

ory survived all else. Scarcely were they alone, when Benedict said in a voice of much emotion,

"Why did you never come all this long time?"

"I knew you were busy and happy," said Xavier.

"Happy!" repeated Benedict, shaking his head.

"To-morrow is the opening of the *Salon*, and you are to exhibit your great work to the judges; but its success is already bruited abroad. Shall I be the only one who has not seen this marvel of modern art?"

Benedict pointed to the group.

"Go and look at it," he said.

Whilst Xavier was examining the fountain, Benedict threw himself upon a sofa and buried his head in his hands. Xavier stood a long time before the group. When he came back to his friend's side, he said simply,

"It is really very fine, very fine."

But he spoke without enthusiasm, and in a tone which betrayed some hidden emotion.

"Tell me the truth," said Benedict all at once in a troubled voice. "I want to hear from your lips the truth, terrible though it be, perhaps fatal. I want to hear it, even though it puts the last touch to the ruin of my soul. Sabine does not love me?"

"She has given you up, at all events," said Xavier.

"She never loved me!" cried Benedict vehemently.

"She sacrificed me to a mere nothing—a dream—some pride of her own."

"I don't understand you," said Xavier.

"Was it not pride that made her put an end to all that her father had arranged between us? What did I ask of her in that hour of sorrow and affliction except constancy and good faith?"

"Do you reproach her with the very excess of her generosity?" said Xavier.