside can be as calm. It was not even possible to hear the distant hum of the city. What time was it, I wonder? Perhaps two o'clock in the morning. The whole district was asleep except that couple and I myself, the terrified spectator. The girl, so near to me that I could have touched her by simply stretching out my fingers, defended herself with an energy which very nearly gave her actual strength.

"She was bent double, head down, knees pressed together. She panted like an animal out of breath. As soon as her arms were seized she brought her child's legs together, and as soon as her skirts were

[1] Slang abbreviation for "fortifications," the obsolete and deserted military works on the outskirts of Paris.

touched she fought with her hands.... The struggle lasted very long, longer than you might think; but, as in the Greek ballad, in which, at last, Charon gets the shepherd down—she was, at last, overcome.

"She beat the air, then, with her arms, fastened on something driven into the blind.... She did not know what it was, poor child; did not know any longer that it was a knife and, thus accidentally armed, thrust back once more that man who was wounding her so terribly for ever, in her body and in her soul.

"Alas! Human flesh is a mere nothing, a delicate soft clay which yields at the first blow.... The knife entered the throat and flashed out beyond it.

"There was a spurt of blood....

"(Here, along the neck, two huge arteries lie out of which blood gushes as from a heart....)

"A spurt of warm blood splashed through the slats of the blind and reached my waist, wetting it. The man, suffocated by the blade, his eyes bursting from his head, opened his mouth in a frightful manner, but did not even utter a sigh; no, when he fell forward on his face, it was she, the murderess, who, recoiling and skipping to and fro like a small blackbird, pierced the silence of the street with three cries... Three cries of horror....

"Ah! Those wailings for the dead! I have never heard anything more appalling.

. . . . . .

"What followed... is of no consequence to you, is it? My mother, awaking with a start, fearing something had happened to me, looking for me, finding my bed empty, calling me all over the house, and discovering me at last standing at the window all greasy and red with blood which she thought at first was mine... it was not for the sake of that part of the drama that I have told you such a story as I have.

"The rest of it, lying in the depths of my memory, is enough. I was seventeen. In half an hour, I, who knew nothing of realities, had learned everything from them, all the secrets of life, of love and of death; what is called in novels desire! And what it means when a man is in love! And what it means too, when a man dies.

"If people do not know why I have wished to live alone, you at least, my dear, will know, henceforth, the reason."

THE IN-PLANO

A Tale for Easter

I

WHEN the great door had been closed with a snap of its powerful lock, little Cile did not know at first whether to laugh or to cry, so utterly ignorant was she of the emotions of solitude.

For twelve years—that is, all her life—she had never been left alone for more than five minutes. In the evenings she went to sleep in her mothr's room, as the latter did not like leaving her at night; in the mornings she worked under the eye of her youthful governess; in the afternoons she became the centre and beloved object of the charmed attention of her family. The presence of ten persons around her did not embarrass her; but she had no more idea of solitude than Siegfried had of fear.

Nevertheless she was alone, quite alone now, for two long hours to come; she could have no doubt of that.

The father had left Paris on a hunting party. Her mother had just gone out in her carriage, taking the coachman and footman with her. The maid and her husband, the valet, were in the country, where they had been called to the funeral of a relative. The chef and the kitchen-maid had gone out separately, as they were allowed to do every Sunday. Mademoiselle Cile had been left to the sole and perhaps rather juvenile supervision of her governess from Madrid, who taught her Spanish.

Unfortunately, Señorita, as her little pupil called her, seemed also to have her reasons for not staying at home. She was, that day, inexplicably absent-minded, nervous, and almost tearful. Cile was fond of her, and asked what was the matter. But Señorita told her abruptly that she was going out, that she could not take her, that she would be back in two hours for certain; moreover, that above all Madame must not be told, and Cile could prove her great affection for her by behaving even better, all by herself, than she would have behaved if her mistress had been there.

Cile promised, without knowing what she was promising, for she

and solitude had never met before. Señorita stuck a big pin through her black hat, kissed the motionless little girl with a swift movement, and both doors closed before Cile had understood anything of what had happened.

Feeling depressed, she sat down quietly on the chair which stood behind her, and sighed deeply.

Every one had gone away from her.

Out of the hundred and one people who loved her so much and were always telling her so, parents, grandparents, servants, governess, uncles, aunts, cousins, and friends, not a soul had stayed to enjoy the honor of paying her attention. Every one, then, had some one to love, somewhere else; how could you explain that? Cile had never foreseen the distress of such a situation.

She got up on tiptoe, and went through every room, large and small. The great mansion where she had been born terrified her for the first time. After much reflection she observed that the empty house had taken upon itself, in full day, the silence of night; and nothing is more mysterious than the confusions which occur in time when sounds are blotted out just as light is. Undoubtedly the sun was shining outside, but in the sudden tranquillity of her surroundings Cile trembled as if there were an eclipse.

She sat down slowly and soberly at the piano, opened the first volume of Schumann at the page where the turned-down leaf indicated her easiest piece, "After the Theatre," and tried to play. But the crash of the first chord made her jump from her stool to the floor, so violently did it re-echo from the four walls and she decided it was better not to continue.

She trotted, still slowly, to the window: the wide paved courtyard, the two outbuildings side by side, the tall closed doors of the coach-house and stable made up, as usual, the only too familiar and invariably deserted scene she had contemplated and meditated over so often before. Even the dog-kennel had assumed the aspect of an empty dwelling since the departure for the hunting party. Cile breathed on the smooth pane and wrote idly in the whitish vapor: "I feel bored."

But suddenly an idea—a brilliant idea—flashed into her childish brain.

The house had only three floors, and the whole of the third was occupied by an immense library, which little Cile was forbidden to enter. In fact, there were only two supernal regions which she imagined to be quite inaccessible: first, this library; and secondly, the firmament. Who could stop her exploring, during her hour of inde-

pendence, the nearest and most tempting of the zones that she was unacquainted with? Who could stop her? Her conscience? No. Cile had a strict conscience, but only in regard to faults or sins whose wickedness she understood. She was quite determined to do nothing reprehensible on the third floor any more than on the first. She would be good when she got there, she would not break anything, she would walk on tiptoe, she would not leave any trace of her secret visit. . . .

Trembling a little, she went upstairs.

Each fresh step, where the flexible soles of her pink slippers had never been before, both frightened and interested her, like a strip of virgin territory in a voyage of discovery. There were twenty-eight stairs altogether, to the top. When she had reached the horizontal rail of the banisters Cile leaned over with a quite excited feeling of standing upon the summit of the world.

On the landing the double door had been left ajar. At a push from the timid child it moved back majestically in the dark—it might have been the door of Mystery itself, and Cile entered, on tiptoe.

II

THE library was laid out in the form of a cathedral, very lofty, very cavernous, and very dark, with glass windows above the shelves. Multitudes of brown books (Cile thought: "More than ten million books") covered the walls right and left, and even farther on, in the far distance. Cile was very fond of books. Now one could enjoy oneself with so many stories! Really she might just as well let herself read a few of them. In the first place, no one would ever know. And then, it would not hurt anybody, would it? Why should she be forbidden to?

Only, it was very embarrassing to have to choose one volume out of ten million. Which should she take? The one that looked the nicest. And the nicest one was the biggest one. It happened that exactly in front of her, right at the bottom of the tallest bookcase, rose the black-and-gold back of a gigantic *in-plano*.

Oh, did you ever see one like that? Surely that wasn't a book!

Cile remembered that she had once been given a game as a Christmas present, a big one shut up in a box which looked like the binding of a book.

"Suppose it were a game," she said to herself.

Then she leaned forward to read the title.

In gilded capitals the title read:

HAGIOGRAPH HISPANOR

The young reader's acquaintance with bibliography and Latin was still too elementary to enable her to complete the phrase in its precise form: *Hagiographorum hispanorum opera selectissima.*

She put her finger in her mouth, and said to herself after some reflection:

"Hagiographer Hispanor . . . It must be a clockwork game."

When she had come to this conclusion her mind was made up. She seized the enormous *in-plano,* almost as large as herself, with both hands, pulled at it, made an effort which caused her to bend double. . . . The book, dragged from its eternal home, slid forward, toppled, rocked, and came to rest, upright on its edge.

Cile breathed deeply, proud of her strength, and still more of her audacity; but she did not take the risk of lifting such a heavy burden. Still with both hands, she turned the first cover over on its hinges, as though it were a secret door, and stepped back a few paces.

The darkness was gathering about her. The daylight was failing, and failing rapidly. A long ray descending from a bluish window-pane fell upon the black frontispiece of the book she had just opened.

It represented the figure of a Spanish saint, a woman in the costume of a Carmelite nun, standing before a landscape vaguely African in appearance. She held a scourge in one hand, and in the other a great heart which dripped blood.

Cile, terrified, stepped farther back.

Soon there was nothing to be seen clearly in the immense room but the stern and pale phantom of the Saint; and the more the surroundings darkened and became black, the more the figure itself brightened and became white.

It seemed to become larger, to stir, to move its eyes.

A breath of air came from the landscape, ruffling the folds of its garments.

It inclined its head.

At last it spoke.

"Cécile. . . ."

The poor little girl, nearly dead with fright, fell upon her knees.

"Madame . . ." she said.

Then, recollecting herself, like a good child, and remembering, just in time, that all nuns must be addressed as "my sister," she murmured politely:

"My Saint. . . ."

The apparition answered:

"Do not be afraid."

"Oh, I'm not frightened," said Cile, very white. "But I'm so nervous. . . . Pardon me, my Saint."

As she spoke she examined the ample costume of the Immortal One, the brown tunic, the scapular, the bare sandaled feet, and the immense white mantle surrounding the whole figure like a blaze of light.

"Come nearer," said the Saint. "Nearer still. How can I help you? Have you something to say to me, or rather to ask me?"

Cile plucked up courage.

"Something, rather, to ask you, my Saint. There are so many things I want to know! And you must know everything, since you come from heaven."

"Well, I shall allow you to put three questions to me. Three, not a single one more. I am listening. And I shall answer you, my child."

At once the child put her first question:

"Why am I forbidden to come here?"

The Saint answered slowly:

"Because the beams and the planks and the leaves and the pictures in all this library are the trunk and the branches and the leaves and the flowers of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil."

"The Knowledge of Good and Evil," repeated the child. "What is that?"

"It is the understanding of life."

"Life . . ." she repeated again. "Oh, what is my life going to be?"

The Saint shuddered imperceptibly.

"That would be your last question, little Cile, think it over well! Would you not prefer to put another one to me?"

But the little girl, who was gradually regaining confidence, insisted:

"No, no! That is all I want to know."

"If I answer you, you will regret that you consulted me."

Cile hesitated, turned pale once more, and replied in a very quiet voice:

"My Saint, answer me; you promised."

Then the apparition raised towards the sky the hand which held a great purple heart, and the drops of blood began to fall, first one by one, like tears, then in streams, like sobs.

"I could," said she, in a hollow tone, "open the book of your life, ascertain how . . . whence . . . in what guise . . . and in what cir-

cumstances.... What would be the use? All human lives are crushed to the same level, and whatever may be the nature of your life it will only be Life.... Listen carefully, my poor child. You are living on illusion and hopes; your illusion will vanish; all your hopes will be mown down; never, never will you succeed in keeping that which is dear to you, or in possessing that which you desire, or in realizing that of which you dream. You will pursue happiness with a pursuit which will be frantic; you will see it everywhere within reach of your hand, and always your hand will fall upon the empty air, your knees upon the earth, and your forehead upon your knees, and you shall utter such bitter cries that you will believe that you are dying.... You will lie, indeed, a hundred times, with those hundred dreams of yours; your last day will not be the blackest of those you have to live."

A wave of blood flowed from the uplifted heart.

"Listen carefully.... You will love. A new, strange, inexpressibly serene and tender sentiment will invade your credulous soul, which will mistake it for happiness, and the more promise of delight it gives you, the more it will scourge your body and your mind with its triple lash of horror, of despair, and of disgust. Of whatever nature your love may be, it will lie in tears and your sufferings will be such as you cannot imagine...."

The heart swelled up several times with great violence. Red blood continued to flow from it.

"Listen again.... You will become a mother. Ah! This time you will believe, in vain, that you have found the path of a happy life. Your child! Your child! How you will long for it! What an enchanted future you will dream of for yourself and for the being you will hold in your arms! But from the day on which God shall have promised you it, your tears will never cease streaming upon your cheeks. There will be terrible sufferings to obtain it, effort and pain every day to keep it alive, terror if it is ill, incurable anguish if God takes it back from you as He gave it. Then you will know that unhappiness rises like a tide to the assault of human life, increasing incessantly, year after year, the surges of its bitter cries."

The heart grew as large as the sun at evening. Its shape could now scarcely be seen, for the blood was breaking out all over it.

"Lastly," resumed the Saint, "take note, today, of all those you love and know that not one of them will be at your bedside on the day when, as an old woman and almost a stranger in a new world, you will die, horribly alone. You will see, one after the other, your four grandparents, so kind and so beloved, disappear from the places where you used to caress them. You will see your mother expire,

perhaps after an agony, at which you will shudder for the rest of your life. You will place your dead father in an oaken coffin between two layers of sawdust, in order that the putrefaction of his body may not filter through to the soil from the chinks in the box nailed down upon his face. . . ."

"Ah! ! !"

Cile, in the last stage of terror, shrieked, wept, held out her hands. . . .

"No . . . no . . . my Saint . . . no . . . don't tell me. . . ."

She threw herself in a beseeching attitude upon the folds of the mantle of light; but through the unsubstantial vision she touched the huge *in-plano* still upright upon its edges. . . . The volume rocked backwards and fell from its full height with a formidable crash, which re-echoed like thunder from the vaulted roof, while Saint Thérèse de Jésus at the centre of a cloud of bluish dust faded out and passed away.

At the same moment the door opened. . . . Fourteen flashes of lightning suddenly illuminated the electric chandelier, and Cile heard her father's voice cry out in a tone of fury such as she had never known in him:

"Cécile! Naughty girl! So it's here you were, then!"

Alas! The poor child was scarcely in a condition to answer. She listened to the paternal reproaches with a sort of bewilderment, seeing in the outburst of his voice the beginning of the unhappiness of life, and collapsed, in a violent outbreak of tears, upon the floor.

III

"I WANT to die this minute, this minute; I want to die this minute . . ." she kept on repeating.

The father, perturbed, approached her, picked her up, took her on his knee, questioned her. What had happened? What was the meaning of all this? Why had she come in there? And what were these cries of despair about? But Cile did not want to answer. Cile did not want to do anything now but die.

She sobbed for an hour without being able to give any explanation of her trouble. She wept, her head buried in her father's shoulder, while he rocked her slightly to and fro. Then suddenly she related what the Saint had told her, her voice sounding weak, expressionless, monotonous, and despairing, like those of dying persons uttering their last words.

The father heard her out. He was unwilling to exhibit more than a smiling tenderness; but in spite of every effort of his self-control, he could not prevent tears coming to his eyes, and was paler than the child herself when she had finished her narrative. . . .

Then he drew her more closely to him. Taking between his two large affectionate hands the little fair head, all wet with tears, he said, with extreme fondness:

"My child . . . my little one . . . never mind . . . you have been punished, as you can see, because you disobeyed me. That is what happens to little girls who go into libraries. They read certain things there about life which there is no need for them to know."

After hesitating a moment, he went on:

". . . And which are not true."

Cile raised her eyes with the serious gaze of a child:

"Not true? How can they be not true? Did the Saint tell me something that was not true?"

"The Saint wanted to frighten you, so that you should repent of your sin, my darling; but life is quite the opposite of the picture that she gave you of it. Life is beautiful . . . life is sweet . . . life is good. . . . It is all happiness."

And, once more, he forced himself to smile.

The child looked at him for a long time . . . then she hugged him to her with all her strength, trembling from head to foot.

PSYCHE

TRANSLATED BY

MITCHELL · S · BUCK

THE VERSE TRANSLATIONS

ON PAGES 731-732 BY

JAMES E. RICHARDSON

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TRANSLATOR'S NOTE

PIERRE LOUŸS' unfinished romance, Psyche, was published posthumously in November, 1927. Many interesting details regarding it are given by M. Farrère in his "Conclusion." One may not agree with M. Farrère's superlatives regarding the book, but the work is, nevertheless, of great interest, particularly as a contrast to the frank paganism so prominent in other books by this great Author. In some ways, the book is, as Pierre Louÿs himself remarked, out of date. But only in details. The essentials of the story remain the same, through the ages.

PART ONE

I

THE EUPATORIA PASSAGE

"MONSIEUR AIMERY JOUVELLE, why do you not greet me?"

"Madame, I ask a thousand pardons . . . I did not . . ."

"See me? In this narrow passage. You looked at me twice."

"I . . . I was undoubtedly dreaming . . ."

"Be honest . . . You turned your eyes aside because one should not recognize a woman when one meets her at ten o'clock in the morning, in a district not her own. You happen to meet me in the Eupatoria Passage . . . and you pass . . . without seeing me . . . discreetly . . . You are delicious!"

Madame Vannetty looked nervously at the young man who half raised his arms and let them fall in an uneasy gesture.

"Madame . . . truly . . . You attribute to me thoughts so extraordinary that I have no words with which to exonerate myself and it would be unpardonable of me to seek a defense . . . How are you? I have never seen you prettier than you are this morning. This gray dress with its white facings is a marvel. Where did you get it? Do not tell me: I have guessed. Ah! Madame, I have greatly regretted that I could not attend the party on Monday evening where, I have learned, you made a brief appearance about ten o'clock. Shall I have the pleasure of seeing you tomorrow on the Rue Marignan? I had intended to excuse myself but if I could be certain you would come, I should abandon everything to kiss your hand."

"He is astonishing! . . . I permitted you to talk in the hope that you would become confused in explaining yourself, and instead you

submerge the conversation in a deluge of banalities . . . Is it because you have an easy conscience?"

"No."

"From whence do you come, at a similar hour and in a similar district?"

"Ah! Now I understand why you accuse me of suspicion."

"Answer."

"You shall be satisfied. I conspire. The conspirators have assembled . . ."

"Here? . . . No. You trifle with me. Speak seriously. What are you doing so far from the Madeleine?"

"The Government has charged me with an anthropological mission among the natives of Belleville."

"You will be serious or I shall strike you. I saw you come out of that black house at the turn of the passage. Who do you know there?"

"A charming child, blond and pale, who is authorized by the State to live by her smiles."

"There is not a word of truth in what you say. First, that house is occupied by workmen's families whom I know and who would not permit the presence of one of those persons among them. Next, you dined yesterday with General Fels and you would still be in evening clothes if you had not slept at your own house. This is a morning costume, this blue jacket, this gray hat, this . . ."

She drew back a few steps and exclaimed:

"Good God!"

A silence followed; then she burst into laughter.

"Oh! How funny this is! My God, how droll! . . . Come, follow me; let us go out quickly; I would not want anyone to spy us."

"Madame, I do not understand this at all."

"The cane with the monkey's head . . . Is it yours? Is it your own? But yes; and the jacket, the cravat, the waistcoat, the trousers, the shoes, all these were described to me."

Then, in a tone which blended irony and tenderness, indulgence and emphasis, she articulated solemnly:

"You are the Mæcenas of the district of Our Lady of the Cross."

Aimery bowed composedly:

"I was not aware of having so eminent a surname, Madame . . . You give it? What a pleasant title for a young man who is neither connected with the cabinet, nor an interne in the hospitals, nor a sub-

lieutenant, nor a vicar. The Mæcenas of the District of Our Lady of the Cross! When my family hears that, my uncles will no longer tell me that I am nothing!"

