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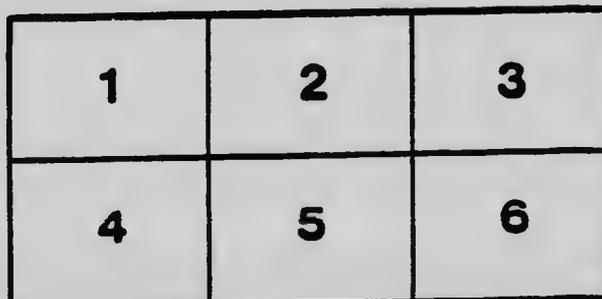
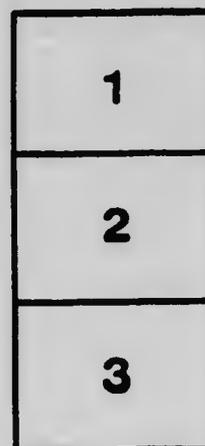
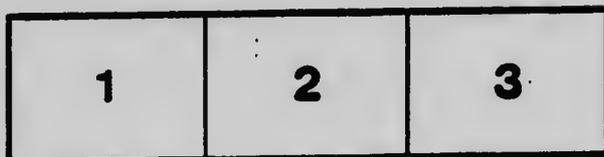
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PHRYNETTE MARRIED

PHRYNETTE MARRIED

BY

MARTHE TROLY-CURTIN

AUTHOR OF
"PHRYNETTE AND LONDON"



TORONTO
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TO
L'ADORÉE FINE MARTOUCHE



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I

MY TWINS

Grosvenor Square.

I AM afraid the maternal instinct is not very much developed in me. I have not said it to anyone, but the twins are two terrible disappointments—chiefly, baby boy. What have I done, just heavens, to beget such ugly children? Austen is so handsome and I am—well—very passable.

I seem to be the only one able to see things clearly. Gracieuse says all new babies are raw-looking like that, with too much skin on and not enough hair—the expressions are mine, of course. As for my maid herself, she thinks that there never was anywhere (not even in her beloved France) such a pair of wingless angels. Vi, who is the godmother of the baby girl, is no longer our frivolous Lady Dare of twenty-one days ago—she has become a fixture of the nursery. She is re-learning to knit—this is her third misfit in petticoats. As for Austen, he—it seems a silly thing to write, but it's true—he is proud. Proud of what, *mon Dieu*? Am I proud? And yet, as I explained to him, I am the most important factor, he is only accidental; it just happened that it was he, that's all. What I mean is, the father of my children might have been anyone else;

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but they would still be my children—my children, my twins, my babies, *mes bébés*! It feels sweet to say it, almost as sweet as to touch them. They are so soft—just like pink putty—and small, and warm, and trusting. I do love them, though I say they are ugly; but what makes me fear that I am not one of these great mothers, a mother by vocation, is that I remember enjoying almost as much pleasure and the same love in handling little boneless puppies (with their darling little paws that look like tiny pink stars underneath), and furry kittens, and even other people's babies. Still the twins are my very own, and they will grow up and be able to play with me, and love me, and become real beings like Austen and me; and their noses may change, at least that of the boy. Oh, clement fate, don't let him be a Cyrano! A beautiful nose is the centre of all happiness. I wonder how I had the courage to joke about it to Austen when I first saw my babies.

"Sir," I said, "you have deceived me. This boy is no child of mine. Look at his nose!"

"Phrynette, really—dearest!"

Those three mild-looking little words—no one would believe how effectually they put out any effervescence in me, whether mental or physical. I am the boiling, swelling milk, and Austen the watchful hand that lifts it from the fire. How quickly it subsides—the white foam, the glad sizzling, the palpitating shiny dome—flop, a collapse, and I stand with my vitality diminished, a chided little woman feeling cold and sad! Yet milk can't be left on the fire, can it? Why am I not sensible enough to understand that? And I wish Austen would

MY TWINS

not call me Phrynette—it's no reason because one has a name to call one by it. Father called me anything—*ma belle, mon petit*, little devil, my angel, *toutou, loulou*, little beast, small cabbage; it reads silly, but it felt like the rub of soft lips on one's cheek.

Perhaps father overdid his duty by me. If he had not petted me without interruption for seventeen years, I might not now feel so acutely the lack of being petted. I have heard that it is not an unusual thing for certain parents occasionally to reprove their children, even punish them—but this may be an exaggeration.

II

MY FAR-BETTER HALF

Grosvenor Square.

I NEVER saw a leech. I have the vaguest idea of what it is like, but I have the most intimate knowledge of what its sensations must be.

