

Christiane, day and night, up to the last moment. She may have guessed that the Marquis was, in some way, responsible for her death. It may have been that, on seeing him, she was too deeply moved to speak. At any rate, she did not utter a word, but merely opened the silent, empty villa for him.

As soon as he entered, Jacques staggered and was obliged to lean against the wall. The air was still impregnated with Christiane's subtle perfume. This gave him the impression that she was there. He thought that he felt her presence and this sensation was both horrible and sweet. Memories of their love and happiness awoke within him in this desolate dwelling, causing him the most exquisite suffering. Ah, the cage was really empty. All the doors were wide open. There was no light and there were no plants. There was nothing living. The very furniture had been pushed against the wall and had the rigidity of things which are no longer in contact with human beings. Jacques was chilled to the heart. He entered her bedroom and, closing the door after him, he went and knelt down by the side of the bed. He buried his face in this couch, which was now as cold and hard as a coffin, and he expiated their love and their forbidden communion, her sin and all his sins. Under the influence of this impression of silence and death, a religious sentiment awoke in his heart and purified it, as a living flame might have done. When he rose from his knees, his face wore the devout, serene expression which prayer gives to it. On looking round, he saw a little sprig of boxwood above the holy-water vessel. It was the boxwood that had remained from last Palm Sunday. He took it down and put it away in his pocketbook. A few minutes later, Monsieur