A passing woman interrupted them in the midst of a burst of laughter which they repressed too late.

"Good morning, Madame Vannetty. Good morning, my good Monsieur! . . . But you know each other, then?"

"No," said Aimery. "I asked Madame the way to the Buttes-Chaumont."

"Simply go up. By the Rue Piat, that is the shortest."

When the woman had passed on, Madame Vannetty's laughter broke out again.

"You probably cannot understand what amuses me so much, but I am suffocating. Come . . . Here, everyone knows who I am. We can talk, a little farther on—at the Buttes-Chaumont, if you wish, since you asked the way there."

*

THE Eupatoria Passage and the Passage of Our Lady of the Cross are two flowery paths in old Ménilmontant, an almost unexplored village which extends from the Rue de Belleville to the Père-Lachaise. Parisians rarely pass the Faubourg Montmartre, and still more rarely the Ambigu, in their most distant wanderings, and it might be said that the Place de la Republique is the extreme limit of their excursions. From there, one must still walk for a long time and cross strange districts before arriving at the church from the shadow of which the two winding passages mount toward the Buttes.

They are bordered with little gardens, but one could not pass in an automobile between their old wooden railings. They are green lanes with some fruit trees, in sorry orchards, where little flowers surround the senile trunks. The poor people who dwell there form an isolated tribe who no more descend to Paris than Paris ascends to them. An atmosphere of silence and almost of felicity spreads over this hamlet of bucolic Parisians, in the perfume of sweet-peas and scattered white syringas.

*

WHEN Madame Vannetty had passed the last gate, she turned toward Aimery and said:

"Consider that I have come here once a week for the past eighteen months. My family has always been interested in the poor of Ménilmontant: I do not know why Ménilmontant was chosen rather

than Vaugirard or the Epinettes; it is a tradition at our house. We have complete information about the really poor, about those who deserve assistance, and we reduce their sufferings according to the measure of our fortunes. But, as the district is very miserable and our protégés very numerous, we can ordinarily give but little in each case, except in cases of sickness or eviction. It pleases me to restore here the customs of my grandmother, with two of my cousins and four friends who also give their attention to the district; and nothing distinguished one of our popular Tuesdays from another when, suddenly, we discovered an inexplicable change in the situation of some of our unfortunates. There, where they had had neither bread nor wood, we found ice-chests, meerschaum pipes, silver watches, bicycles, half-silk petticoats, sewing machines—in fact, all that is luxury in Ménilmontant. And we ended by learning that in the lofts where we would leave an hundred sous, an unknown young man had appeared before us and distributed bank-notes. His name? He would not give it. His address? Still less. His appearance? Hair neither brown nor blond, an unobtrusive moustache, eyes perhaps blue, perhaps green, and no particular marks: discover then, among three million men, an unknown of this description! The costume was hardly more individual. The cane alone . . . Ah well! It has betrayed you, this cane which you have been twirling so nervously while my discourse bored you. Do not deny it: you are the Unknown."

"I am the Unknown. Yes, Madame, I have always dreamed of being the Unknown, the Masked Youth, the Sword of Mystery, the Hand of Darkness, the Knight of the Lake. That has been my inclination since the cradle. Take care lest I disappear abruptly in the middle of the Rue Piat, with a blasphemous imprecation and in an odor of sulphurous acid."

"Think well, I beg of you, and tell me whether I should believe my eyes when I encountered you one morning transformed into a philanthropist in a district of paupers!"

She threw him a stealthy look and was again seized by the same mad laughter which had already twice shaken her.

"I laugh," she said at last, "because I cannot help thinking of Lady Willowwood's party where I saw you this winter. You had been the first to leave your cigar and seek the ladies in the grand salon. As soon as you appeared, the tone of the conversation became something frightful. I think you know that you have the reputation of telling women, especially, stories which are unsuitable for them. But it is claimed that you tell them so well, and so possess the art of making them acceptable, that it is seemly to blush, but not to take offense, at

your recitals. You took advantage of it. That evening, I was obliged to retire."

"I do not recall a thing I could have said."

"It was about a green wicker case from Japan . . . Your memory clears, does it not? . . . An essential of meditation for dreaming young girls . . . But do you expect me, in my turn, to describe it to you? . . . You were talking behind a fan, so as not to be heard by a beautiful young person who was turning the leaves of an album at a near-by table: Mademoiselle de Vieux-Cernay, whom her little friends privately called Yeux-Cernes, following the style of surnames . . . I watched her while you were talking. She grew red, then pale, then crimson. She did not lose a word of the abominable details which you let us ask, one by one, rake that you are, as though you wished us to take the responsibility for the subject and its developments. That evening, she would have given more than her virtue to have your essential. If you did not seduce her the next day . . ."

"Mademoiselle de Vieux-Cernay? But one seduces her only in a dream."

"Be silent; you speak of horrors . . . And when I recall this short scene, when I see, at the Faubourg, M. Aimery Jouvelle leading devout young ladies toward the most mortal sins and, at Ménilmontant, the same M. Aimery Jouvelle distributing sewing-machines to working women, it appears to me so unheard-of, so extravagant, so droll . . ."

"And you know but one of my secrets. What would happen if you knew the others!"

"Do not attempt a diversion. You are discovered and it is I who have captured you."

"Captured by you, Madame, I am too happy a rabbit. I insist on being eaten."

Madame Vannetty drew back her lips and revealed her teeth:

"Take care!"

He gazed intently at her with a strange expression, his eyes smiling, his mouth closed; one of those looks by which men see far beyond the visible woman, plunging their eyes through all to a very tender future, a future perhaps eternal, upon her breast. In this flash of silent dreaming, his thought acquired an extraordinary rapidity, similar to that which animates a dream. Through the clear blue of the young woman's eyes, so open and sincere, Aimery looked into the depths of her soul. He knew that it was as yet unborn. Then he let his gaze wander over her blond hair: the true blond which might be called the blond of France; he admired the well-placed nose, the delicate mouth which appeared so soft, the ears modeled like master-

pieces. Then, without any brutal, or even familiar, idea, but giving free rein to the imagination which impelled him, he mentally disrobed the young woman, opened her dress, conceived her nudity, elongated, slender and very white. He recalled the arms, the shoulders, the breasts which he had seen, one evening, in a low dress, but the grace of which appeared to him for the first time in his thought. Madame Vannetty's charming body floated for an instant, like a dream close to reality, then disappeared.

"I was in love with you, Madame," said Aimery, "two years before I met you."

"Explain that miracle."

"In love with your name."

"Of Psyche?"

"Psyche."

II

AZURE

THE clear morning sky was pure as Psyche Vannetty's eyes. For the first time in six gloomy months, the immense, pallid gray cloud which had hung over Paris during the cheerless winter, vanished in the brightness.

The air was lighter, faces were happier. A limpid atmosphere restored the youth of the streets. Women passed in rose-colored dresses. Gamins whistled. All the windows were open and the terraces were peopled with drinkers. A swelling breeze glided over peoples' cheeks, a wave so diaphanous and so virgin that it seemed to have come from the heavens.

*

WHEN they had passed the gate of the Park:

"Oh!" said Psyche, raising her hand.

She turned her head and, with a long, circular gesture which included all nature, she murmured with an ecstatic smile:

"The Springtime."

Aimery had become serious.

"It has not come again. It was already here," he said. "See this thrust of grass which is becoming green, which lifts, which shivers around the leafless trees. Resurrected things come out of the earth; the trees which seemed only logs, again become living beings: the chestnut-trees throw out enormous buds which are thick as the

branches, viscous as mollusks drawn from their shell and green like all Hope. Ah! the vigor, the joy and the beauty of all this! No day of summer, no matter how triumphant it might be, could intoxicate me as this does. Alas! how beautiful it is! What a joyous puberty, what an explosion of joy all about us!"

"And the birds!" said Psyche. "And the birds! Do you hear the birds!"

She held out her hands.

"At this season, I feel myself becoming a young girl again. I would like to play here, run on the paths, roll on the grass, tear my red stockings and eat flowers. Let us walk on quickly. Let us go to that little temple which is at the summit of the Park, on the tip of a rocky point. The color today is adorable and, up there, we shall be in a shadow in the midst of all the light. Which of us will be there first?"

As they ascended, the sky broadened.

It was of a blue so profound that even the landscape assumed an Italian coloring. The solar sky can be conceived neither by dreams nor memories; it is splendor; it gives to open eyes that of which closed eyes can retain only the glare and the decline. Aimery gazed at it as he walked. That springtime blue was united in his memory with unforgettable pleasures. All these, one by one, returning from the depths of the past, were reborn as living, as fresh as they once were, reopened their wings, mingled brightly with the great celestial light which spread out to infinity the thirsty cup of future happiness.

When they reached the top, the whole sky surrounded them, and, like a voyager who discovers the sea, Aimery paused and drew himself erect in the intoxication of the regained azure.

Psyche sighed.

"The road stops," she said, sadly. "Ah! My hope goes farther! They hurt me, these instants of life when I feel myself exalted toward a goal which eludes me and which transforms itself . . . Where is the springtime? Where is it, that which so agitated me when I felt it pass through the trees and graze my hair? . . . One shivers, one starts, one excites one's self, one believes that the fruition will be beautiful because the desire has been great; and the desire dies like the sea upon the sand, like water vainly lifted by the wind which always flees on into the distance . . ."

"Why do you not follow?" said Aimery. "Why not let yourself be carried away? You know well that the road does not stop here. It is here that it begins and awaits you. It is free, it is for you . . ."

"No, you have misunderstood me. I shall not follow that road."

"It is the only one."

"Say no more. I am on the point of becoming your sincere friend, and you are going to discourage me."

"There is no other road in the earthly paradise."

"You deceive yourself. One would think you wished to deceive me, for you know better than anyone that there are other roads to exaltation, since you are a poet. That one is not all . . ."

"Everything there becomes beautiful."

"No. And, at this very instant, you do not think so. Your emotion when we entered the Park, your tenderness before the marvels of the earth and the sky, your passion: that was not from love."

"In three minutes it was."

"You are prompt. I must ask you for three years to reach the point where you are now, and I promise you nothing."

"So much wrath over an opinion upon the roadways of Paradise?"

"The first awakening of spring is a period which I cannot live without being moved to the bottom of my heart; then that emotion addresses itself to all there is of the unknown above us, about us, in the perfume of the woods, in the light of the sky, in the divine shudder which overruns me and which I adore above all because it is mysterious. I know not from whence it comes to me nor toward what ideal its power draws me. I do not understand it. I feel it. It is sweet to me. And when I speak so to you, you translate it as: 'I love you!' "

"You have said 'I love.' That is not the same thing. But you have proclaimed it. What is Love, Great God, if it is not this which you meet?"

"Love! Then you think I am not beset by it? Does the life of Paris permit young women to avoid at least hearing its voice? I do not yield to it. I will never yield to it. But is it less bold? . . . If you could know . . . It is a ceaseless persecution . . . I dine: the leg of some unknown searches out mine and seizes it as though in the shadows of a bed. I dance; there is a hand feeling my corsage, a hand falsely distracted or thoughtless, which has the air of not dreaming it is there but which turns, informs itself, changes its place, knows my hip and touches my breast. I sit down: some guest seats himself beside me and presses his whole person against me. He talks in my ear, looking at me so closely that he sees the top of my corsage; and, suddenly, comes the: 'Will you? . . . What day? . . . Tomorrow?' which my dancer has already said and which my neighbor at the table has allowed me to listen to. I go out on the street: there is the vile follower who approaches me and attaches himself to my shadow. He never leaves me:

if I walk quickly, he hastens his steps; if I enter a shop, he enters with me; if I change my path, he anticipates me; if I turn back in flight, he is there, he is always there; he is upon the steps when I ring at my door! Ah! Horror! . . . And what more is there to tell you? The shameful touches suffered in crowds. The still more shameful memory of the husband my father gave me . . . See what love has been in my life . . . There were evenings when I was crushed by distaste, by boredom and by . . . I know not what, which deluged me with tears . . . For, after all, we have senses, whether or not we are on earth to obey them. To always resist is to become mad . . . Then I tried to escape from that obsession. I tried not to think of it. I recovered my balance. Life is so vast, and the soul so valiant! I prayed. I gave myself to those charities which took me much among poor people. I wrapped myself up in a book, a picture, a landscape—what shall I say?—in whatever could make me forget man and his unwelcome kiss . . .

"Ah well!" she continued, in a changed voice. "You alone had never talked to me of love.—I have already told you that, in a tone not in accord with my feelings; but my nerves interfere with my words, this morning.—You alone spared me. I appreciated that in you! And now that is nothing! Today, chance made me uncover a secret which drew us together . . . I laughed at you. I gave you my hand. I thought that, at last I had found a friend to whom I could open my heart without therefore opening my corset . . . You see that I have told you all. Ah well! You also . . . you also . . ."

Her lips quivered. A shiver ran from her head to her knees and, with a gesture of weakness, she turned her head aside and started to cry.

At last Aimery understood. The point was not to convert Psyche to the sentiments she inspired but to those which she felt with the most lively intensity without acknowledging them and without even knowing them.

This woman, twenty-four years old, was absolutely a virgin at heart. Her intelligence, her purity of spirit, her delicacy of soul and of thought, instead of awakening it to her own affections had, rather, deceived it; and in the matter of love she reasoned like a child who, although quite unaware of it, dotes on her cousin. All passionate experience, all sensual education, was wanting in her history. Her amorous or disturbing agitations immediately transformed themselves in intellectual music and she failed to recognize them, through their metamorphosis, in the murmur of her reveries.

Still crying she had seated herself sideways upon a circular bench, beyond which extended the horizon. That instant of weakness had broken her attitude. A woman who permits herself to be seen in tears, renounces all coquetries in losing that of her eyes. Psyche gave up all. Her neck bent, her shoulders drooping, her body relaxed, her hands wandering, she was like a pupil who had finished her lesson in deportment. Her dress was no longer the same. Her hat seemed spiritless. Her slipping umbrella drooped in six long, melancholy folds.

"Psyche . . ." said Aimery.

And, hearing herself called by her first name, she felt no surprise.

He sought her eyes.

"Psyche, it was not I who made you cry."

"Oh! It is not you."

"Nor anyone. It is Love itself, which you slight and which is within you."

"Good Heavens! Love for whom?"

"For whom? But you say such foolish things! Do you think that love addresses itself to anyone? Is the springtime in this park made for the gardener who sprinkles it? Was this passing man born for that girl who talks to him so rapturously; and, if he did not exist, would she not love? You do not know what love is and you think to escape it when it entirely possesses you."

"What do you wish to say?" she asked, weakly.

He hesitated for an instant, then resumed with a smile:

"Listen, do you know the legend of Psyche, your patron saint?"

"I did not know she had been canonized," she smiled vaguely.

"Psyche, like yourself, was ravished by a mysterious adolescent who would neither tell his name nor show his face; and she was his without knowing that the unknown was Love."

"Mine is still more mysterious, for nothing informs me of his presence. My tears, you would say? If it was he who made me cry, I would prefer not to know him. I am unhappier this morning than I have ever been."

"He gives us enough pleasures to be permitted also to make us suffer."

"And what pleasures has he given me? I no longer have a husband, if I could say that I ever had one. I have no lover: I have no friends: I live alone, miserably alone . . ."

"Alone with him. Your eye sparkles: it is he who animates it. Your cheek reddens: it is he who touches it. It is he who makes you smile and he who makes you sigh. Whatever the thought by which you

are moved, if you shudder it is because he is there. When you are pleased with the music of violins, you love. When you breathe the perfume which attracts you, you love. When you admire the sun setting beyond the water, daylight upon the sea, springtime on the plain or autumn in the woods, it is he who transforms all strange nature, rendering it moving like human passion and in accord with your passion. He is the marvelous Blood which enables you to understand the forest murmurs and the speech of birds. He is all which exalts you above realities, all which carries you away beyond dreams. Do not attempt to escape him for he is all-powerful: he has more than pleasure and more than sorrow in his hands. He never tells you his name but he is your lover as he is your master. Nothing can stop his ardent approach. When you feel in yourself all your youth which swells your breast and enflames your lips, it is he who transfigures you; and, in your shadowy bed, between your arms, Psyche, when you have extinguished the last light, it is he who hears you weep."

She let her face fall into her cupped fingers. Aimery gently took her other hand, which seemed asleep in the fold of her skirt, and rested his knee on the stone bench.

"Psyche, do you feel that he is there, between your hand and mine?"

"Is that he?" she murmured. And a slow undulation, like a sigh, lifted her bowed form for an instant.

He resumed, closer to her and holding the clasp of her fingers:

"Do you see now why I could not understand you when you called Love that which is a caprice, a low gallantry, a tolerated insolence, a brutal, cold flirtation, all that which you detest, all that which I scorn, and for which you cruelly said to me: 'You also'? Do you see that there is, between us, an incomparable sentiment which surpasses our senses and our thought, an emotion absolutely pure, a current of energy, of happiness and of beauty, which I welcome with all my strength because I feel myself greater under its influence, prouder of being alive, more worthy of you; and because such a joy comes to us from the height of an ideal so lofty that I respire, in it, a divine breath? Would you . . ."

"In pity, ask nothing of me! I hear you; that is all I can do."

She sobbed abruptly, then recovered herself and, with her clenched hands, pressed her handkerchief upon her eyes.

Aimery clasped her knees and leaned over her.

"You yourself are free."

"I am not a widow."

"You are more free than a widow, for she is bound to a mem-

ory: more free than a married woman, for she belongs to a husband: more free than a young girl, for she is controlled by her parents or by her tutors. No liberty is equal to yours. Nothing in the world can restrain you except yourself."

"That should be enough."

"When Love wishes, that would be nothing, Psyche. Love is stronger than you are."

"And is it stronger than my faith? It is that which, more than anything, has sustained me until now. I have no refuge except in it. I beg of you, do not close that to me. What would remain to me if I no longer had that?"

"But you shall keep it! Who speaks of depriving you? Your faith has protected you against worldly debauch which is lowering. It will not resist the love which you feel, which I feel; for Love and Faith are but the same virtue whose ecstasy changes its name but is itself in nowise altered. Between Martha and Mary, you need not select Martha: it is your faith which will defend you. Love, Psyche: you are free. Love before the world; and search in the Gospels for a single word which would condemn you. That word you will not find."

"You frighten me. What do you wish of me?"

She looked at him at last, her eyes widened by anxiety, looking as though she would rather hear a word of death than a word of love.

He said, frankly:

"To go away with you."

"To go away . . ."

"This very evening."

"I don't understand what I hear . . . I am becoming mad . . . You want me to go away with you? . . . But how could you think . . ."

"Listen. For two years I have owned an estate. It is not that which came to me from my father and which is in Champagne: it is another one, in the west, twelve hours from here: a park, woods, pools, a stream, a château which is quite isolated from the world. The springtime there is born some days later than ours. As though the machine of time had made two turns backwards, we will revive, under another sky, this same morning which we have lost here because it came too soon for us. And that new springtime will bloom only for your eyes."

"You dream!"

"I will not let you talk. Leaving you, I will go and engage a compartment in the nine o'clock express. I will send you the number. I will arrive at the station this evening an hour ahead of time, and you when you wish."

"Do not depend on it."

