

THE PUCE DRESSING-GOWN

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deal table. The oil lamp had a glass reservoir, a chipped chimney, and a cardboard shade, and had probably cost less than a florin; five florins would have purchased the table; and all the rest of the furniture, including the arm-chair in which the dressing-gown reclined, a stool, an easel, three packets of cigarettes and a trouser-stretcher, might have been replaced for another ten florins. Up in the corners of the ceiling, obscure in the eclipse of the cardboard shade, was a complicated system of cobwebs to match the dust on the bare floor.

Within the dressing-gown there was a man. This man had reached the interesting age. I mean the age when you think you have shed all the illusions of infancy, when you think you understand life, and when you are often occupied in speculating upon the delicious surprises which existence may hold for you; the age, in sum, that is the most romantic and tender of all ages—for a male. I mean the age of fifty. An age absurdly misunderstood by all those who have not reached it! A thrilling age! Appearances are tragically deceptive.

The inhabitant of the puce dressing-gown had a short greying beard and moustache; his plenteous hair was passing from pepper into salt; there were many minute wrinkles in the hollows between his eyes and the fresh crimson of his cheeks; and the eyes were sad; they were very sad. Had he stood erect and looked perpendicularly down, he would have perceived, not his slippers, but a protuberant