With Austen, even when he kisses me most passionately (for him), even when he presses me against him so violently that I give an agonised gasp like a deflated bellows, I never feel near enough to him—it is then I wish I could leech-wise dig my tentacles into him—my being existing by his substance. I wish I could suck not only his blood, but his very soul. But all this I would rather die than tell him, or let him guess. He would not think it “nice.” I believe he is correct even in his conceptions of love. I say “I believe,” because we never discuss love together, at least, not love in its most intimate aspects. He loves me very much as I imagine a faithful Regent might love a young Infanta in respectful awe of her innocence. I would not even be surprised if he often said proudly to himself, “My wife has no senses,” unconsciously parodying that Spanish Minister’s indignant assertion, “The Queen of Spain has no legs!”

Austen is a good husband, an excellent husband, but

MY FAR-BETTER HALF

he is not the masterful, delightful lover such as my imagination pictures anyway.

He always speaks kindly, but he never flatters. He is one of those men who, if you complained that your feet were cold, would ring for a hot-water bottle. He makes love as he takes food, because Fate has made it a natural need, but he is free from gourmandising either in food or in love; and I believe that he feels ashamed of both appetites. I have no patience with perfect people!

Of course, I never discuss these subjects with him, for his "Really, Phrynette!" is charged with such a surprised disapprobation that it always makes my own words sound much less decent once spoken than they had seemed in my own mind.

I wish he would see me not as I should be, but as I am—just a poor, young, eager, palpitating little animal, hungering for more than mere paternal, respectful affection. He has such a high standard of womanhood that I sometimes wonder whether it is I who am abnormal, or whether he knows anything of my sex at all.

Wherever did he meet the woman he imagines me to be? I know no one answering the description. Did he meet her at all, or is he not rather a poor, blind, innocent, self-made dupe? I shall never know. Our married life will very likely always be this dull, monotonous, correct affair. He always asks my permission before kissing me (this, of course, a way of speaking), until I sometimes want to cry out, "Oh, don't ask me—never mind me—think only of *you*; or don't think at all, but be just yourself, your primitive self, not the gentleman, but the man—the male, the mate, the master—gloves off!"

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Austen has a peculiar way of treating women as responsible beings. That's not the way at all. I daresay he can't help it, being an Englishman, but there is nothing more trying to a woman's nerves than to be perpetually taken *au serieux*. It makes even the simple utterance of yes or no a very weighty affair, if she knows that her "yes" will be instantly taken for an assent, her "no" for a negation. With Austen I have a funny new feeling of being taken at my word. For instance, when he asked me if I did not mind his joining the Ritchies on that tiger-hunting expedition in India, I said "no." (It is not polite to deprive anyone of his pleasure. We had both promised to go, but at that time the twins were not in course of construction.) I said "no," but naturally I meant "yes." This is how I said it :

"No, dear, I don't mind, if you think you'd like to go."

I knew he'd like to go, but I naturally expected him to say he did not, if only for the sake of politeness. But English people (some of them) seem to place truth before politeness, and Austen said :

"Yes, I would, if my dear little girl is sure she won't feel lonely ; but I am sure she won't, now the twins are here."

And so, you see, my retreat was cut off. After that I could not very well tell him that I would give twenty twins for one Austen. Some men, of whom he is one, expect a woman to be a mother first and a wife afterwards—in feelings, I mean. Well, I am not. I could do without children, but I could not do without a husband.

MY FAR-BETTER HALF

And now he is going, and he will not be back for three months ! It is damnable, as Vi says when she is excited. But I dare not ask him to stay, for he has a sort of extraordinary prejudice against people going back on their word.

When I am stronger—this is my first day up since the twins came—it is decided that we go to Biarritz—Vi, Gracieuse, the twins and I—and wait there until Austen has had enough of despatching the poor, beautiful tigers. Since my husband is such a moral man, I wonder he does not see what a big sin it is to kill anything that is beautiful. If he absolutely wants to kill, why not go to Paris, become the chief of the amateur police, and kill a few Apaches ? I don't blame him for his destructive instinct—it is part and parcel of man—but it might be accompanied by discernment. I never could understand why the *sans-culottes* could not be satisfied with cutting off the nobles' heads without damaging their pictures and furniture. Ugh ! men without art !

Austen says tigers are dangerous beasts. Most beautiful things are dangerous—does not the sea drown us, the fire burn us, the mountains make frozen meat of our poor bodies ? Does not the sun give us freckles ? And look at the ravages a beautiful woman causes—though I have nothing on my conscience—as yet.

Why should not the natives of India protect themselves ? That is the very thing they want, I am sure.

Austen has had a special gun made with complicated straps and things, so as to enable him to shoot with his left hand. I almost wish sometimes his left arm had

PHRYNETTE MARRIED

been blown off at Modder River as well as his right one—he would be quite, quite mine then—I should be just indispensable to him. Perhaps such a wish may be a little selfish, but, oh! why are English husbands so independent of their wives? I truly believe they could manage to be happy without women at all—if only they had—tigers!