"The auto will follow in the baggage, and we shall enjoy tomorrow morning on an estate where nothing shall happen except by your wish, where I will not even follow you if you really do not wish it. You have already said: 'There are other paths to exaltation than those of the senses.' You shall decide that according to the counsel of the springtime. We have learned today that the same emotions stir us together and that eternal things draw us toward each other across life. You have given me your friendship; I will lay claim, through that, to beg you to go this evening, and not to expose our destinies to all the perils of hope and of an inaccessible future."

"I shall never have a lover. I have sworn it."

"My happiness has need of your presence."

"In the eyes of the world, my presence or my love would be judged by the same words."

The young man leapt up.

"In the eyes of the world! That is what I hear from your lips at the end of such a scene! You are young, you are mistress of yourself, all frankness is in your eyes, all honesty in your hand; and you would let me believe that you would care if Madame X . . ., who has had ten lovers, became offended at yours! That is the last argument you reserve for me, the insuperable barrier behind which you say: 'No.' This world which you scorn: it is to it that you surrender and not to your heart."

"I am crushed," said Psyche.

"Will it even know where you are, this spying world, so badly informed on the subjects for which it is most greedy? Cannot a woman leave Paris for eight days without awakening peoples' attention? A fortnight: at your feet, I ask a fortnight. Afterwards, I will kill myself and the world shall have you again."

"My God! What have you said!"

She was standing.

"Ah!" she continued, sadly. "Oh, my friend, you see. This love which is hardly born and which you describe to me as a delight: see what it has already cost us: I am in tears: you dream of death. Is this the road of happiness?"

"Yes."

She shook her head.

"I do not wish it. Farewell, my friend. I shall always think of this morning which we lived together; but you should forget it. That will not be difficult for you. Your remembrance will be lost among others; the affections of men are so scattered! . . . Forget our encounter and especially what I told you, for I responded very badly to you. I

feel myself quite crushed . . . Have pity on me; let me go . . . I have put all my strength into my resistance and I have nothing more to say to you except that I offer you my hand . . . Have the charity not to accompany me."

*

SHE descended the winding road, following a path by chance . . . Her head leaned alternately on one shoulder and the other like a weight too great to carry. She passed slowly behind a group of green lilacs, reappeared, crossed a bridge, diminished in the distance. Her gray dress was almost lost in the pale mist which colors Paris at all hours of the day, but Aimery saw her only, among the passing people and the trees. When she had disappeared, his eyes closed.

Then he lifted his two fists, thrust back his hair, and walked away, striking at the ground with his cane.

"I am mad for her!" he said to himself. "She shall go!"

III

ARACŒLI

AIMERY walked quickly away from the Park and regained the automobile which was waiting for him at the Place du Combat.

Madame Vannetty had clearly declared that she would not be followed, that she would never have a lover and that she had sworn this.

A conversation which terminates thus is not always without hope, but it certainly does not indicate that the loved woman will permit herself to be ravished that same evening. However questionable the future might be, the chances for success were null for that evening. Nevertheless, Aimery was not disturbed. In saying: "I am mad for her; she shall go," he established a logical relation between the two parts of the sentence, as certain travelers say ingenuously: "I shall travel tomorrow; it will be fair." These are the charms of optimism.

Thus he prepared all arrangements for a departure for which the most adventurous would not have wagered an hundred to one. What hour was it? Twenty after twelve. He said to the chauffeur:

"Gare d'Orsay!"

And, taking his place in the left corner of the vehicle, he left the right to an invisible Psyche.

When one gives battle, one must have a talent for it and take ad-

vantage of every opportunity; that is the entire art of tactics. This army was vanquished by the dust, and that one by snow. Aimery had the heavens on his side; not the religious heavens which exterminated the Amalekites, but the Azure which does so much to throw lovers into the arms of the first young person to appear. By such a morning as that one, he was convinced that women's resistance could not endure and that if one might be fortunate enough to be present when it departed, the time to besiege them, the ardor to convince them, they would yield in advance. He had said to Psyche: "You shall decide that in accordance with the counsel of the springtime," and, within himself, he had added: "I have an ally so powerful that you can do nothing against him."

With extraordinary confidence, he entered the railroad station and engaged a sleeping-car compartment in a Company car. From there he went to a florist's where he ordered, for that evening, white lilacs, roses from Nice, anthuriums and hydrangeas. Then he was driven to his house where he wished to write to Psyche as soon as possible and look up her address. He had even forgotten where she lived.

Write to her! His heart bounded. The first letter, the source, the beginning of this unknown future; the envelope which would always be on the top of a package of letters, under the knot of ribbon and which one would open, in the sequel, with new love or new hatred, saying: "This was the beginning!"

And what a difficult task! To give the hour of the train, the number of the car, the letter of the compartment, the name of the station. What more? Advice on the checking of baggage! And harmonize these upon a theme of passion by the artifices of counterpoint! To write in so well-balanced a manner that Psyche could find there neither an assurance which could offend her nor a doubt which could make her hesitate and perhaps abstain. What delicate perils in that ardent page!

The automobile entered the silent Rue d'Aguesseau, passed the gate of a garden and stopped before a double stairway.

Aimery had already started up the steps to his house when his valet descended to meet him.

"Monsieur . . . Madame is here."

"Madame?"

"A half-hour ago, Monsieur."

"What day is this?"

"Tuesday, Monsieur."

"Tuesday? . . . It is true. For luncheon. I had completely forgotten. Where is she?"

"In Madame's boudoir, Monsieur."

"Is she impatient?"

"No, Monsieur. Madame is playing with the monkey."

"Good. I shall be up in ten minutes. I have a letter to write in my cabinet. If Madame asks for me, come for me."

Two years before, Aimery was returning from Egypt, well after the end of the season, on an almost deserted packet. Chance placed him at the table near an unknown young girl who had the tint of a mulatto and almost European features, the nose delicate, the eyes elongated.

Those eyes seduced Aimery as soon as he met their glance. Between their delicately tinted lids, the edges of which were naturally darkened, they smiled so tenderly, so humidly and so voluptuously that they seemed always murmuring thanks for a supreme pleasure.

The black hair was thick and fluffy, the eye-brows and the lashes very long, the lips dark, the neck slender. A tiny hole pierced the right nostril.

After dinner, Aimery followed the young girl to the deck. They talked.

She was born at Pondichéry of a Philippine father and a Hindu mother, both of mixed blood. Her ancestry embraced the Dravidian, Hindu, Spanish, Arab and Malay. Certain native colorations had left a Negro stain on her long fingers. She was called Aracœli.

Aracœli spoke two languages, French and Tamil, and professed two religions, which was much in a period when so many honest girls had none. While her father was teaching her the Catholic catechism, her mother had instructed her not to scorn the gods of her country; and as, on all occasions, the young girl prayed at the same time to Our Lady and to Parvâti, she thanked them together for benefits received and believed that the Virgin and the Goddess united their divine powers to smile on her prayers and to grant them.

Having become an orphan, she was going to Estremadura, accompanied by her paternal aunt who wished to see the *tierra bendita* of her distant ancestors before she died. But this aunt was sea-sick and could not leave her cabin, a circumstance which Aimery did not fail to appreciate and which would doubtless have converted him to the hundred gods of the Coromandel Coast if he had owed it to his prayers.

Outlined in the evening, the flirtation continued the next morning

and made rapid progress. Aracœli, raised in a lonely place, but amorous and heedless, had neither the talent nor the wish to defend herself from the first man who had the opportunity of pleasing her. Toward three o'clock, she let herself be persuaded that there was too much wind on deck and that cabin 44, selected between two empty cabins, was better suited to conversation. It was there, in view of the shores of Crete, that Aracœli gave tenderly, if not the very heart of her virginity, at least its approaches, and the confidential spectacle of her enchantment under caresses.

Four days later, she arrived at the Rue d'Aguesseau, after having forgotten her aunt at Marseilles.

The appearance of this anthropological curiosity in the Ville-l'Evêque district, caused some comment. It was claimed that Aimery Jouvelle had bought a mistress in the Garden of Acclimation; that she had a ring in her nose, drawers hung with glass trinkets, and various other nonsense. Aracœli was not so dark as the report would have it.

An hour after her arrival when, leaving her bath, she showed herself naked as the gods had made her, Aimery told her that she resembled a Siamese cat, fawn-colored with some details in black. Her color was clear Havana or, more exactly, Broca's shade No. 29, to speak the language of ethnologists. And the softness of her contours, the suppleness of her young body, all were so charming that Aimery became much more amorous of the harmonious whole than he had been, on the packet, of selected morsels.

Anywhere, Aracœli much preferred to be nude. Naturally and through unconcern, it became slowly accepted by Aimery himself that she should show herself before all his servants and sometimes before his friends without other veil than a pearl, set in the Indian manner, in the right nostril.

It was not that she intended to seduce anyone: never did concubine more faithful share the bed of an honest man. Her mother had never ceased repeating to her, during her infancy, that man, although docile while he is loved, becomes frightfully cruel when jealous. Aracœli had many apprehensions and little curiosity. And, beside, her lover pleased her. She loved him calmly and patiently but without any sham. In the little neighboring hotel, where Aimery soon installed her, with two chambermaids and a cook for the entire household, she had many occasions, but never the impulse, to deceive him.

She did even better. She knew from her mother that the surest way to hold men fast is not to constrain them, and that the favorite risked less by tolerating the hundred women of the harem than in strictly forcing extended fidelities, the rupture of which is always dra-

matic and often irreparable. Consequently, she told Aimery, in her very soft voice, that her constancy did not ask payment in return, that he was free to give her rivals, free even to show them to her; and that she loved him too sincerely not to be happy with him in all the delights which he might enjoy upon their breasts.

Aimery rarely profited by the permission she gave him. His desires seldom led him beyond the first essay. The young Hindu was not averse to these little experiences which always ended so well for her and secretly flattered her intimate vanities. It was very pleasant to her to be loved; it was even pleasanter to see herself preferred. Her charms were henceforth open to the test of comparisons, and when Aimery would return to her arms after an interrupted fugue, she would receive him with a little ironic look, indulgent and almost maternal, as though he had complained, the poor child, of having slept badly on a trip.

*

THE letter to Psyche was completed only after a difficult half-hour. It was ten minutes of two when its author finally entered "Madame's" boudoir.

Aracœli was seated, quite naked, in the top drawer of her Empire commode, looking like the Leda of the large swan of yellowish copper which formed a lock. Her body bent forward, her legs dangling and her hands clasped before her, she was bouncing an orange fastened on a garter, to tease his monkey, Tarquin.

"What are you doing there?"

She inclined her head on one shoulder, assumed her little, childish smile, so affectionate and so gay, and, like a little girl caught in mischief, she said, timidly:

"I am playing."

They embraced.

"I am very late, my dear."

"But no."

She never knew the hour, would breakfast twice or not at all, would sleep for twelve hours or pass the whole night awake; to all that she was indifferent.

Nevertheless, she asked:

"Let us be served in my chamber; the dining-room is so far away."

Then, as he came to stretch out on the large divan, she ran there, curled up near him and rested her head on his chest.

"Do you know where I was last evening? At the Circus. There

were elephants dressed like babies who were playing with firemen (but these were clowns, of course). Ah! How funny they were! . . . and how I laughed . . . Such things do not amuse you, my darling, but they please me. Afterward, I was in the stables. The elephant-driver saw at once that I came from below here; we spoke Tamil. He told me that he was not worthy to make love to me and that his humility would save his life, because he could not possibly kiss my mouth without dying. I told him that I had a lover, however, who took his pleasure from all my body and who died in my arms only to be gloriously reborn. He replied: 'Then he is a god.' He had reason, my Aimery."

She took his head between her hands and gave him a long kiss to keep him from talking.

"Then I returned and, during the night, Marozie, unfortunate one, had five little kittens. She had come into my room; she would not leave me because she felt that she was well protected. I was obligated for the delivery; she cried like a woman; it was her first time. And if you had seen her; she was so touching. One would have said that she knew in advance all that had to be done and the care to take. When the first-born fell on the padding . . . But you are not listening to me. Of what are you thinking?"

With her gentle, indulgent smile, she examined him like a clairvoyant mistress from whom the face of her lover could conceal nothing.

"Aimery, you were faithful to me last night, but you are going to deceive me this evening."

"Are you sure?"

"Oh, yes!"

"I am not so sure."

"Then it is because she said 'No' to you . . . But you are hoping that she thought 'Yes.'"

He did not reply.

Aracœli sat upright on her heels like an Egyptian slave; and in a very gentle tone, without a reproach, without any bitterness in her voice, as she would have said "How can I please you?" she whispered, her eyes upon him:

"At what hour do you wish me to go?"

Suddenly tender, and a little ashamed, Aimery straightened up, took her by the shoulders, gazed into her eyes . . .

"Cœlia," he said, in an affectionate voice, "where is there in the world a heart so charming as yours? Do you know that if I saw the least sadness in the depths of these eyes I would remain at your feet?"

"But I am not sad. You are in my arms."

She smiled at him, conscious of her power.

She had never yet attracted him by means of those vices which are wearying and repellent and which end in estrangement. She was holding him through a certain primitive influence, a simple, naked charm which emanated from her and which always suggested, to the spirit and to the flesh, the pleasure of ardent conjunction. Aimery had known women whose simple physical aspect awakened the desire for all the perversities and who would indulge themselves furiously, like Ausonius' woman from Bordeaux, "for fear of dying before trying everything." Aracœli had not been less docile nor perhaps less curious, but, in her arms, love was so much the more beautiful as it was purer. And she had, moreover, so much youthful grace to offer him, so much sensuality to welcome him, so much gratitude to share with him, that, in the embrace of her soft thighs, all voluptuousness was tenderness.

"Tarquin! Will you leave me alone!"

The monkey had seized the silken tape from which the hostile orange was suspended. He had a sense of retaliation. That was his only instinct of justice. Uncomfortably seated on a shelf of red mahogany which hung over the niche where the divan was extended, he imitated like an actor the posture Aracœli had taken to torment him; he returned, in every point, the treatment he had received from her.

"Tarquin! If I catch your tail!"

But Tarquin would not let himself be caught. With a bound, he was in the curtains, drew himself up by the draw-cord and rubbed his stomach on the canopy while his orange hung suspended like an ornamental pompon.

She pursued him. He descended a little, to bring his defiance closer. She raised her arms: the tossing orange touched her fingers and was drawn up into the monkey's clutch.

"I will play no more," said Cœli.

And she pretended to cry, then burst into laughter. The victorious Tarquin put an end to the combat by picking apart his projectile which only a thirst for vengeance had kept him from devouring before.

Then luncheon was served, not only for Tarquin but also for his adversaries. Aimery was about to leave the divan when the little slave seated herself lightly on his knees and said, winding herself about her master:

"Tell me first . . . What is her name?"

"Whose?"

"The woman you saw this morning. With whom you have an engagement this evening . . . Don't you remember?"

"Aracœli."

"But no. Aracœli is going to leave in an hour. She will sleep in her chamber alone with Marozie who still needs looking after, the poor little cat . . . Tell me about the woman . . . Is she pretty? Does she resemble me? I hope not . . ."

"Not at all."

"Tell me, is she blond?"

"Yes, she is blond."

She put her arms about his neck.

"Oh! Thou art handsome. Embrace me."

IV

PSYCHE SHAKEN

PSYCHE VANNETTY was half fainting as she regained her house, closed the door of her chamber and threw herself on her bed, her face in her hands.

"To always resist is to become mad," she had said, during the exhausting scene which she had endured. And this phrase repeated itself constantly in her ears as though spoken by another voice.

To always resist! To always clash with this desire of man and to struggle against him, against herself, against everything! "My God!" she thought, "I have no accomplishment for being a thief or a murderess; I have not in myself the instinct which would urge me to despoil or slay my fellow-creature and I do not encounter at every street-corner people who say, secretively: 'Come! Take it! It is within your grasp; no one sees you; you have nothing to fear! Kill! This man is without defense; here is the weapon; no one will know!' But where the question is of love, that is the intense temptation! Debauch yourself! All is ready for your flight: an apartment: the distant château; choose: I have foreseen everything. If you will go, here is your ticket, the auto will follow in the baggage. Debauch yourself, it shall remain secret. Neither scandal nor pregnancy, you risk nothing; and, even if someone did surprise you, there will be no harshness; this is allowed by the custom of the times, permitted by the laws of the world. Look at me: I am Youth, I am Luxury and Joy! And I hear this every day of my life and no matter what I do a lover assails me; and when I repulse him, when I take all my courage to save myself from him, I discover that this man has a sworn ally, who is here, in my heart, in my flesh and my blood, and who cries to me: 'Follow him! Follow him! . . .' My God! I have no more strength . . ."

With these words, she felt, in reality, the fall of the last remains of her strength. The nervous will which had bound her temples slackened like a cord left to float endlessly in space. A gentle, subtle wave ran over her body. Calmness took possession of her and, in the morning light, Aimery appeared under her closed eye-lids.

She imagined him, sadly, as one dreams of something at once promised and withheld. To go away with him was delirium; she knew well that she would not go! But, although he was not there, although she had been able to escape him, there was still the peril of encountering his shadow in the ethereal realm of memory . . .

He had said of Love: "Do not attempt to escape him; he is all-powerful; he has more than pleasure and more than sorrow in his hands . . . Psyche, do you feel that he is there, between your hand and mine . . ."

Alas! She forgave him for everything, since he was no longer to be feared. "And what should I expect from him?" she thought. "Our hands touched; nothing more. I had to defend myself only from his voice; he did not seek for my lips, he did not follow me when I left . . . But what a voice! And what eyes upon mine! . . . I would not dare meet his gaze again . . ."

Then the smallest details of that grave hour returned in disorder to her memory . . . Upon the stone, beside her, some unknown had left a newspaper which the wind lifted always in the same way and which fell again like a gray wing unable to pass over the back of the bench . . . Then there was a fluted column carved with intitals and tender inscriptions . . . Next, a shrub on which a single bud was beginning to open and which quivered its little green leaf perpetually, just above the horizon . . . Far beyond, great clouds of smoke floated over Paris above the two railway stations . . . and still farther, the pure white Sacred Heart with its mosque-like cupolas . . .

While Aimery was talking to her, she had looked always at the seal of a ring which he had on his left hand; she had tried to read two words which were engraved in the gold . . . He had said to her: "You yourself are free." And at that instant, the ring, surprised by the sun, had become dazzling.

*

"Who is it?"

Someone had knocked. Psyche raised herself on an elbow on the bed. The chamber-maid announced a visitor, Madame de Jaulgonne, in the little salon, but the dinner was served. Would Madame receive Madame de Jaulgonne in the dining room?

"No, I shall not lunch," said Psyche. "Let her come here."

She entered her dressing room, indolently adjusted her hair, powered herself with a vague, indifferent hand.

"Good morning, Lotte," she said, returning.

Madame de Jaulgonne walked quickly up to her:

"What is this I hear, Nichette? You will not lunch? Are you ill?"

"It is nothing, dear; my nerves are upset."

"You have a shocking look, my little one; look at yourself. What has happened to you?"

"Nothing."

"What a joke! Tell me the truth. A misfortune? A sad letter? News of your husband?"

"What an idea, Lotte! How could you . . ."

"Then what? Money losses? Trouble with the servants? A doctor who has upset you? . . . There is something, certainly! I have never seen you so pale . . . You are suffering, that is clear as daylight!"

Psyche made an evasive gesture. Madame de Jaulgonne continued:

"You have no right to suffer alone when I am here to sustain you and to aid you with all my strength. What is happening in your life? A passion, perhaps?"

