

"Nothing, I tell you . . . only a memory."

"A pleasant memory?"

"Yes! . . . Yes, a delightful memory even. . . . It was at night, off the Île de Ré, on the fishing-smack in which Clarisse and I were taking Gilbert away. . . . We were alone, the two of us, in the stern of the boat. . . . And I remember . . . I talked . . . I spoke words and more words. . . . I said all that I had on my heart. . . . And then . . . then came silence, a perturbing and disarming silence. . . ."

"Well?"

"Well, I swear to you that the woman whom I took in my arms that night and kissed on the lips — oh, not for long: a few seconds only, but no matter! — I swear before heaven that she was something more than a grateful mother, something more than a friend yielding to a moment of susceptibility, that she was a woman also, a woman quivering with emotion. . . ." And he continued, with a bitter laugh, "Who ran away next day, never to see me again."

He was silent once more. Then he whispered:

"Clarisse . . . Clarisse. . . . On the day when I am tired and disappointed and weary of life, I will come to you down there, in your little Arab house . . . in that little white house, Clarisse, where you are waiting for me. . . ."

THE END