This morning I met Captain de Montiers in the Park. He has hardly changed since the time he used to come to father's studio, first as a patron, then as a friend. He saw me (I should rather think he did; some men make the fact that they see you just a little too obvious), but he did not know me again. Two years bring such a change to a growing girl—especially two years of beef and fog. I have now much rosier cheeks than in Paris, and I have dropped my freckles. Then there is Austen, and the twins, and my hair up. All that makes a big difference. I am not matronly yet, but, however little married I am, I *do* look married. I am more dignified; I can walk in a long fur coat without looking like a baby bear. It is a funny thing—I am two inches taller than before my marriage, and yet I don't look taller, because I have more *embonpoint*, I suppose. When I was young, I mean two years ago, it used to annoy me to be so very slim, and now I envy the touching little salt-cellars in debutantes' necks.

I take off my left glove on every possible occasion. The joy of my wedding ring has not worn off yet. Nor has the ring itself—I rub it every morning with my nail-polisher.

MY FAR-BETTER HALF

I do not know why instinctively I pretended not to see the Captain—sheer laziness, I think.

It was the first spring day, and that sort of weather hesitating between showers and sun, very mild and pervaded with the smell of hyacinths and decayed leaves, the sort of day that plunges you into lethargic happiness: when one feels deliciously tired, blushes at every glance, and actually feels the sap swelling in one's veins; when one's body is languid and one's heart tender and grateful—a sort of physical and sentimental Renaissance.

I sat opposite Albert Gate, and watched the people on horseback, and amused myself by counting the well-shod women passing in front of me. Englishwomen are not very particular about their heels—pity! The sun was licking my feet and I was beginning to feel drowsy, when, between me and the sun, stood a black figure whose chief interest seemed to be in studying the pattern of my lace veil. Again, that Captain! I opened my sunshade and closed my eyes.

The next morning I did not go to the Park, and took advantage of Gracieuse being out of the nursery to try to curl the twin girl's hair with my Marcel tongs. It was not a success. Her hair is as flat as Napoleon's itself. That child totally lacks the feminine instinct. She does not seem to realise the importance of looking one's best—even in bed. As a matter of fact, for all they resemble me, these children might not be mine at all! I hope she is not going to develop into a militant suffragette—she just howled and kicked, began a desperate scout-signalling with her two arms, and knocked over a

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Sèvres statuette I had placed between the two cradles to inculcate love of the fine arts in the mind of my *gosses*.

Evidently a fond mother need not expect any reward for her devoted care. I had just given her two of my nicest chocolates with *pralines* inside to stop her howling, when in rushes Gracieuse and pushes me aside and shrieks, "What are the villains doing to my little white rabbits?"

I am not a villain, I am their mother, and if one can't play with one's own children, what is one to play with, I ask you?

I am sure the mother of the Gracchi was not interfered with in such a heartless way, and Marquis chocolates never harmed anyone before that I know. That will teach me to deprive myself of my sweets for other girls next time, and I gave her the two biggest too! And Gracieuse was positively disrespectful! She said I was "the naughtiest child of the three." I think that sometimes she actually forgets I am married.

I don't care, Mrs Parr promised to get me a darling lemur like hers. He'll be my very own. I'll be able to do what I like with him—he won't be a silly cry-baby anyway.

Austen is gone. He went away an hour ago. I tried to cry; it would have looked better and done me good, but I could not—I am too full of rage. How do English-women accept such things? The ones like Vi accept very gaily, but the others? As for me, I don't consider marriage as a profession; I did not take Austen for him to keep me, I took him because I wanted him. I still

MY FAR-BETTER HALF

want him. Does he not want me any more? Does he think the Phrynettes will always be with us, but that there won't be always tigers in India? Very well, then, I am going to amuse myself too. The pity of it is that so-called amusements bore me. Cards I loathe. I have read so much during the last ten months that my eyes are tired and my brain weary. I would love to go to balls, or to travel, or to fence, or to swim, in fact, to feel the renewed activity of my young body—but it is too soon yet. I am not strong enough. Many women have called to see me, but I generally say I am not well enough to see anyone. They are not interesting, they are restless and heavily frivolous. They have very little to say and say it badly. They cannot converse; indeed, they are almost inarticulate. They all have travelled, and have absolutely nothing to impart on wherever they have been and whatever they have seen. They know the world as a mole knows the earth it burrows through. They will remember the hotel, the golf links of some heavenly place, but neither its sunsets, nor its vales, nor its forests. They do not speak of the road where the poplars kept a guard of honour as they passed, where the white violets were found, where the lilac hedge was early, but of the road where they had a breakdown, where they ran over a dog, where they were fined for fast driving. One of those livers in a hurry sent me some flowers and books, amongst them the delicious "Marie Claire." The next time she called I received her in bed and thanked her enthusiastically.