She was a person essentially frank, to whom her frankness had brought some celebrated enmities and some unbreakable friendships. One knew her equally incapable of uttering a compliment which she did not believe or of expressing an opinion which was not distinctly her own. Psyche loved her quick voice, her careless gestures, her eyes which always seemed to say: "If this is not your opinion, what do I care for that!" And she had no firmer friend than this free woman who lived less inclined to embraces than faithful to the clasp of hands.

The two friends regarded each other fixedly.

"Charlotte, I do not *want* to be in love!"

"Mercy! That is what I feared! You must be mad over him to utter such a phrase to me!"

"I do not *want* to. I *will* not be!"

"But you are deadly in love, my poor little one! In love like a schoolgirl. Let us see, who is it? René Marcenay? Jean de Sarens? Aimery Jouvelle? . . . Oh! It is he. Add nothing; thy face names him sufficiently. You have chosen well, Nichette; he is delicious."

"I did not choose him," sighed Psyche. "I repulsed him with all my soul."

"And since when . . . did you repulse him? I saw you both Wednesday evening at the house of my Aunt de Horges; neither of

you had the appearance of searching or of flying! I would never have suspected the tragedy which you were playing together."

"He declared himself this morning. And he wishes to carry me off this evening!"

"Ah! He is quick, this flirt of yours!" said Charlotte, suffocating.

"I am still sufficiently strong, thank God, to resist an invitation of that species; but the scene I had has left me worn out . . . I no longer recognize myself . . . I doubt myself, if not for the present, at least for the future . . . You know my life, Charlotte, I have nothing in my past. And this which I say to you now I wish to repeat on the day of my death, guarding my pride until the end. That is my only pleasure. If I should lose it, it would seem as though everything had fallen in ruin about me . . . Charlotte, I have need of your friendship! Support me, talk to me; I do not want to fall, either in your eyes or my own! Ah! I am a poor Psyche who no longer has confidence in herself!"

She let her arms fall helplessly.

The reply came promptly:

"One may hold out, but one must know why. If you mix bad reasons with the good, on the day you see that one of your arguments is valueless, all the others will tumble over like a house of cards. You have a perfect right to take a lover if you wish, and do not imagine that I should be scandalized. If I learned that M. Aimery Jouvelle had passed the night at your house . . ."

"Charlotte!"

". . . Or the hour for tea, if you prefer . . . Since I would remain your friend, I regret saying that, since it astonished you. You resisted him; I approve of you. If you had yielded to him, I should have understood you. And do not get it into your head that you 'fall' in my eyes when you open your arms to the man you love . . ."

"Charlotte!"

"That does not concern me in any way and it concerns no one. It seems to me also that you are afraid of the world's opinion. Assuredly, the world will be curious, but it will not interfere, you may be sure. Moreover, your secret belongs to yourself, and you could conceal it with more ease than you seem to think, unless M. Jouvelle himself . . . But I believe him too gallant to be a coxcomb. If, however, the world learning of it, the gossip were running from mouth to mouth, one would accept it as one of the thousand bits of news of which one talks without being sure; and your hostesses would be careful to recall it so as to give consideration to the one in the presence of the other, to invite you together with a discreet sympathy for your sentimental affairs

... Frankly, I see no other possible consequences of worldly scandal which should make you pale in advance, my dear friend, and which you would be the only one to take seriously."

"But peoples' contempt! Their looks! Their reticences! Their hidden thoughts! And the feeling I myself would have when I saw entering one of those women who make visits at seven o'clock in the evening with the flush of pleasure still on their cheeks . . ."

"And then? ... Do you think, then, because you have no lover, that the world has given you none?"

Psyche arose with a bound.

"Me? They talk of me?"

"Truly, you are too innocent, my little Nichette! You are over four years old. Why should anyone guarantee your virtue? One does not ask *if* Madame X. amuses herself; one asks *with whom* Madame X. has her acquaintance."

"But what could anyone say about me, when there is nothing?"

"Whatever they wished. You have been the mistress of René Marcenay for the past six months. And you deceive him."

"That is infamy!"

"You deceive him . . ."

"Neither he nor anyone . . ."

"Come, calm yourself; understand, this is not my talk. You deceived him yesterday at five o'clock in an apartment on the Rue Vernet. And at six o'clock someone had told me. See how I am informed!"

"In short . . ."

"At that hour, the Champs-Elysées were barred off before the Elysée Palace during a visit of the President to some Japanese prince or other. A mail coach, returning from Mesnil, had detoured the bars by way of the Rue Vernet. Four metres up on the second seats, a woman cast her eyes carelessly into a mezzanine apartment at the front of an unfamiliar lot, and she saw you, my dear, she saw you naked as Eve our mother, with an Adam she did not recognize."

"My poor Lotte! Yesterday at five o'clock I was at Versailles, at the house of Madame de Geslis . . . Who was the miserable one who told you that?"

"A nice little soul who wished you no harm. She told me that you have a charming breast."

Psyche, astounded, seated herself on the edge of a sofa and rested her elbows on her knees, her temples in her hands, her eyes staring. Madame de Jaulgonne continued:

"If you have properly understood me: do not be virtuous on my

account, since I care nothing for that, nor on account of the world which will not believe you and which has forgiven you in advance. Resist on account of yourself alone. Let that suffice you."

Psyche raised her eyes.

"Then . . . Then you still advise me . . ."

"Yes."

"I do not yet quite understand . . . I am confused."

"In my eyes, you are free to accept this adventure or to refuse it. I ask but one thing: will you be happy for having yielded? Ah well! If you abandon yourself, you will bring happiness to Aimery Jouvelle but not to yourself, my little one, I predict."

"Why?" asked Psyche, sadly.

"Ah! Ah! . . . There is a question . . . a melancholy . . . almost a deception . . . Only an instant ago, you *would* not be in love . . ."

"Not at all. I have freed you from false barriers, obstacles of painted cardboard which you would have completely overthrown all by yourself, which would have encouraged you. But now we see an obstacle, and I stop you."

"Do with me whatever you wish."

"What will happen if you have resolved to yield? Aimery Jouvelle wants to carry you away this evening, you say? You will not go; that is evident. He returns tomorrow; you allow him to pay court according to form, and you hear him in six weeks. Good. You both have fifteen days, a month, two months, of intoxication. In the beginning you are sentimentally in love; but the more time passes, the more you feel yourself enmeshed by the flesh, the more your lover becomes detached from you. When you shall be entirely his, he will have ceased to love you. When your sole reason for living shall be his embrace, you will have become only a memory."

"But why only that?"

"What would you have me say? Because men are that way and because the only way of retaining their affection is, sometimes, by marrying them . . . Poor little one, this method has not succeeded with you, but the other would be worse. The day when Aimery Jouvelle abandons you . . ."

"You are appalling!"

"I hope so. The day when Aimery Jouvelle abandons you, I know, from your character, that you will give him no successor, and there will remain with you nothing in the world except regret for happiness and remorse for your fault. On that day, your life will be wrecked."

"Yes, Charlotte."

"I should not be at all surprised if all this adventure ends in a Carmelite chapel. With you, it foreshadows a matter of life and death. Ah well! Since you are pious, I advise you to remember that today, while there is time, and not in six months, when it will be too late. Who is your spiritual director?"

"You who observe so little . . ."

"It does not matter about me. Who is your director?"

"Alas! He was Father Pasquier . . . He had known me since my childhood. I had to say but a word to him and he would immediately find the advice which he gave me in each circumstance. Since the Dominicans were expelled, I have taken an Abbé, but that is not the same thing. A little doctor of souls, if you see what I mean. He gives counsels like ordinances and he always has a recipe for preserving you from sin."

"It is good, that. To heal crises of the will, little methods are worth more than grand phrases."

"Father Pasquier did not talk like that but he knew how to reach me and when I left him I was sure of myself."

Madame Jaulgonne hesitated an instant; then, with the audacious and uneasy smile of a card player who draws one card to five, she concluded:

"Go to the Abbé."

PSYCHE'S CONFESSION

WHEN Psyche, introduced by an old woman servant, had seated herself in Abbé Tholozan's reception room, so different from the monachal chamber where, formerly, Father Pasquier would receive her upon a straw-bottomed chair between four bare walls, she was as timid as a young girl confessing for the first time.

To this priest, who knew little of her and who doubtless had not yet conceived for her all the spiritual affection which a woman hopes for from her confessor, she was going to make the most humiliating avowal which had ever come from her lips: the avowal of a future sin.

She would not say: "My father, I went astray for a moment, I was taken unawares and I sinned." She would say: "I am forewarned. I see clearly where the evil is and I no longer have enough will to keep me from going straight to it, unless you restrain me." This, which she would confess, was worse than a fault: it was cowardice.

The Abbé appeared at the door and advanced toward her, opening his hands.

"You have come to consult me?"

"And to confess myself."

"Confess yourself! But I heard you the day before yesterday! . . . Then what have you to tell me which is so serious? A little sin to which you attribute a great importance and which does not merit it, I am sure . . ."

He would encourage her.

"There, you are all agitated . . . Eh! You shall not succeed in disturbing me! You are, Madame, a penitent to whom I would dare, as they say in a village, give the Good God without confession. Sometimes you may sin a trifle verbally; but, Bah! one must take the times as they are and not ask of worldly people what is expected of Ursulines. Flirtation is just midway between vice and virtue; purgatory is made for it."

So saying, with the gesture of a judge who disposes of eternal pains at will, he straightened himself in his armchair.

The Abbé Tholozan was passing forty. He was neither large nor small, but tolerably fat and carrying well his Roman aspect.

"I am afraid of sinning in action," said Psyche.

"In the future?"

"In the future."

"I assure you it is a trifling matter. A scruple! Perhaps a dream! A peril which you will avoid and which will be good for your salvation. '*Tentationem da mihi, Domine!* Give me the temptation, Lord!' cried Saint Jerome, 'since thou hast given me the strength to repulse it!' Let us see; speak with an open heart."

She spoke. For a very long time. She wished to relate all the scene in the park, feeling that, if the Abbé did not know all the details, he could not estimate the consequences. Then she described the sequence of her sensations, turned back to her past, expressed her fears for the future, told of her weakness and of her loneliness . . .

The Abbé listened with an occasionally distracted ear, like a man for whom those adventures were not as unthought-of as one would have him think. He nodded his head regularly to show that he understood, even when he forgot to listen. He heard the essential parts.

"Yes," he said, in a perplexed tone. Then, raising his eyes toward the penitent:

"Ah well! I shall not say again to you what I was saying awhile ago. I am more affected by your emotion, my daughter, than by your recital. In crises of this sort, after all, the peril is always as much as one

imagines it, since the soul obeys its illusions rather than realities. Until now, you have very well controlled carnal temptation; but, this time, I advise you not to enter the battle."

"But how?"

"Go away from it."

Psyche regarded him with a positive surprise. He explained himself at once.

"I believe that your own strength would be sufficient to defend you; and, if I could communicate to you all the confidence I have in your firmness, I would simply say: 'Be strong.' But you doubt yourself; and who can foresee the snares which the enemy will spread about your feet? Assuredly, you will not go tonight to the rendezvous which he had the impudence to propose to you; but you will see him return an hundred times to the charge; he will make use of every means to overcome you; and I do not believe it right to expose your chastity to such pressing perils.

"Last autumn, I was confessing a young girl who found herself in a situation much more alarming than yours, because she was, if I may say so, in a state of habitual sin. Her own servant, charged to go out with her, had consented to take her three times a week to a secret apartment where the unfortunate child would commit acts, the great seriousness of which was less from their character than from their frequency. I tried in vain to show her the opprobrium of her conduct: each time she promised not to fall again, but the next day an irresistible impulse would take her again to the house of the young libertine who abused her weakness; and, after a dozen weeks of effort, I had not succeeded in having her ignore one rendezvous. It was necessary to resort to broader methods.

"Dining one evening with her father, I took the family doctor aside and said to him, in a low voice, looking at him thus . . . 'Doctor, send her to the waters.—What waters?—It doesn't matter.—Ah! Ah! . . . Far from Paris?—As far as possible.—For three weeks?—For three months.' This doctor was a Christian and, without other explanation (for what more could I have given him?), he did what I expected of him. And if ever a thermal season cured a desperate case, it was, by force of circumstances, that of which I am telling you the history. During her absence, the tempter removed his nets to place them elsewhere. One day, my young sinner returned to the place of her past faults, but there was nothing there to make her commit them."

The Abbé Tholozan paused a moment after finishing his anecdote; then he continued.

"Thus was protected, in secret, a soul of sixteen years which did

not know itself at all. But you are valiant, my dear girl; you will assist in your salvation. I clearly show you the remedy; cure yourself boldly."

"My father . . ." hazarded Psyche, "I feel . . . really more courageous since . . . I have spoken with you . . . I do not want to yield, but I am ashamed to fly . . . If I do that, it is a defeat; it is a confession that I am afraid of him . . ."

"There is no shame in fearing Satan. A man defends himself against a man; he does not contend against a pestilence. It does not indicate a feeble soul to fly before a tempest, my daughter, or before love, for our human arms are not strong enough to struggle against the fire of the sky or against that of the abyss."

"If I do not even attempt to struggle, my father, what will happen to me when I return from exile? I shall be certain to meet him. Perhaps he will still love me . . . However long my absence may be, I have seen passions endure longer than all voyages . . ."

"Go away this evening. There is just time. I suggest this departure to you as my advice and, since it must be, I impose it affectionately on you as my penitence. Return, pack your trunks; you have five hours, which will suffice. Someone awaits you at the Gare d'Orsay; go to the Gare de Lyon. Someone departs for Brittany; go to Italy. Pray to Saint John de Lateran, and beg the well-beloved apostle to draw you from guilty love by grace of the love divine! Lift up your heart toward God! Love is due only to him. Go this evening and, when you feel firmly that you can return without danger, come to me on your arrival. I wish to learn from you yourself that you are saved from evil."

"You require it, my father? I submit," said Psyche.

VI

THE SUPREME STRUGGLE

SHE would obey. She would leave Paris to forget.

Her resolution taken after so much uncertainty, Psyche Vannetty expected to be calmer; but her calm was gloomy and resembled that which we sometimes assume at the loss of dear ones, covering our sadness with languor but not with peace.

She returned on foot along the lovely avenue which led to the Muette its triple alley of green chestnut trees. These also were budding prodigally toward the paler and almost obscured azure, but Psyche's eyes no longer saw the springtime.

For some hours past, her heart had beaten so quickly that the remembrance of the morning already appeared infinitely distant, like the springtime of another age, but forever deflowered.

She was satisfied and regretted nothing. Her life would continue solitary and without reproach, as in the past. Happy? No, but regular. The irreparable would not take place. The shadow of remorse had hovered over her and finally flown away without having touched her. Now sheltered from an unknown peril, she wished to persuade herself that all would be better so; but, with her apprehensions, she had lost that emotion, that shivering, that intimate fervor which formerly animated her and which was, for her, the savor of life.

Re-entering her empty house, she said to the chambermaid, with a gesture of indifference:

"Blanche, pack my dressing case, a box of hats and one trunk of dresses. I am leaving this evening for Italy. Select for yourself in the wardrobe and in the linen closets; also the dresses I will need. I leave it to you. Go."

Then she went up to her room. Eight little notes to write to release herself from eight accepted invitations; five or six notes to advise her closest friends; it was not necessary that this quick departure, being far from an amorous prank, should take the appearance of one . . .

But as she approached her little white bureau, she saw an unstamped letter on the morocco blotting-case.

The writing? She did not know it.

She paled suddenly.

"It is from him," she said to herself. "Indeed . . . He said that he would write to me."

She went to the extreme end of the room; she wished to go out; but she was so pale . . . and felt so badly, that she let herself sink upon the farthest chair.

"I do not want that letter . . . I will not read that letter . . . It is useless . . . All is sacrificed . . . All is dead for me."

But one can never throw aside a letter without reading it. Even silence is a reply, and sometimes the worst of all. How did she know what that sealed envelope contained? Had he, perhaps, realized that his projects were impossible? If it should announce a visit from him, the servants should be notified, so that no one would admit him. If it named some other rendezvous . . . If he were leaving from the Gare de Lyon . . . she should know it, so that she would not fall into his arms at the moment of flying from him!

Psyche, wan as a dimming lamp, arose in her long dress of gray linen, crossed the room, and leaned over the white bureau.

This letter would speak to her, in spite of all, and, although she would never see again the man who had written it, this posthumous letter chilled her hands. She opened it like a testament and read it with tear-filled eyes.

"Do not smile: I shall be at the station. Do not condemn me further. I know that it is madness, that it is impossible, that you will not come: and I shall await you. I have dreamed of a friend exactly like you, since I can imagine nothing more charming than in your image; but of a friend who would go; and you will remain, I know well. She would go spontaneously, as though it were the simplest idea in the world to go where the springtime called her and to lead a cavalier there. She would find engaged for her the little compartment B on the 9:32 train which runs on the Douarnenez road to Sainte-Anne-des-Bois, and she would permit me to give her my hand to enter the train or to descend . . . These are imaginations . . . Let me have them for a day. Until the last moment, I shall believe that you are on the way, that your carriage is delayed, that you will arrive with the crowd, that you are there, behind the window. I shall remain hidden near your empty place so that no one will see me waiting for you; and when the train carries me away without you, then only shall I dare weep for my part of happiness lost."

"Alas! And mine?" cried Psyche, sobbing against her hands. "My poor little bit of happiness here below, which I have never touched nor even met, but hope for which has helped me to live: is it today, is it today that I pass to one side of it and lose it forever?"

A long surge of consciousness shook again her broken will. An hundred things Aimery had said to her in endeavoring to convince her passed in a confused rush through her spirit, with a power of persuasion which she had not recognized in them. Yes, this would be intoxicating, this departure in great haste, this soaring of human youth towards the youth of the earth, the fields and the forests! Sin: there could be none in the ardor so beautiful, so fresh, with which he had spoken to her in the broad light of the morning . . . And then . . . Charlotte indulgent . . . The world hostile toward the solitary and helpful to the united . . . the example of the happy; pity for herself . . . all, until that history told by her director: that returning exile, still amorous, the empty house, the lover departed to seduce others . . .

She cried out in her thought:

"I love him; I can no longer deceive my heart. It is not a strange

voice which repeats incessantly to me: 'Follow him! Follow him!' It is myself, it is all of myself, my being, my blood, my life."

BUT this was only a cry. When she had uttered it, she fell on her knees and prayed. At the instant when she saw clearly into her own soul, until then so obscured, a return of moral energy stiffened her against the unmasked passion.

She no longer applied, for her salvation, either the counsel of a friend or the orders of a director. Psyche was struggling against Psyche. A civil war had burst in her own white city. A desperate combat delivered her against herself, between her passionate will and her reflective will, body to body, in the night of her brain. It was a terrible duel.

And as, in ancient battles, the armies engaged, calling to their assistance warriors from above the clouds, she conquered herself in the name of Heaven, putting all her strength into her clasped hands and into her hope of eternal peace

"MADAME . . . It is Monsieur the Abbé Tholozan."

"I will come."

With head erect, she entered the salon.

The Abbé held in his hand, against the black of his new cassock, a little book embroidered in blue.

"I have brought you a traveling companion," he said, smiling: "'The Meditations of a Soul in Peril.' Read it in the car or, still better, where you are going, to quiet your thoughts. It is a comforting book."

"You came to see whether I was setting out, Monsieur the Abbé? You have had reason. Less than an hour ago, I was close to remaining."

"I rather expected that. But now you are strong?"

"I am."

"You will not go tomorrow evening or tomorrow morning, but immediately, as you yourself promised?"

"Immediately. The trunks are being packed."

The priest seated himself near his penitent, took her hand, and said:

"My dear child—permit me to call you that—I foresaw the short weakness which you have had, and it is to avoid still more alarming relapses that I am putting four hundred leagues between you and

temptation. To depend on one's self is not always courage but often pride, often presumption. The soul left to itself returns to its errors and afterwards laments, saying: 'Why had I no guide?' You have taken one, my child. Let yourself benefit by his experience. He will free your road from snares and ambuscades. Follow him with closed eyes. Remaining at Paris, you are lost. Your director entreats you to go. Some day you will thank him."

She was resolved. He left her, content. After his departure, she went up to examine her trunks. She slipped into a case the Guide to Italy, the Burckhardt and the Helbig, which she had brought back from her last trip, a little Dante for Florence, a Ruskin for Venice, a Musset for Saint-Blaise and for Zuecca. She filled all the corners, even taking the Italian grammar which she carried so carefully each time she crossed the Alps, without succeeding in finishing the chapter on substantives.

Her little notes were written in half an hour. She changed her dress, dined quickly, closed her wardrobes, paid the servants, slipped into her dressing case her "letters to answer" with that from Aimery which she had not time to burn; and, panting for breath from so hasty a departure, looking to see what she could have forgotten, counting her parasols, her money, her tickets, her little hand-packages, she was seated, some hours later, in the summoned carriage which was drawing her toward the Gare de Lyon.

VII

AIMERY'S DEPARTURE

AIMERY'S departure was less animated.

Through the first minutes of awakening stretches an intermediate period in which we do not separate the imaginary from the real. We know well that we have dreamed, but the palace of dream still exists, and if it were not true that we were going out, we would re-enter it immediately.

Aimery believed that he had experienced a similar aberration when he re-awakened his optimistic mirage in the automobile which was carrying him to the Gare d'Orsay.

With a vexed little laugh, he shrugged his shoulders.

"Obviously, she will not come."

To seduce her, it was necessary, first, to remain near her. After the "No" she had given him, what spontaneous reversal could he expect from her without some interference in favor of the rendezvous?

But when Aimery stepped upon the platform of the station, there still remained a doubt—that is to say, a hope. Psyche was not there? Who knew? If the rendezvous had been given in a deserted place . . . But here, in this moving crowd! Perhaps that was she, that hat with a blue veil . . . or, over there, that long, light mantle? . . . No. He was too late, beyond doubt . . . If she had arrived first . . . If she were below, in the compartment! . . . An unlikely supposition! But, once more, who knew? He was mad with groundless hope, but was he not foolish to despair without proof?

He descended, searched for the car, found his place. But Psyche was not in the compartment.

Nevertheless, as though she had come, he closed the curtains, placed the flowers which he had brought for her, and four of his cushions in the two corners of the seat. A fresh, flowery perfume contended with and soon dispelled the heavy odor of the subterranean station. He put two little cups on the shelf, one full of bonbons, the other empty, for rings. Finally he stretched over all the lower wall a wide piece of soft, fine Chinese silk, yellow embroidered with blue.

"That is a bit compromising," he said ironically. "The more so because she will not come!"

He thought quite the contrary. The more the little furnishing he had devised gave the appearance of a chamber of love, the more the shadow of Psyche there assumed reality. She was there, floating and all but invisible, awaiting her absent body which was coming to mingle itself with her. Aimery adored it; already he smiled.

Ah! The ardent chimera of that flight! Loving, to tell it on one day and to fly in the night! To break all the rules of classic love, brush aside the formulas of flirtation, ignore the youthful preliminaries, skip over the three acts and seven scenes between the *cavatina* and the *duo* of love! Ah! If she were the woman to love thus, to go "spontaneously, as though it were the simplest idea in the world to go where the springtime called her and to lead her lover there!" He had proclaimed that! If only she heard!

MEANWHILE, the hour was passing. The voice of the conductor calling "Travelers for the Nantes express!" startled Aimery, who became pale.

Three minutes more, and the train would leave.

Aimery rested his hand on the frame of the little door, and his heart began to beat with so much passion that he knew not whether

it was from desire or despair or uncertainty. Ten times he wished to jump out and run to the stairway to see if his eyes . . . perhaps to call, "Hurry! Hurry!" . . . To what use? If she were there, he might lose her. If she were not . . .

Suddenly, the door opened and Psyche, Psyche herself—no longer her image or her shadow, but her real self, her look, her perfume, all of herself . . . Psyche entered.

Trembling, she closed the door, leaned against it, stretched out her hands:

"I beg of you, do not touch me . . . I don't know what I am doing here . . ."

"Her voice! It is her voice also! . . . What you are doing here, Psyche? Bringing all the beauty of life to him who hears you!"

Her eyes closed, her hand on her forehead, she spoke as though to herself, while the resounding train rolled through the Paris tunnel:

"How did I come? . . . I know not . . . All the way, I thought to fly from you . . . I was afraid of you . . . afraid of myself . . . Not five minutes ago, I was still flying from you . . . and I am overcome . . . you see . . . all is finished . . ."

"Psyche!"

"It is madness; you told me so yourself. It is impossible . . . And here I am!"

"Psyche!"

PART TWO

I

THE KISS

THEY were silent.

Madame Vannetty had given her hand to the young man's trembling hands, and supported herself on them, her arm outstretched.

Her head almost drooping, she let fall on Aimery's eyes a look hesitating and veiled, then fixed and clear, a look in which all sensations strove for light and expression, but in which there was, especially, fright.

Aimery was stooping, one foot upon the seat, an elbow on his knee. Of Psyche, he was touching only the distracted hand, so palpitating and so warm that the glove took life about it and seemed its skin. He sensed, with motionless passion, this little intimate warmth and the vague perfume of her closed corsage. But he did not speak yet, and dared not make a movement. As though she had been the antique Psyche, the white butterfly of mythology, one would have said that he dreaded to put his hand upon her for fear of destroying, at the first contact, the imponderable flower of her beauty.

And she gazed at him! With what solemn eyes! Women regard Love sometimes as they would regard Death, with the terrors of an unknown Beyond. As though, at the instant of yielding, their earthly future divides, like their eternal future, between the menace of a hell and the splendor of a paradise. Psyche's soul was too feeble for the emotion of this supreme hour. She was stifled. Her eyelids quivered. She wished to say a word which she could not pronounce. She bent backward, then forward, as though moved by the swaying of the moving car, and fell, trembling, dissolved in tears.

Aimery received her in respectful arms. Happy above all at not having startled her, he did not clasp her; he supported her carefully. What need had he to give way to haste? Psyche was a prisoner, bound by the irresistible flight of the train which resounded like a nuptial organ in the nave of the stone tunnel. And these lights, these vague vapors, which glowed under the sonorous arches, were the tapers and the incense of their mysterious marriage . . . She would be his. Why

be abrupt with his joyousness? He sustained her with a single arm about her quivering shoulders and gently rested his other hand upon an abandoned hand.

"Psyche," he said, very tenderly, "I cannot hear you cry any more. I will give you all that you wish of my life and of my strength and of that which is in me to fashion about you a happiness acceptable to you. But do not cry any more. I am not in your arms; I am at your feet. That which you desire shall be accomplished. That which you do not desire shall be obliterated. You see, it is not I who have led you here. You have come of your own free will, as much at liberty as you shall be always. Nothing shall happen which I shall not have read in your eyes before raising my thought to it. If you should repulse me, I swear to you that I would go. My happiness is something of yours with which you will do as you please. When you wish to destroy it, I shall say simply: 'You yourself have given; you yourself retake: bless you, Psyche!' "

A gasp shook her, like a woman suffocating.

"Be good to me! . . ." she sobbed.

Then she repeated, many times:

"Pardon! . . . Pardon! . . . I do not want to cry any more . . . as on each evening, formerly . . . I need to be happy . . . Ah! When I tell you what my life has been! . . . Not an affection for me. Not a hand to clasp as I clasp yours . . . I know nothing at all of that which is happiness and I am afraid of delivering myself to you . . ."

Then, as she leaned her head backward, Aimery bent slowly toward her mouth.

She saw the shadow of his face descend little by little toward her; and her blue eyes widened, became suddenly as grave as they could have been at the presentation of the Viaticum.

His lips grazed hers. She started, turned them aside . . .

Then let them touch.

Insensibly. Aimery had clasped her. One hand supported her body and the other her neck. She breathed deeply as though oppressed by a troubling dream. A nervous, softly trembling impulse, a slow flood of strange emanations, a boundless enchantment, light and beneficent, overran all her body. Her eyes lengthened, then gleamed. Then she closed them.

For how long had this kiss throbbed? Psyche had lost the sense of time. She clung like an amorous woman who abandons herself body and soul; and yet when it appeared that the young man wished to gently free one of his discreet hands, it seemed to him that, by a movement of her head, she wished to say: "No . . . Not that . . . Not

here." But she said nothing at all. The two mouths could no longer separate, one from the other.

A blue, quite sombre shadow fell from the half-screened lamp. A whistle, imperceptible, then sonorous, then deafening, then weakening and lost, swept over the train. It was late. The express, now, rushed through open country, without other noise than the monotonous, precipitate drumming of the wheels, passing over the rails, indefinitely. The windows were closed, the curtains spread; and, little by little, all the odors floating about died away before the perfume of Psyche.

SUDDENLY the train paused, with screaking brakes.

Psyche drew herself up with a start, and re-opened her eyes.

"What is it?"

"Nothing. A station."

"Where are we?"

"At Etampes, probably."

"Someone called Saint-Pierre . . . Saint-Pierre-des-Corps."

"It is possible."

"What? We have passed the Aubrais? But that is as far as Tours, Orléans!"

"I don't know," said Aimery.

She turned toward him, her face transformed, her eyes shining, her lips red; and she burst into laughter.

Her laughter was not yet without constraint, but Aimery could not be misled either by her look or by her attitude. Psyche was being transformed. The trace of the kiss, which brightened her mouth, radiated from her whole body.

"Yes, that is it," she repeated. "Do not look to see where we are. It is Nice or Ploërmel or Baden-Baden. I have fled at random from Paris. I do not want to know where I am."

Erect before the glass, her arms raised, she repaired the light disorder of her hat, her hair and her veil. She had opened her dressing-case when she heard a sound at her door which made her start.

"My God!" she cried. "Someone knocked . . . Someone has followed us . . ."

The knock was repeated.

Aimery half opened the curtain, reassured her with a gesture, and opened to a porter who saluted and asked "if he might make the beds."

"The beds? . . . You are mad!" said the young woman, flatly.

And when she had re-closed the door, the red mounted to her cheeks. This man was the first witness of her secret. He had seen her, Psyche Vannetty, behind a bolt scarcely half open, alone with a man, in a sleeping-car. He had offered to spread bedclothes, as though her companion had every right over her, could undress her, see her naked, embrace her naked . . . What would he think? She was tempted to go out into the corridor and walk up and down there for the entire night, to prove her chastity to this servant. Stiffening against the wall, she hid her face in her hands, with a stifled "Oh!"

"It is I who am mad," she said slowly, letting her arms fall. "Do you know what day this is?"

"No."

"Recall that this morning, *this morning*, I scarcely recognized you! And that this evening . . ."

"Do you regret it, Psyche?"

"And that this evening you call me Psyche, as though you were already . . . Love . . . And that between my meeting and my flight less than twelve hours pass . . . Is it I who have done this? Is it I who am here? . . . I have become completely mad.

"This which is happening to me is so improbable. If I were telling it to you, you would not believe me."

"Truly?"

"Do you know how I came?"

"By an inspiration from heaven."

"By the clumsiness of my confessor."

"A man of genius! What is his name?"

"Ah! If the Dominicans had not been expelled! Father Pasquier would have guided me better! But I have a new director who does not understand me at all . . . Without him, I would have remained in my house. How could you expect that I would follow you voluntarily? In a moment of forgetfulness, perhaps . . .

"But after five consecutive hours—without a relapse, without a quiver, making my preparations for departure, my packages, my letters of excuse, wishing continuously to be seduced—never, never would I have done it!"

"Well?"

"Well! It was he who made me pack the trunks! He wanted me to leave for Rome at the instant you were leaving for Brittany, for the purpose of more surely escaping you. He succeeded! And I found myself . . . do you understand, now? I found myself dressed for traveling, with my trunks, my hand-bag and everything necessary for following you, *passing the Gare d'Orsay* to go to the Gare de Lyon

. . . It was twenty-five minutes after nine . . . I sensed you there . . . You loved me . . . I had but to lift my hand to the carriage bell . . ."

She paused, refreshing her memory.

"But it certainly seems to me that I did not touch it . . ."

"No, Psyche, do not accuse yourself. It would have rung all by itself."

"You think so, Aimery?"

II

THE FOREST

SAINTE-ANNE-DES-BOIS was a solitary station, set far from the village which gave it its name. A shed; some posters; some trees; two quiet employees who seemed to be promenaders.

Psyche, furtive, her veiled head lowered, hurried down the corridor and descended to the platform. In the silence, the crackle of gravel under her shoes made her start. There was no other sound except the light breathing of the locomotive and a little bird song from the poplars. She took a few steps more to the shelter of the shed and, to turn her back on the travelers in the train, she considered, motionless, a poster which displayed gypsy women in an Andalusian landscape.

But the train, which had hardly stopped, seemed determined to remain there. What was happening? Someone detached the car which had transported Aimery's automobile. The unloading of an automobile was an unfamiliar operation to the employees of the little station, and the train tarried, and Psyche became impatient.

It seemed to her that, from all the compartments, all eyes were turned toward her, that someone was recognizing her, by her long, gray mantle which had been seen at Cannes, by her hat which she had worn twice, and particularly by this barrette, designed especially for her and known to all Paris. This train, it was still Paris, rushed in pursuit of her, pausing behind her. She rewound her veil about her neck and then stood motionless, fearing lest her gestures themselves might have some personal character.

A whistle. The train ground heavily away and disappeared. When she turned her head, she was delivered at last. Aimery was talking, farther on, beside the baggage. Toward the west, she could see only a bit of smoke, lifted by the wind. The curve of the blue rails, wet with dew, ran bare over the yellow sand.

"Ah!" she exclaimed, with a sigh from the depths of her breast.

And it was as though the black cloud of her conscience, also, had gone from her. The sin which she had not committed, which she had repulsed an hundred times in the habitual dignity of her resistance and of her chastity: the sin appeared to her in another aspect. Without doubt, this was not the same. That at Paris was still guilty and shameful and unworthy of her. It was something else at Sainte-Anne-des-Bois, and the former was not less inexcusable . . .

She reproached herself for thinking that. And then thought it again . . . Finally, believing herself reassured and to cut short her revery, she turned her head involuntarily toward the very person of her temptation.

"What are you doing?" she asked Aimery.

"Everything is ready."

"Shall I step in?"

"Do, please."

They departed alone. Aimery drove. He had given orders that no one should come to meet him. After following the road for a few minutes, the automobile entered a narrow, level road, unbroken by ruts, freshly rolled; one of those excellent roads which the tourist has the impression of inaugurating at the instant he chooses it. With some winding, it passed through a little, thin wood crossed by green brooks; then, at the summit of the hill, ran directly into the forest.

"How well I feel!" exclaimed Psyche. "I did not sleep in the night. I was very weak at six o'clock; and now I am more rested than I would have been lying down. The breeze from our progress gives me a pleasure which I could not explain to you. Take the longest road; it will be the most charming."

She added, in a gay voice:

"Indeed, where are we going? You have not told me."

"We are going toward the Springtime as I promised you yesterday."

"Yesterday, that was enough for me . . . to say that I would not follow you. But this morning, I find myself with you, without knowing where. I know vaguely that we are in Brittany, but that is all. What is the name of your estate?"

"I would rather not tell you the name until you have entered it."

"Why?"

"It will merit it only if you show it the honor of giving it."

"How mysterious you are! Is it far from here?"

"We shall be there shortly."

"You go there often?"

"Never."

"Why not?"

"I have been waiting for you."

"Speak more seriously."

"I speak very seriously. I let myself be tempted by this château, offered for sale two years ago. First the name pleased me, then the place. I had no need of it for myself. I acquired it only to conduct to it, in the greatest secrecy, the unknown woman whom I should some day love and whom I had found nowhere."

"And you knew in advance that you would encounter the unknown woman?"

"I have always had faith in future happiness."

A long silence separated them. They regarded one another.

"You are happy!" said Psyche. "Is it another happiness for which you hope?"

"Yes."

"Then," she said, slowly, "you are doubly happy. What talisman do you carry to enter thus into the supernatural?"

Her reply was a penetrating look.

The automobile turned sharply to the left, abandoned the macadam for the springy mould of a forest path; and, throbbing, slackened its speed. The path sloped sharply upward.

Gigantic trees stretched up their immovable columns. Pheasants ran over the ground; higher, squirrels climbed; still higher, shadowy wings glided silently under the arch of the trees. The last branches united at the top, so near the sky that it seemed as though the birds could not mount to them; and the immense nave extended to infinity in a blue mist which was the birthplace of clouds.

"This is beautiful," said Psyche. "But what a frightening country. If I were alone here, I should die of fright before dying of hunger. We have not encountered a single soul since our departure. Is this, then, the forest of the magician Merlin, from which men are driven by sorceries?"

"Almost. But be reassured; you are riding in a magic car and you have nothing to fear."

"You say: 'Almost'?"

"Because there is a little which you may not have divined."

"It is an enchanted forest? You startle me. Do you know that I am still not far from believing fairy stories? If I were abandoned here, I should be more afraid of gnomes than of wolves, and I should see goblins gliding in the sunbeams."

"At sunset, you shall know everything, before the dwarfs have left their caves; and my secret is nothing you need dread."

Some minutes past, through the trees there had appeared a high wall with tiers which rose evenly along its side, like the steps of a giant stairway. Above the moss-stained chevrons, the vegetation of a garden was clearly distinguished from the brown forest. Then the wall opened. Two towers flanked a large, open grille. The car entered, followed a straight aisle, circled around a pleasant, quiet château, crossed a wooden bridge, and stopped at last in the centre of a terrace which dominated the surrounding country.

"It is an oasis!" exclaimed Psyche, ravished. "This reminds me . . . Oh! How much this reminds me of Philæ!"

"Philæ!" cried Aimery. "You also have seen Philæ!"

And she recalled it, her hand over her eyes.

"I was small, Philæ still existed. My father had taken me with him to the Thebaid and to Nubia. We had left Assouan to cross a torrid desert, the desert of Saint Anthony where I expected to see lions on the hills and vipers along the road. And suddenly, from the top of a sinister hill, in the midst of a great yellowish flood which seemed like another desert moving, we discovered the Earthly Paradise, the green isle of life in the land of the dead . . . Philæ! O Philæ! Its trees, its palace, its painted columns, its great winged Isis which I took for the Angel of lost Eden! And I was going among the palm trees, to find out what had put into the hand of the first woman that fruit which had given her the knowledge of good and of evil . . ."

She re-opened her eyes.

"You have given me again the vision of my infancy. We have left the Forest of Winter and here is the Springtime, another Springtime!"

"That which was born for you alone."

"That which you had promised me."

III

THE CHÂTEAU . .

As he conducted her to a vast room which took up the middle of the first floor, Psyche shuddered as she passed near a bed, and walked quickly to the central window.

The garden spread itself out at her feet. She saw a long stretch of water bordered by a green curb, from which ran a clear brook which lost itself among the trees. She saw a sloping lawn where white peacocks were walking in dazzling sunlight. And, farther away, more trees, and lakes, and blue plains and the celestial circle of the horizon.

Aimery stood behind her, but so close that his cheek almost touched her cheek; and the hand which he had rested on her shoulder was trembling. Psyche was his; all his. Nothing about him, neither the walls nor the earth nor the trees, nor the waters, belonged more to him than she. He had withdrawn her from the world, lifted her into a domain more solitary than that of a vessel upon the ocean . . .

Passionately, he kissed her neck and clasped her with so close an embrace that she could not breathe.

"I beg of you!" she entreated, fluttering her hands before her face.

And, in a lower voice:

"Like yesterday, still . . . Like yesterday . . . Only that . . . Just once more . . . I love you . . . I have no strength against you but I beg of you with all my soul!"

When she felt his lips pressing upon hers, she moaned from the corners of her mouth, a long, low plaint, as though this first voluptuousness was already too powerful for her almost virgin senses. Then her lips also kissed silently. Her breast rose and fell; but Psyche did not want to fall, and her lover did not force her. With greatly different sensations, they were intoxicating themselves together in a voluntary chastity which their own delicacy could prolong indefinitely. She had sworn, in a supreme spasm of strength, that she would resist until evening and that, afterwards, the die would be cast, if nothing came to succor her conquered will. And he, sure of subduing her, capable of restraining his fancy: Aimery tasted an intense pleasure in retarding his happiness to endlessly increase it. He held in his hands, under her hair and under her cheek, the young woman's relaxed head. Psyche was no longer sad, and the kiss of her mouth was fervent and light, clinging or loose, languishing or moving, as Aimery alternately diverted or pressed her burning, inert head.

*

A CLOCK struck.

"What time is it?" asked Psyche, uneasily.

This clock suddenly recalled her to the realities of existence. Luncheon was to be served. She recovered herself, blinking her eyelids like a dreamer awakening. She recalled, little by little, that she had arrived from a long trip, and she began to ask questions in a still disordered voice.

Where were her trunks? They would not be there for three hours. Her room? This one. Aimery's room? A little farther on. She

walked nonchalantly through the dressing rooms and bathrooms, which pleased her, as well as a little boudoir-library where she mentally selected a book. Then, the clock having struck a second time, she discovered that she was famished.

They descended the main staircase together. No servant appeared, either in the corridors or in the dining room. She asked:

"Are you served by spirits?"

"I told you that the country was enchanted."

"Say one word more and I shall believe you."

"The house is barely inhabited. I leave here but two gardeners and a household of porters who are former servants and will be able to serve you, I hope; but I have directed that I do not wish to see them and that everything is to be done without my interference being necessary."

"That is nice," said Psyche. "As I shall be served as little as possible, and generally when I am not present. My chambermaid will not enter my dressing room until I have left it. Leave your porters in their own house so I shall not see them even about the table. We are in a forest; let us do like hunters. We will have little *pates* which you yourself can cut, and you will not say one word to me which is also for the waiter."

"All that I have to say to you when I touch you, Psyche, is too secret even for the air surrounding us. I would speak so softly, so softly, that, if your soul enclosed another soul, still more secret and more pure, only that one could hear me."

"The first one has heard you too well. Yesterday, it heard you when you were not there. You were saying always the same words, in the same voice, in the same tone. I have rejected you a thousand times; but I am beginning to think that this château is really bewitched, since I fled from you to Rome and arrived here."

"You are not a fatalist?"

"And you?"

"Since yesterday."

*

ABOVE the garden, the blue sky spread its profound splendor. Psyche raised her eyes toward it, but instead of receiving a divine response, she found there only a burning memory. It was under a similar sky that her emotion and Aimery's had become love.

He took her hand. She gazed at him. They understood each other and, silently united, descended toward "the other" springtime.

IV

THE GARDEN

"WELL-BELOVED," he said, "give me your hand. I will clasp it between mine and you shall lead me where you please."

"Through the garden?"

"Through life."

Psyche slowly gave him her hand, and replied timidly:

"Let us choose a path where you will remain such as you have been until now."

"You still doubt me?"

"I have confidence in you. That is what makes me tremble. My destiny is in your power like the hand I abandon to you and which you are caressing but which could be broken. If you are not the master of your heart . . ."

"Psyche! . . ."

"No! Do not answer. I have said nothing. These are reveries which haunt my thought. I am so much given to sadness that, at every turn of my life, I expect to find a black horizon; but over our heads the sky is blue and about my hand your hand is sure."

"You believe that, at least?"

"Yes. I need to believe it, Aimery, and I have no right to doubt it. You are good. You are gentle. Twice since yesterday you have proved it to me. Twice you have understood that I was in your arms without offering myself to you, and that my joy depended above all on your reserve . . ."

"And mine also."

"Aimery, is that true?"

"I love you, Psyche. What desire could I pursue which may not first be yours? My joy: that is your hand which you have given me, your eyes which reproach me for nothing, your mouth which does not turn itself from mine, your voice which does not detest me."

"Listen to me . . . I do not know whether you will understand me. In the solitude where I have wept so much, where I have passed so many black nights and melancholy mornings, I have known but one consolation, to which I have attached an inestimable value because it has been the only thing left to me. That was my peace of conscience.

"I have quite sacrificed it. Upon this ambition, I have risked my destiny. It cost me so much that, if it escapes me, I shall go through life like a person lost. I should lose my reason. I tremble when I think of it . . . And then . . ."

She had seated herself upon a grassy bank and was smiling sadly into Aimery's eyes.

"Then . . . Even on this adorable journey where, for the first time, life seems sweet to me . . . in this deserted garden where I am in your hands without any defense and where, however, I feel myself protected by what is best in you . . . I think that I could be, perhaps . . . With you! Always with you! . . . happy without remorse, amorous without sin . . . to live, in your arms, enchanted days, every instant of which would leave me a remembrance absolutely pure . . . and give you my soul with so much fervor that my body would no longer tempt you."

He shook his head and said, tenderly:

"It is too late, Psyche. I have been your lover since yesterday; and nothing, now, could assert that I might not have been."

"In the past? What do you tell me?"

"In the past so near that I have in it still the perfume and the warmth of your lips. You have no suspicion of what love is; you have given me yours without knowing it; and you combat still, in an uncertain future, the supposed enemy which frightens you, when you have already embraced it, this enemy of your dreams; you yourself are wholly united with it. It is that which you feel so sweet."

"No," she said. "No; that is not the Irreparable . . ."

"You think not?"

Psyche wished to reply, but shame restrained her. After all, what did she know? So little. Aimery? Everything. She hesitated, then grew timid because of her silence and, feeling herself blushing, she bent her head.

"Do not doubt it," said Aimery. "When two lovers have united their lips, love gives them, not that which is most pure, for everything about it is pure, but that which it has of the inexpressible and that which it leaves us of the eternal."

"The eternal memory; not the eternal remorse."

"You imagine it, vaguely, as a victory of sensuality, a festival of human flesh . . ."

"I do not imagine it! I do not know it!"

". . . When it is, on the contrary, the sublime evocation of the immaterial being which reveals itself in us!"

Aimery seized the young woman in his arms and sought her half-opened mouth.

"Have you written, you also, in your private album, this old verse which all young girls have copied at least once: 'To love: this is to be two and to feel but one'? They have been led to think that this is a

definition of love; but only those who already know the bed of love, and all its fervors, understand the secret of amorous ecstasy. When I touch your lips, Psyche, you are myself. I breathe with your breast, I think with your brain, I quiver with your nerves, I feel with your senses. In my hand, which presses yours, your blood circulates. If your eyes brighten, that is my own desire; if they close, it is my pleasure which over-runs you and which animates them. The physical part of carnal love is annihilated by love itself, as the seed bursts and falls in dust in the shadow of the tree which created it. Do you see, Psyche, do you see that the touch of mouth to mouth, burning as it is, is nothing to the sudden miracle of immateriality which awakens about us? And understand me finally; love could create no greater wonder than this: a virgin is a lover so soon as the kiss touches her. The embrace reserves for her the same intoxication—the same! Exalted an hundredfold, but identically pure!"

"Oh! Why do you talk to me so?"

They walked on, side by side, slowly, past bushes still brown but with green tips on all the twigs. At their feet, the new grass, more forward than the trees, crept along the thickets, lifted above the fallen branches. The tree-trunks themselves had a green, happy aspect. The blue branches shone in the crisp light. The bark was moist with sap. Aërial respirations lifted the supple tips of the ash-trees toward the sky.

She sighed, exhausted:

"Why do you love me? Why, among all women, is it I you have chosen? I, so much a stranger to the secrets of love that, when I hear you, I can scarcely understand you . . . I who know not how to respond to you . . . nor how to yield to you . . . nor how to fly from you . . ."

"Psyche, your eyes are blue as the peaceful skies where your childish eyes sought for Paradise; but I do not love you for your eyes. Your blond hair is light, like a pale shadow, and soft as a glance of love; but I do not love you for your hair. All the rumor of the sea is in a shell, and all the quivering of love is upon your mouth; if your lips ceased touching mine, the best of my life would quit me with them; but I do not love you for your mouth, Psyche, nor for your face, nor for your dear hands. If there could be found in the world a woman who had all your beauty . . . and who was not you, I should not love her. You ask me why I love you? But I am your body, Psyche, and you are my soul."

He pressed against his breast the little, burning hand which he held always, and said:

"Do not look at me. Look where we are. It is here that I wished to conduct you . . ."

But Psyche's eyes remained on his. A prolonged gaze, anxious and limpid, was flowing toward him, continuously, from the shadow of her lashes.

"See," said Aimery. "This is the Old Château; it is this which has given its name to the estate. You were so curious to know the name. Do you still wish to know it?"

She glanced about, her eye distracted then vaguely charmed by the ruin, reddening in the twilight; then she roused herself, turned her head, smiled at the beauty of the evening.

Of the old château, there remained only a wall with empty windows which framed, in their arches, bits of the sky. At the corner of this wall was a tower which alone remained standing and intact.

"Once upon a time," said Aimery, "there was a Princess who slept for an hundred years and whose eyes were unsealed only by love. The bed of her dreams and of her wedding is still there, in her tower chamber. That is the Château of the Sleeping Beauty of the Wood."

"Oh! Is that it?" asked Psyche.

"That is it."

"Show me!"

They entered, climbed a spiral staircase, which bathed them in shadowy coolness, and pushed open a low door which closed again behind them.

All of the setting sun was in the chamber. Upon the wide, low bed, the counterpane of ancient silk shone like a roseate lake at midday. The walls, of dull gold spotted with white ermine, reflected a crimson radiance which filled the air; and the source of all this splendor, the red star, appeared in the dazzling window.

Psyche leaned her elbows on the sill.

The horizon spread out to the sea.

The sky could not be distinguished from the ocean. The same scarlet tint was painting the air and the waters. An immense, flaming wave was spread over all the earth, and, moment by moment, was losing its brightness. The sun touched the Atlantic. There it sank, becoming more and more sombre; and the last drop of luminous blood faded away like a star.

Then there remained of its glory no more than a little rose-colored cloud, suspended in the darkening blue of the sky.

As, in her revery, Psyche contemplated this surviving cloud, which held for her alone the memory of the sun when the earth was already plunged into the night, four admirable verses sang in her memory.

And the first words made her tremble as though an admonition had ascended in her from the depths of her consciousness.

Go, then. Farewell. I loved thee.
Look: the sun reddens all the western sea.
That flowery cloud: one lingering petal from
The rose of day, stripped for eternity.

Aimery was standing beside her. He had not relinquished her hand . . . "Go, then. Farewell. I loved thee" . . . She raised her eyes toward him, opened her mouth, and repeated mentally this farewell which she wished to say, which she could not pronounce, which overwhelmed her with anguish, strangled itself in her throat, stifled her constricted breast . . . But her lover's lips were already touching hers, and a kiss more ardent than she had yet received, contested the last quiver of her wavering will. It seemed to her that she was walking, that someone was drawing her slowly, in the prolonged intoxication her lips were drinking, toward the great, nuptial bed where the Princess of the legend had awakened to life in the arms of her cavalier, and that she was asleep to love near the same, enchanted bed.

Little by little, the fingers which had supported her head drew away. She felt that someone touched her fastened collar, that the first clasp was opening . . . She cried:

"Aimery!"

And caught him by the arm.

But he did not struggle with her. He was waiting for her to yield to his lips and to his eyes.

She regarded him despairingly, with tears in her eyes. Then, pale as a dying person, she let her hands fall.

V

ARACŒLI TEMPTED

ALL alone in her wide bed, the sheets of which were as smooth as those of a wise virgin, Aracœli awakened toward midday, after having slept for eleven hours.

She rang the bell, had her bath heated, stretched herself, plunged her ten faun-like nails into her short, thick hair, stretched again, arched her back, and, for a morning salutation to herself, kissed herself on the shoulder.

The bath which she entered, still half asleep and not free from her dreams, was sympathetic and sweet to her. Aracœli loved to recall

that, one morning, for his pleasure, Aimery had taken her there, in the warmth of the water; and she knew which of these swan's necks she had grasped with her moist hand at the instant of her always grateful pleasure.

Such memories were the landmarks of her young existence. She had arranged so as to have many of them. Beside her bed and her three divans, which were imbued with them, she had also an armchair, which had become her friend, an easy-chair in which she never sank down without closing her eyes, a little stool, the souvenir of a folly, and even a dining-room chair which she had marked with green silk to distinguish it from the others.

But when Aimery was not there, she waited patiently for him, as she resigned herself easily to rainy days, knowing that pleasant days would return.

Lying in her white bath, she caressed her little, brown breasts, which no one had done since they awakened, regarded her smooth belly, her idle legs; and she enjoyed simply the charms of solitude without demanding from fate that which it was not giving her.

As she lingered in the depths of her bath, a chambermaid came to inform her that madame the manicurist had arrived.

Aracœli stepped out of the clear water, stretching her arms along her slender hips, and, dried, re-entered her chamber where she stretched out, entirely naked, on the bed.

Madame Brémondel was a former nurse who had, one day, left the hospital for the houses of hospitality, without encountering the success which the internes had predicted for her. From mortification to mortification, from failure to failure, she had fallen to a point where she had at last realized that even in making money from her entire person, a woman does not always gain her living; and, after that, she resigned herself to taking an honest trade. That of a manicurist suggested itself and, through an awakening inclination, she had come to excel at it.

The young Hindu was already upon her bed but Madame Brémondel did not dare approach. Madame Brémondel did not like monkeys, and the one in this house was lurking in her way. Aracœli was obliged to intervene.

"Tarquin, come here; you shall have some sugar."

Among the hundred qualities which distinguished him from monkeys in general, Tarquin had that of understanding French or, at least the essential words, such as sugar, stick, orange, nut, swing and go to bed.

He jumped upon the bed. The manicurist entered, bowing. The well-schooled monkey returned the greeting.

"Did you see how he saluted me?" she said, eagerly.

"Yes, Madame Brémondel, but that was not from respect. It was even to mock you, probably."

"Oh! I do not care about the respect of a monkey. Still, yours has mockeries which might be taken for politeness. What a love your Tarquin is. And so intelligent! So cunning! But he has a singular name. Why do you call him that?"

"That is quite a story! You do not know Tarquin's life? Tarquin has a crime on his conscience."

"A crime!" exclaimed the frightened manicurist.

"Certainly; he is a celebrated monkey. He belonged to an Algerian captain, down there, in an oasis. One day, the Arab washwoman came to the officer's house to wash the linen; she brought her daughter, a child of five or six years, who went to play in the garden. Suddenly, cries were heard! Cries! And Tarquin was seen violating the little one!"

"Lord! What a little monster!" exclaimed Madame Brémondel, feelingly.

"You think so? Nevertheless, he went about it very well: quite like a gentleman. They reached him too late. Then the Arabs wanted to kill him. The captain was obliged to give him away; and that is how Tarquin came to Paris and how he earned his name."

"Ah well! ... In your place, I should be uneasy, Madame Aracœli."

"Oh! I see! What would you expect! He knows well that it is not permitted."

"It is not of Tarquin that I am thinking," insinuated the manicurist. "I know that he resembles a man more than a monkey and that he would concern himself little about what is permitted if he were seated in my place."

"Be reassured. There is no one."

"Oh, I know that, in Monsieur Aimery's absence, you sequester yourself like a recluse; but when he is here you receive his friends and ... I believe it is no secret that you do not like to be dressed? Do you feel certain that this has no danger for anyone? I would not conceal from you, Madame Aracœli, that someone is desperately in love with you."

"Ah!"

"I would not give any names; that is not my place. But I am well informed ... And how could anyone fail to be amorous before so much beauty! You are shapely! Like a statue! The hands! Ravishing!

A breast! To model! Legs! Unrivaled! And the small of your back is the prettiest in Paris. That is what I was saying yesterday to Madame Rosina Alban, who is proud of hers. Madame Alban of Comédie-Francaise. One who has seen you does not forget you."

"But how amiable you are today, Brémondel! Anyone hearing you would think you were courting me."

"You joke at me. I assure you that I am quite affected at the thought of that poor young man, so gifted himself, such a handsome boy, and a good soul, you know, incapable of seducing a friend's mistress! This love has wrecked his life but, rather than declare himself, he would kill himself, be sure."

She expected to be interrupted by the question: "What is his name?" But Aracœli turned herself lazily upon her side, extended her left hand to the little instruments which were beginning to tickle her right hand, and said, in a slow voice:

"Did you notice my new ring? Aimery gave it to me, Saturday evening, for my eighteenth birthday. I was wishing for a ring precisely like that. He is nice, Aimery. He always divines what would please me best."

Madame Brémondel admired the ring and, without losing countenance, resumed:

"Ah! Who would not give to you! Jewels are made for you. Everything goes with you, gold or stones. Gold, which fits so badly with blondes, ornaments you like a goddess. You know, Madame Aracœli, I would like you to have a new jewel each day."

"Oh! Why? I have quite enough of them."

"But, Great God! People give ten times as many to women who would not be worthy of being your servants. Monsieur Aimery does not appreciate his good fortune. He does not love you as he should. First, why is he not here? Does one travel when one has found a beloved like you? One does not leave her for a day or for an hour. That is what it is to love. You deserve a lover like that, who would pass his life at your feet."

"His life at my feet, Brémondel! But he would be bored to death!"

"Monsieur Aimery, perhaps, but another, no."

"And how would he know he loved me, if he never missed me in his bed? Aimery is never more tender than on the days when he returns to me."

"He loves you? You are sure of it?"

Brémondel was playing boldly. Aracœli was not angry and even, rolling her head upon the pillow, could not keep from laughing.

"My God! What a question! But yes, I am sure of it."

"But if he does not return? If, in a month from now, you receive a letter instead of a kiss? If he marries in the autumn, as gossip reports? These are things which may yet happen."

"He will return."

"In a month?"

"In eight days."

"He is fortunate. He is fortunate to inspire such confidence!"

"And if anyone speaks to you about his marriage, you can shrug your shoulders."

For an instant, Madame Brémondel gazed fixedly at the young girl, as though she hesitated to make important revelations.

"I should remain silent," she said, finally. "First, I never busy myself with things which do not concern me. And then, I am afraid of troubling you. But you may know, nevertheless . . ."

She rested her hands upon her knees and articulated, in a horrified voice:

"He deceives you!"

"I know it well."

"You know it?"

"I permit him to."

"And you do not repay him?"

"No."

"Ah well, Madame Aracœli, you see, I am as respectful as I can be. But I love you too well to restrain myself. To me you are not a client like the others. When I come here, when I see you so nice, so pretty, so good-hearted, I am overcome by affection for you as though you were my daughter. And I have tears in my eyes when I hear you speak, because you will be unhappy later if you continue to be so good."

"You think so?"

"Do I think so! Come, it is not for nothing that I have fifty-five years of experience. You are young, you are confident, you have a little heart entirely fresh, entirely sincere; you believe that since one loves a man one retains him. Undeceive yourself. As I know Monsieur Aimery, you should not be faithful to him as he becomes less amorous."

"Really!"

"When you feel that he is disengaging himself, make him seriously jealous, and you shall see how he returns to you. But this should be reserved for great occasions. The first time, if I were you, I should not say a word to him. It is so easy, in Paris, to deceive a man without his knowing it. And then, right is on your side. No one would throw

a stone at you. This is a question of morals: when an honest woman learns that her lover has mistresses, she should amuse herself, in her turn, and remain an honest woman. There is not a reproach for her. Now, this is what you would do if you listened to me."

"I am listening."

"You should have two lovers instead of one. First, for pleasure; one cannot have too much, at your age. Then, for prudence; so that if one of them leaves, the other would remain, and you would not be all alone again. For the second lover, you should choose one young, handsome, well established, rich and of good family. You have the choice. Monsieur Aimery has a fortune, but he of whom I am thinking is twice as rich and, besides, much better born. For, while I would not speak evil of the Jouvelles, whom I do not know, all the world knows that the Sarens' . . . My God! I have spoken the name without realizing it!"

"Ah! It is Jean de Sarens who sends you?"

"Yes . . . That is to say . . . He did not send me at all! Lord! He is far from suspecting it . . . But I saw his sadness . . . his tears . . . And I who love you so much also . . . I am reduced to tears . . . ah . . . ah."

The manicurist drew out her mourning handkerchief.

Aracœli, always nonchalant, her two hands behind her neck and her legs simply crossed, responded, with a smile:

"Madame Brémondel, are you going to see M. de Sarens this evening?"

"I don't know . . . Perhaps . . . I will go to see him instantly, if you wish it."

"Good. Say to him that he is to pay you double, adding that you have carried out his commission and that it has cost you a client."

"Madame . . . Madame . . ."

"You will return, in the afternoon, to adjust your account through the maid."

"But, Madame, I am in despair . . ."

"Go at once, old horror, or I shall tell Tarquin to put you out."

VI

THE WHITE PEACOCK

Two white, full-breasted peacocks were trailing slowly down a vista, spotted with sunlight and shadow, their long tails of spotless feathers. The movement of the light painted their wings in the softest

colors, the yellow of day, the blue of shadows, rose, the light green of forest reflections; and, over the two wandering whitenesses, passed the mirage of the sun.

Just so, Psyche's soul was touched with ideal tints which she had never before known. The great shadow, between her eyes and Nature, had disappeared. The unapproachable veil which had concealed happiness from her had lifted like a mist and, joyous, astonished, elated, she no longer stood troubled before the beauty of things.

She clasped her hands on Aimery's shoulder and, advancing her head to see him closely, murmured:

"My love, tell me the truth: have I not also slept an hundred years since the day before yesterday? I awaken in another age, perhaps on another earth, where all is transformed, you see: the garden, the birds, the color of the season. You are not the same. And I am no longer myself."

"Yes, you have slept an hundred years. Nothing exists any more except this garden and our reanimated forms, a new Aimery, a new Psyche."

"That name was mine. You used to love Psyche . . . How can I please you also, I who no longer have anything in common with her?"

"I have always loved the Psyche you have become, not the former one."

"Still, you were very fond of her, if I can still recall it. But, for me, the things of yesterday are so far away that I am no longer sure of anything unless it is your presence, your voice, your kiss."

The kiss interrupted them. Psyche submitted, still blushing, but compliant and disarmed on the arm of her lover. Aimery's hand touched her girdle, mounted toward the breast which it seized passionately. Beneath long, smiling eyes, Psyche whispered, confidentially: "It is yours . . . It is yours . . ."

In the solitude and silence of the garden, the still vaster solitude of the forest, Psyche passed the borders of an insuperable zone where the mystery of her metamorphosis guarded its sacred character.

Not a soul appeared in the domain of the Beauty of the Wood. Faithful to the order given them, the gardeners had returned to their retreats and the valets to their dwelling. They were neither seen nor heard.

At the end of a winding alley, Psyche discovered a little glade, overshadowed by leaves and branches, an aisle of green shadow, where the hunter's dinner which she had desired was mysteriously

served. The table had been set so stealthily that Psyche could say and almost think:

"Will the invisible spirits which lulled us to sleep serve us always?"

She bent down suddenly, delighted to have found violets. She gathered them and covered the table cloth where unknown hands had already placed roses. The perfume of these first roses was more penetrating than she had ever imagined. The glade enchanted her; the air was sweet, the shadow cool, the food exquisite, the water delicious, the decanters covered with moisture, rosy flowers and leaves.

Aimery watched her enthuse over everything and throw, to the least objects, that first amorous smile which could no longer leave her lips. She was in a state of constant pleasure. Her eyes scarcely changed their lustre whether they looked at Aimery or the trees or the glass of pure water or the glade. She seemed to say to everything, with the same warmth: "I love you . . . I love you . . . I love you . . ."

When they had arisen and when she again felt Aimery's arm tighten about her body:

"Why do we touch?" she asked. "However far away you may be, it always seems to me that you caress me."

Together, they mounted the steps and the staircase of the little château, to Psyche's chamber. After their evening in the tower, it was there they had passed the night; and they returned there, by tacit agreement, invincibly led, each by the other.

THE window curtains drawn, the chamber was darkened in a sudden obscurity to which, little by little, their eyes became accustomed. Aimery and Psyche were lost to sight, then reappeared. She felt, with a new shiver, the masculine hand loosen the hooks of her bodice, the pin and the four clasps of her skirt, the twisted cords of her petticoats, the large, flat buttons of her warm drawers . . . She herself unbuckled her little corset and drew off her long stockings which were scattered with the rest. Then, with that pretty movement of ill-advised modesty which often accompanies the fall of the clothing, she cowered against her lover, as though he would protect her, as though her enemy were somewhere in the night, in an unknown place, but elsewhere than in his arms.

A feeble plaint, a voice revealing an inexpressible feeling, came from her lips when Aimery stretched out beside her, and their mouths

quickly found each other. He allowed her to slowly awaken to desire in a passionate but virgin embrace, which solicited nothing. She remained almost motionless. Of her lost chastity there was left a wavering reserve which was touched with timidity. She no longer feared sinning so much as perhaps sinning awkwardly. She blushed, not only for her imagined fault, but for her certain inexperience. Love for her, had been so little known that she was ignorant even of the preliminaries; and, simply embraced, she was confused as a young girl who, at her first lesson in waltzing, would not know which hand she should put on her partner's shoulder. There were questions, in a low voice: "My arm annoys you . . . No? . . . Are you sure? My leg presses you . . . Is that better? . . ." As much as her thought could shake off her senses in such a moment, she sought to reassemble in her memory the little she had been able to retain of romances and love poems . . . But *Indiana* and *Don Paez* were not sufficient to instruct her. She said to herself: "I have no experience." All these doubts left her hesitating. Her chemise, which was giving her no protection: was it childish to keep it on, or unseemly to remove it? Her disordered hair: should she let it down? In a voice soft as a breath, she murmured: "Would you like my hair?" And, as Aimery replied: "Yes," she drew out the brooch at her neck, her comb, her clasps of yellow shell, her pins of iron and gold, and, shaking her head back, spread out all her hair and, beneath it, fell again into Aimery's arms, happy and affected to have still had this much more to give him.

This abundant hair flowed out so lightly that only its perfumed warmth foreshadowed its caress. It mingled with the shadows. Aimery could not find its vague boundaries. So far as he stretched his arms, he touched always the fragrant ringlets which eluded his fingers in tiny waves. Psyche enveloped him, raised upon one elbow, enclosing him in this great, animated veil which was part of herself. Her eyes shone with an expression much more maternal than amorous. She was content, she breathed rapidly, and, from beneath, Aimery drew toward him her dear head, which was now quite small, held in the hollow of his hand.

This hair united them, made them a single being, a chrysalis wrapped in silk where their metamorphosis was germinating. It was a shelter more intimate and even closer than the bed; it was the heart of their heart, the holy-of-holies of their nocturnal ecstasy. Psyche, ardent and agitated, now, was at last secretly conscious. She no longer received Aimery's caresses with that shuddering movement of the flanks, drawing back to avoid the ordeal. All her chaste nudity, her moist and tender skin, from her head to her feet, accepted the embrace. And when, to secure nothing except with her consent, Aimery murmured upon her

lips the entreaty which, but recently, had so frightened her, Psyche, smiling towards the sky, responded: "Aimery!" in a tone which meant: "Why are you asking me?"

She became crimson. The intense blush of her modesty and of her pleasure enflamed her lovely, pillowed head. Then her gaze slowly lost itself. She no longer saw anything, either about her or in her dazzled consciousness.

As in a dream, she opened, with her two hands, her hair which was stifling her. Her arms fell again, inertly. She no longer thought. Moaning, she lay in her outspread hair like a stabbed victim. She felt, within her, the quickened beating of her heart, impelled with haste and fervor to suffice for the superhuman exaltation of her life. Her flanks panted. Her wandering mouth choked, suddenly. She clasped Aimery with all the vigor which still stiffened her delicate members; and she uttered a cry, a grievous, sharp cry, while she stretched out her arms; and, through the outspread tips of her long fingers, passed the quiverings of nervous voluptuousness which she could no longer feel.

*

"AIMERY!" she repeated. "Aimery! My Aimery!" She no longer knew what to say to him. There were no words which would not be feeble before that which her hands, her eyes, her mouth, her pressing breast, her turning head, expressed so glowingly.

Regaining her consciousness, she gazed at Aimery's face, into his eyes, and no longer recognized him. After having experienced her own pleasure, she discovered that of her lover. She thought: "What! You also! . . ." And then she closed her eyes, to relish, in the depths of her being, that twilight of sensation which is the ineffable hour of physical love. There was an inward light, an overwhelming, wholesome peace, a luminous quivering, which ascended, always more tenderly, from her senses to her thought, from her flesh to her spirit, from her well-being to her felicity.

VII

THE APOGEE

PSYCHE did not decide to unpack her trunks until the following week, either because she hesitated to settle herself or because she had not the time. She took linen at hazard from the disordered trays. For the rest, her morocco bag, opened on a table, sufficed for her dressing-

table. But, on the seventh day, in Aimery's presence, she finally consented to hang up her dresses and to air her hats.

She would have prefered that he was not there, in sight of those intimate details. By an inconsistency which she could not explain, the offer of herself in the darkness shocked her less than this exposure of her trousseau in full daylight. However, she consented. What would she not give him? The trunk was opened, the trays drawn out by their loops and deposited on the furniture.

"Hold, my friend!" said Psyche. "See whether I was setting out for Italy! Here is my grammar!"

They laughed at it.

"Poor grammar! I have never been able to read past the verbs. The only Italian word I know is that which we say to children when we ask them the way and which sounds like the cry of a bird: 'Cui! Cui! Cui!'"

She laughed heartily.

"My old guide, with all its notes! I have had it sixteen years. I have given the points of the statues. This one has a cross because it is beautiful. This one has two crosses because it is very beautiful. And this one, which is magnificent: do you see how it is marked!"

"I am sure that you kept an intimate diary."

"Yes . . . I no longer dare re-read it and I have never been able to burn it. It is inconceivably naïve. I knew nothing at all of life and yet I wrote it like an old philosopher. One's soul is so simple at fifteen years! All that which is not bad is good; all that which does not bring tears brings laughter."

"But I still have a soul like that."

"Truly?"

"And I sincerely hope that you will recover yours, if it is true that you have lost it! Internal sadness is doubt, a critical spirit, hesitation to feel and to judge. Let us be fifteen years old! Let us settle our opinions! Let us say: this is criminal and that is sublime; this statue is hideous and that one is admirable; yesterday I was desperate, today I am mad with joy! Those are the phrases uttered by happy hearts!"

"You have reason. I love you that way."

"Not for anything in the world would I have a critical spirit! The faces of those who have one are sufficient to disgust me with it."

"You have youth. You have revealed mine to me. At twenty-two years, I felt myself old, but so old, so disillusioned, so willing to die when God might will it! . . . And now you have come, you are here, and everything between my childish journal and my arrival at the

Beauty of the Wood has disappeared. More and more, I believe that I dreamed in the tower."

"Certainly. I have already told you that."

"Elsewhere . . . Psyche Vannetty . . ."

"That was your young-girl name."

"You see clearly!"

She caught her skirt in her fingers to drop a curtsy.

"And this schoolgirl's dress. I am a young girl, stolen away by obscure artifices, sequestered in a distant garden, deprived of defense and even of will! . . ."

"A poor adolescent ravished by a guilty seducer . . ."

"Assailed with suggestion . . ."

"Bewitched . . ."

"And if this were true?"

Aimery replied, unsmilingly:

"There is but one method of knowing; that is to search for the mark."

"What mark?"

"The mark of the sorcerer. When a person is bewitched, her skin is insensible at one point which has to be sought for."

And he kissed her forehead, her eyes, her mouth, asking, each time:

"Is it here?"

And Psyche replied:

"No."

He kissed her neck, he caressed her shoulder, pressed her warm hand to his lips.

"Is it here?"

"Search no farther," she said, in a low voice. "I am sensitive everywhere."

*

THE trunks unpacked, Psyche retired to change her dress, and she put on, purposely, the gray dress with white facings which she had worn at the Buttes-Chaumont, at the hour when her astonished life had taken a new road.

The young man recognized it. Psyche was well satisfied and cast an involuntary glance over her corsage. Between them, so soon after their first exchange of emotions, they already had memories, already a past. This dress was the last she had worn before her flight, the last which had not been broken open. Its straight folds and bands

of white cloth had preserved a character of chastity. In seeing again the form of the skirt, Aimery recalled entire phrases which Psyche had said to him and which had almost faded from his memory. By a simple association of ideas, the dress, in its turn, repeated symbolically the character of her resistance. It seemed that, dressed so, Psyche could respond only "No, I will not follow you. I will never yield to you."

And as, going out, they again entered the sheltered paths of the always solitary garden, Aimery had the secret impression that Psyche was not yet all his, because her gray dress had not yielded. At first, he doubted whether this illusion exalted or chilled him. Then he drew closer and put his arm about the young woman to influence her more quickly.

Day by day, the sensation which he felt for her was tinged with sensuality. That which she was returning him, although a little more vague, followed, at a distance, the same road.

"Psyche," he said, "if I were to make a poem about you, I should compare you to a statue in the first light of morning. The first light of day lightening only the hair and the eyes of marble. That is all that I was loving in you when I was adoring you and you were repulsing me. And then you gave me your lips; all became light down to those. And then the light, slowly, has descended to your feet."

"Aimery, do not talk so."

"And today this dress is unbearable to me."

"Hush!" She closed his mouth, affectionately. "Then the statue of the poem is not clothed?"

"No."

"Then it is not the statue of the Day; it is hardly that of the Night."

But she could not murmur the phrase without a warm undulation, like a voluptuous remembrance, ascending, filling her with the responses of the body to the spirit.

"And why," he asked, "would it not be the image of the Day? Only love is pleased in the shadows. Beauty is the gift of the sun. Come. Do you know what this door encloses? It is the secret garden of the park. Here it is opened and closed behind us. Where we are now, no one in the world could follow you nor spy on you. There is no strong house nor bolted chamber which could be better protected than this green-walled labyrinth. This is the source of the river which crosses the domain. The sun is bright. It is almost like a day of summer . . ."

Psyche did not give him time to finish. No. That would be an

impossible thing for her. She begged him not to think of it again. An affectionate uneasiness animated her eyes while she was speaking, caressing him, her hands on his cheeks, her mouth near his mouth; she did not want to refuse him anything nor, above all, to give him any sorrow. But to undress in the sunlight, Oh! No! No! Some insurmountable thing was preventing her from according him that. And, as soon as she had received from him a smile which no longer insisted, she began to talk about the wood and the flowers and the blue spring whose babble overran her voice, and of the spring days, each one more tender, and of her joy in loving with all Nature. One would have said that she was trying, quickly, to distract Aimery by another enthusiasm, to chase from his spirit the unhappy idea which had led it astray.

Then she consented to return to the Tower; and there, in the shadowy chamber, when the closed curtains had finally pacified her taste for mystery, she felt a kind of relief to see that Aimery did not cherish her less for not having obtained from her that which she could not have given him.

The gray dress was vanquished without a struggle. Her inviolability had vanished with the day. Psyche resisted only to the light of the sky. In the shadow, she was disarmed.

Appreciating that she had been obeyed, she gave herself according to her heart, with a burst of more intense affection than she had ever shown. Aimery saw her advance a degree toward the supreme emotion of the senses. In his arms, where she had formerly remained silent and as though meditating in her pleasure, she at last dared to break her silence and proclaim her love, almost her pleasure.

Aimery heard her in a dream. She spoke in a vague, feeble voice, breathing between words, turning her head without turning away her gaze.

Between two embraces, her head pillowed in her hair, she said to him:

"Of the things I had never understood . . . phrases become clear . . . words change their sense. You promised me the marvelous Blood which would reveal the speech of the Birds . . . It seems to me that I hear, for the first time, the unfamiliar language of Love . . . Those *ardors*, those *fires*, those *flames*, were in a tongue unintelligible to me, which I thought foolish and antiquated . . . No one burns for anyone, I told myself . . . And what should I call this which I feel if it is not burning, burning . . ."

She closed her arms.

"And this bounding heart, which strikes my breast, which I would give you, Aimery, if I had not already given it!"

They entwined again and spoke no more, their lips united.

If there is, in the life of some lovers, a summit, an apogee, an incomparable instant where happiness suddenly alights, Aimery and Psyche knew this miracle in that instant of that very day; and only death would take it from their memory.

On the evening of that same day, Psyche was alone for more than an hour. She was stretched upon a couch in the boudoir of her apartment. Asleep, awake, always dreaming, she felt herself humbled, but possessed by such a calmness of spirit and of senses, that she had never known anything so sweet. More desires, more thoughts: a delicious serenity spread in her, vast as the sky in the immobile water. Ah! Inexpressible peace! "I am happy . . . I am happy . . ." She dared neither move nor re-open her eyes, for fear lest her happiness might fly away with her revery.

And yet she arose . . . Aimery? Where was he? All this which she had experienced, he also must have felt. She and he were no more than flesh and a shiver. She would not wish to be happy without him . . . Aimery? She would find him and never leave him.

A lamp in her hand, she softly entered the little room where she had been accustomed to write; and, upon the table, she saw a sheet on which the ink was still fresh; there were stanzas, of verse . . . Psyche . . . The first word was her name.

Bending over them, she read:

Psyche, my sister, while thou tremblest, hear:
With touch and voice hath happiness come nigh.
Cease now thy speech, be still: no lovers mere
Have been with gods, known more than thou and I.

O tenderness, evoked through shadows laid
On slumbrous lids! . . . What is there we can hold
Of these dead kisses, these long sighs, allayed,
When life inverts our hour-glass sands of gold!

Yet, vast, immortal, this one moment grows,
To bear the scents of love through tombs of death,
As a shed veil doth lavender and rose
For centuried years youth-sweet with living breath.

Hear, well-beloved! Nights more vast and strange
Than these shall know thee, waiting thou not me;
And loves, light-caught, shall pass in furtive range,
Touching these naked feet, in jealousy

Of what, half theirs, was ours. Then mind thou this,
One space unique; when the pure gods and high
Bent my bowed head, thy neck so sweet to kiss,
To one life-spirit, soft with time borne by.

O deathless night! On this, our couch supreme,
With trembling fingers locked for the last spell
Of mouth on mouth, from one dissolvent dream,
Round we the deathless pearl where memories dwell.

After the third strophe, Psyche had paled.

"What is there we can hold . . . Than these . . . Waiting thou not me . . . And loves . . . Then mind thou . . . Time . . . Memories . . ."

"This is not true . . . This is not he! It was not he who wrote this!"

Then a cruel anguish invaded her breast. She let herself fall, her arms on the table, her eyes on her arms, shaken with sobs, reconquered forever by the hand of Sorrow. And, more feeble, more faltering than if she had shed her tears upon the ashes of her lover, she repeated, in a despairing voice:

"He no longer loves me . . . My God! Already, he no longer loves me!"

PART THREE

I

AN hour later, Aimery found her, in her night-filled chamber.

She was standing at the window, her elbow against the wall and her forehead in her hand. She was looking at random, past the obscure garden and the sheet of starred water.

Why did she remain without a light? Aimery asked. She shook her head and, even before he had kissed her cheek, he felt that she had been crying.

"Still tears, Psyche? Tears on the night of such a day!"

Exhausted, she knew not whether to reply that she wept from anguish, which was true, or that she wept for joy, which was what she would like to say. She murmured: "It is nothing. I love you," but in a strange voice. She coughed to change the tone.

"It is nothing," she repeated. "I love you and I weep. I have always wept, you know well. My happiness and my sorrow end in the same tears; and I don't know why these flow this evening."

He said nothing more, but fixed his uneasy, very tender eyes on her. The two glances mingled their silent flow. Aimery's was so clear, so frank, so animated by loving light, that, for an instant, Psyche doubted her own doubt.

THE CONCLUSION OF PSYCHE

By CLAUDE FARRÈRE

OF the third and last part of Psyche by Pierre Louÿs, there exists only the few lines just read. After the death of the poet only those lines were recovered.

It is nevertheless more than probable that Psyche was written completely. It is even certain that several chapters of this third part, which today have disappeared, were in existence in 1911 or 1912. We know that Pierre Louÿs wrote the first third of his book at Biarritz in 1906 and the second at Tamaris in 1907. And we know also that after 1907 he stopped, because of scruples or fantastic dislike. But I know further, I who write here, that, toward 1912, Pierre Louÿs, who, two or three years before, had read me the first part of Psyche, showed me the last chapters, those relating the death of the heroine. And I know further that, in the summer of 1913, Thierry Sandre, then a soldier on leave, paying a visit, at the Rue de Boulainvilliers, to our master, heard him reply, to an anxious question:

"Psyche, dear friend? I have finished Psyche. I finished it precisely on the 13th of July of this year."

Such a remark seems decisive to me. Pierre Louÿs was not accustomed to boast, even pertinently. Psyche, as it has reached us, is not incomplete, but mutilated. And we guard the hope that, some day, the last fragment, inexplicably mislaid, of this great work, will be restored to French literature.

Here an objection arises. If this Psyche were truly completed on the 13th of July, 1913, why did not Pierre Louÿs publish it at once? Why did he never publish it in the course of the dozen years between 1913 and 1925?

Thierry Sandre and I, who were perhaps Pierre Louÿs' most intimate friends, at least toward the close of his life, hesitate a little, on this ground, from expressing all our feelings.

Pierre Louÿs had, in fact, several reasons for hiding his supreme work under a bushel; several reasons of which some were only pretexts, as much for himself as for others, but of which some were really serious and exacting. Many of these reasons could not be given even

today; it is not well to draw all the truths from their wells when one speaks of the great dead and while the living who have surrounded him continue to live. However, it would be difficult to truly explain Psyche, by indicating the climax and by prognosticating the very delicate peripeteia, that which Louÿs assuredly wrote last, if one did not first harmonize the work with the workman and if one could not show a little that which always represents his chief book in the life of a powerful writer . . . In this case, that which represents Psyche in the life of Pierre Louÿs.

Whoever writes, paints his own portrait. Parmenides—I quote Pierre Louÿs himself—Parmenides discovered and taught that a man is identical with his thought and identical also with the subject of that thought. A corollary readily permits the affirmation that the romancer is identical with his romance and identical with the persons in that romance. The author of "Le Roi Pausole" willingly admitted experiencing, in turn, at the time when he was inventing that capricious epopee, the soul of an illogical and easy-going king, the soul of a fantastic page and even the soul of the great Huguenot eunuch. No less inscrutable, however: Pierre Louÿs had in himself so much fairness that no one better than he was capable, the occasion requiring, of supporting sincerity and, to their most extreme consequences, the worst theories of the worst sophists although detesting them above all. A stronger reason enabled him and obliged him to support his own theories, which were always wise and just, And if none of the very real beings he created, from the *Concha of the Pantin* to *Parrhasios of Sanguines*, were entirely strange to him, we have the right to admit that Psyche Vannetty and Mademoiselle Aracœli and, above all, Aimery Jouvelle simultaneously incarnate Pierre Louys. These three creatures, so profoundly human, are much more than the simple, momentary materialization of a dream, an hypothesis or an opinion. They delineate, in all his essential qualities, the man who made them. And, if Pierre Louÿs had neither power nor wish to publish his Psyche, it was perhaps chiefly a mysterious modesty restrained him at the instant of revealing to all the world this or that deep wound which life had dealt his heart and which he chose to suffer alone and without complaints.

If we might meditate there for a moment: what is Psyche, in fact?

The eternal romance of all heroes whose destiny has unexpectedly cast them between a dream and life.

The dream, here, calls itself Psyche Vannetty. Life, Aracœli. Like Heracles of old, Aimery Jouvelle does not hesitate in his choice. But, in the final reckoning, his choice turns against him, as it did to the

son of Alomena—because all realized dreams deceive the dreamer and because life always revenges itself on those who have dared to prefer an ideal.

In such a work, when the author tells his own history; the history, not of his doings but of his hopes, and of the things he would have wished to accomplish: such a work may well frighten the one who writes it.

Perhaps another scruple restrained Pierre Louÿs.

"All his life he had sung of love—from *Astarte* to *Archipel*—but the exclusively sensual love which had been sung, before him, by his great inspirations, the masters of Athens, those of Alexandria, those of Syracuse. The day when he invented Psyche, a different love, until then unknown or disdained, was revealed to him: the more complex love of more evolved beings, the full love which aspired to more than the simple pleasures of the flesh, the love which tends to join and mingle not only bodies but spirits, hearts and minds. It was to this more modern passion that Pierre Louÿs, burning his ancient gods, resolved to consecrate his supreme effort. Opposing these two symbols —Psyche Vannetty and Aracœli—he had that which all artists attempt. Certainly! But Pierre Louÿs was not an artist. In that brain, one of the most astounding which has ever existed, a pitiless wisdom watched perpetually, directing a critical spirit, as imperious as was the other spirit, the creating spirit of the poet. Those who may read to the end of these pages, where I endeavor to sum up the conclusion of Psyche, will doubtless ask, with me, whether the climax which the poet first conceived was not modified by philosophy and whether the philosophical climax does not mutilate the poet. Caught between his acute clairvoyance and his tender preference, perhaps it was voluntarily that he took refuge in silence.

*

Then, what was this climax?

The most logical. The most fatal. That which life, or destiny, or the gods have irrevocably marked in advance.

Psyche Vannetty, by the light of her symbolic lamp, had read the verses, those very beautiful verses, which Aimery Jouvelle had just written. The ink was not very dry. And already Psyche Vannetty knew that Aimery Jouvelle no longer loved her. But Aimery Jouvelle, himself, knew nothing of it, would know nothing of it for a long time.

How could that be? Do poets never know what their poems say, nor why? Aimery Jouvelle had written with a dash. He had intended, in good faith, to put his love upon his paper as a cassolette throws out

its perfume. But Psyche Vannetty was not deceived there. It is not good to walk with lamps in the night. Those who do that risk seeing too clearly. Psyche Vannetty, who had searched farther than she should, found that which she should not have.

They are good fairies which have endowed man with illusions.

This, then, is where the drama begins. The true drama.

Aimery no longer loves and believes he loves still. Psyche knows herself to be no longer loved.

She then goes to risk all to reconquer the love which is escaping her. Aimery, unconscious, puts no obstacle in the way.

And the following days parallel the preceding days.

The two lovers, withdrawn from the world in their voluptuous solitude, could not, however, remain there indefinitely. Louÿs had considered calling his book "The Week of Springtime." Without doubt, he recalled having previously written, having thought, perhaps, that a single night would suffice for a couple to at once exhaust their reciprocal intoxications. Converted, in the sequel, to less brief amours, he nevertheless fixed a limit of one week, or two, or three. Aimery had taken little more than seven days to satiate himself with Psyche. And if the tête-à-tête of the two lovers had prolonged itself unduly, Aimery would have quickly perceived that he was satiated. He had not. However, all dreams are soon made to vanish before life.

It was necessary, then, for Psyche and Aimery to leave the Château of the Sleeping Beauty of the Wood. It was necessary that Psyche should not have lost all hope and that Aimery should retain his illusion.

Here a catastrophe interposed—the same which Pierre Louÿs conceived so long before deciding to write it. Left at Paris awaiting her lord and lover whom she expected to return at the end of a single week, the beautiful Aracœli unexpectedly decides to travel herself and suddenly departs for the East Indies from which she formerly came. She departs quietly, as though simply going for a walk. And she does not fail to announce her departure. She writes Aimery the most gracious, the most smiling of letters. She will return some time, depending on how things go. She will return when return calls her or when she becomes tired of going straight before her, or, who knows? When someone recalls her . . . if it does not displease her, then, to be recalled! And so much for Aracœli.

And there, at one stroke, is Psyche Vannetty delivered from a rival.

What think you? Perhaps, on the contrary, there is a rival raised against Psyche Vannetty! Aracœli, present, was a small matter, as we

have seen. Aracœli far away might be formidable. In love, as in fencing, breaking off is not only the most adroit maneuver, it is also the most menacing.

It is quite certain that Aimery Jouvelle, when he encountered Psyche and when he became enamored of her, had Aracœli under his hand and concerned himself little about her. At present, with Aracœli no longer there, will he not dream a little too much for Psyche's peace of mind?

In any case, Aracœli departs for the Indies. Aimery thinks himself obliged to suddenly return to Paris. And that is the end of the Week of Springtime, which has not endured for much over twenty days. According his heroine a compassionate delay, Pierre Louÿs—*magis amica veritas!*—could not do more.

Psyche Vannetty is back in Paris. She does not see again the ingenious—too ingenious—Abbé Tholozan.—To what good, thereafter? But she sees Madame de Jaulgonne, from whom she hides nothing, and who knows not how to advise her. She sees Madame de Horges, Madame de Geslis and Mademoiselle de Vieux-Cernay. She sees MM. de Sarens and René Marcenay. In brief, her former life has resumed possession of her. She will no less continue to be Aimery Jouvelle's mistress. But in secret. And how far, from these furtive, Parisian amours to the free blooming of their tenderness of yesterday, in the lost château and in the garden flowering with white peacocks!

Psyche already suffers, and a little more each day. Her lover is still faithful. But she senses his detachment.

For he no longer loves her. And it has not taken him very long to perceive it himself. A few hours in Paris were sufficient for him to see himself clearly. The springtime of the Ile-de-France is equal to the springtime of Brittany. Aimery breathes its efflorescence with so much sweetness that, suddenly, the château of the Sleeping Beauty of the Wood is stamped in his memory as something already far distant.

Then, that is the end. A very slow end, a minor anguish which prolongs itself, aggravated, enlarges.

Psyche Vannetty, certainly, has struggles. But she is the contrary of a fighter. And then, to struggle is easy to say! Does one struggle against nothing? A woman in love defends herself against a rival. But Psyche Vannetty had no rival—tangibly— She has had none since Aracœli departed.

One day, Aracœli returns. But, before that day, poor Psyche has given up the useless battle. Since she was no longer loved, since nothing had served, neither sentimental attempts nor sensual attempts, both

Paralyzed by the certainty of repulse and disaster! Then, each day, Aimery drew away, drew away, drew away!

Madame Jaulgonne, at the beginning of the adventure, had fixed the conclusion: "When you shall be entirely his, he will have ceased to love you . . . Men are that way . . . And the day when he abandons you, your life will be broken . . . If all this ends in a Carmelite chapel, I shall not be surprised. With you, this foreshadows a matter of life and death."

It is no longer a question of death, certainly. But in the meantime, six months have passed and now Aimery Jouvelle suddenly leaves Paris without any notice, except a note. And Psyche Vannetty, reading this note, imagines that, six months later, Aimery Jouvelle will leave Paris in the same way, after writing a very different note,—and that he will not leave alone.

Between the author and the reader, Aimery Jouvelle, this time, would hardly be able to beg Psyche Vannetty to accompany him since he goes to Marseilles—to Marseilles, where the triumphant Araceli would land in two days—but Psyche Vannetty knows nothing of it and will not have an opportunity to learn of it. For she herself suddenly decides to leave also. Paris, while Aimery is not there, is unbearable. An odious solitude crushes her, a solitude which no friend could soften. A solitude which she imagines could not endure in the presence of her happy memories, in the presence of the dear phantoms of her nights and of her days, irrevocably lost—dead . . . A solitude strong enough to drive her, one evening, toward the Gare d'Orsay, toward the 9:32 train, toward Brittany and the mysterious village which had been, in the past, the halting place of her passionate voyage and the introduction to her radiant life, so brief.

IT IS December. Snow covers the earth and clouds fill the sky. The dense night lingers. And when the train carrying Psyche arrives at Sainte-Anne-des-Bois, it is scarcely dawn. About the station, the leafless poplars sadly wave their tenuous skeletons. Psyche descends and shivers in the winter wind. There is no more springtime. There is no sun. There is no auto brought especially to speed the traveler. Psyche is alone, alone, alone. She asks directions from an employee at the station.

"Madame . . . It is very far, your château!"

Far? . . . What matter . . .

She walks along in the sharp morning. And she does not recognize the road formerly passed over so quickly and so ardently, beside Aimery.

The deep snow, already deep, blankets each hedge, each clump of furze, each group of trees. The flakes swirl noiselessly in the air, before falling.

Psyche walks on. A league. Two leagues. Three leagues. She is very tired. She is very cold. But she scarcely notices it. She has passed the little, open wood, the brooklets, invisible under their white shroud, the forest. Here is the ascending path and the great, rigid oaks. Here is the wall with chevrons. And the grille—closed.

Closed—Psyche has not foreseen this. What a mishap! She must ring, wait, parley. She must see people, be seen . . .

Nevertheless, she is resolute. She rings. She calls. But the only response is silence.

No one is there. Neither porter nor gardener. Nothing. And the grille is closed. And the wall stretches out itself indefinitely to the right and to the left. Is it necessary to depart, to return—to the station so far away, to the train, to Paris?

Psyche does not want to. And she walks at hazard, following the enclosure, passing around the garden.

Happy chance: there is a breach in the wall. An old breach, obstructed with briers and nettles. But poorly obstructed. Psyche throws herself violently through the obstacle, twisting, tearing, trampling. And she passes, her hands scratched, her dress torn. What does that matter now! She is in— In the garden.

The château, now. Where is the château? Where is the terrace? And, above all, the old tower? The old tower where once the setting sun entered? The old tower where there was the bed, the wide, low bed, with its counterpane of ancient silk, like a roseate lake at midday? She must find it, find it quickly; for now the snow falls doubly fast and Psyche feels the icy weight upon her shoulders.

Ah! At last! . . . There is the terrace, which one discovers, below, to the right, over these black pines . . . And, nearer, rising among tangled branches of the leafless beeches, the arched windows begin to appear, the empty arches which formerly framed their bits of blue sky. At the near-by corner, the tower rises, the tower . . .

But it is closed, it also. And, this time, there is no breach.

Then, worn out by fatigue and frozen to the soul, Psyche Vannetty pauses—and loses courage.

The low door is there; and, behind the door, the so much desired staircase; and at the top of the staircase, the chamber, full of ardent memories, the chamber still rustling from kisses given and received, unforgettable kisses. Oh! to enter into all that barely vanished happiness and to warm repose, sleep there—what a joy this would be,

what a paradise! But no. The two doors of hard wood are there, bolted, inexorable. And upon this interdicted threshold, all hope is left behind.

Two stone steps precede the closed door. Mechanically, Psyche Vannetty sits down.

And, suddenly, a gentle numbness envelops and overwhelms her. There is no canopy over the arched door. The snow falls vertically and thickly.

Psyche sleeps—sleeps perfectly—forgets . . .

And the snow weaves her shroud.

*

THIS was the conclusion of Psyche, of whom I have guarded the most precise remembrance, over fifteen years, from that reading which Pierre Louÿs gave me, one night, in his workroom, with its great book-cases, which was his sole retreat from 1904 to 1925 and which was torn down last year.

I said to him, then: "But the book is finished!" And he replied: "Not yet, not yet . . . Some things remain to be done, other things to revise . . . Aracœli's departure . . . her return:"

And, to cut the matter short, he gave me some of the false reasons under which he dissimulated to himself the profound hesitation which restrained him at the moment of beginning the publication of this great book, the book of his soul.

"You see, it is a book which has waited too long. I began it in 1906. But it was in 1900 or 1901 that I conceived it. And I was wrong to dress it as a modern, contemporary romance. Today, it is dated."

(Today: that was in 1912).

He insisted:

"Think: do women at present wear corsets? Is there any need to unbuckle them? Does one ship an auto on a train, to go from Paris to Brittany? And then . . . the Château of the Sleeping Beauty of the Wood . . . has one a right to speak of a château of the Sleeping Beauty of the Wood, since Loti, under that very title, has written the masterpiece which you know?"

Certainly, none of this was serious.

It does not much matter if a book is dated. It even would be singularly unfortunate if the matter were otherwise. And, as for the Pierre Loti title, had not Pierre Loti himself, the most honest and most scrupulous of great geniuses, fairly taken it from Perrault? Then?

"Then"—some time after, Thierry Sandre was saying to me—"then, Psyche never appeared."

"But why? These are no more than pretexts which he gives us, which rather he gives himself . . ."

"Evidently not."

"Well?"

"Well! The book is too intimate . . ."

*

WHO among us, romancers, has not at some time written these or those pages "Too intimate" and then has not destroyed them? It is well for the patrimony of France that Pierre Louÿs, recoiling before a gesture which perhaps tempted him, did not destroy Psyche. That which we still lack, that which I have had the audacity to attempt to summarize here, will no doubt be recovered sooner or later. But such as it stands, and mutilated, this great work, which reveals its author to us in a new and unforeseen light, allies itself with other unfinished books, which are none the less perfect, of our literature, and which one compares sometimes to those temples, two thousand years old, of which we have but the august fragments.

CLAUDE FARRÈRE

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