"Rather nice that book, 'Marie Claire,' isn't it?" she asked.

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“ It is not a book—it is a brook, a morning, a cup of milk, a white rose, a pearl, a taper, a blue mist melting into a blue sky. It is not a book, it is a marvel. Listen to this about Blanche the Cow—‘ She was always lifting her head and looking into the distance, and then, all of a sudden, she would start off at a run. The cowherd used to pity her because he said he could not say what or whom she was regretting.’ There! Isn’t that an inspired photograph of Blanche the Cow? Have you noticed how moodily ruminative most cows are, as if regretting the tenderness of other pastures? ”

“ Well, my dear, if you say so, I believe you; but I never came close enough to a cow to be able to judge. When you whirl in the car past melancholy Blanches, you haven’t time to study their physiognomy, have you? ”

I think I will leave London and go to Biarritz as soon as ever I can.

III

MY COMRADE OF LONG AGO

Grosvenor Square.

I HAVE again met Captain de Montiers, and spoken to him—at least, he spoke to me and I was civil.

I was on my favourite chair in the Park, and he boldly sat down on the next seat, lifted his green hat and said, with an engaging smile, "How do you do?" Seeing that he has known me when I was no higher than that, and that *petit père* rather liked him, I smiled back and said, "How do you do, Captain de Montiers?"

Since he remembered me, what is there so surprising in my remembering his name?—yet, if I had fired a pistol at him, he could not have looked more surprised. If his olive skin had allowed of it, I am sure he would have blushed.

"Oh, madame," said he, "I ask you infinitely pardon."

This was getting funny.

"What for?" I asked.

"I—I—the fact is, you see me at the regrets—but impossible to remember your name. I am desolate—quite desolate."

"Console yourself," said I. "I'll tell you. I suppose you mean my present name."

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"Your—how say you?—present name. You mock at me, madame; but I deserve it well—mock then, but forgive me."

"Look here, Captain," I told him, "I don't know what you are talking about at all. My name was Phrynette Chédor, as you very well know, and now I am Phrynette Bettany. I was married a year ago."

"Phrynette!—Chédor's *petit chou*! Not possible! *Mon Dieu, mon Dieu*, but I am surprised. I would never have known you again."

"Well, but you did know me! It was you who said 'how do you do?' first."

"Ah, but I had no idea then—at least, of course, I knew you—but I was not sure."

"What an extraordinary man you are! Then suppose I had not been me, what an awkward thing for both of us!"

"Ah, well, that does happen of course. How are your dolls?"

"My babies, you mean?"

"Babies, oh—in the plural, too!"

"They are twins, you see."

"Oh, it's very droll. I mean, I really cannot reconcile myself to the fact that you are grown up. Let me see, how long was it since I dandled you on my knee—six years ago, was it?"

"I—I am eighteen and a half!"

"*Mon Dieu!* Do you remember you broke my monocle? I used to wear a monocle in those days—I was young then."

"Yes; and you were the first man to bring me flowers.

MY COMRADE OF LONG AGO

It was the most subtle flattery you could have been guilty of. All the others, father's friends, they all brought me playthings and sweets."

"Yes—you still have the same hair—and—I was desolate, quite desolate—to hear of that poor dear Chédor—at his age too—— Now then—I am an idiot, forgive me! What do you think of that woman on horseback?—sits well, does not she? I met her in Vienna last winter, could not get to know her name. You don't happen to know her, do you?"

"No. *A propos*, I never asked you, how is your wife?"

"My wife! Whom do you mean?"

"Yes, your wife. I remember her very well, so pretty and so amiable. She used to chat with me while *petit père* painted her portrait."

"Oh—er—I suppose you mean my—er—cousin. You were such a *gosse* at the time, you forget—she is very well I daresay. No, she was not French—yes, English—I have—er—relations of all sorts in Paris. Why laugh you? I think you are mocking me again. *Ça ne fait rien*—that is, yes, *ça me fait plaisir*, it helps me to remember you as you were—*l'enfant terrible*, with her short skirts and long curls, curt manners, and a long tongue, put out on the slightest pretext. Fancy you remembering my sister-in-law! Wasn't she a lovely girl, though?"

"Your sister-in-law? I thought you said your cousin before?"

"Did I? Ah, just so—er—she was both, you see—she was a—a cousin and married my brother-in-law."

PHRYNETTE MARRIED

"But that does not make her your sister-in-law."

"Doesn't it? Ah, well, never mind, I always had my own doubts she was my sister-in-law, really. I have seen you several times in the Park before to-day, but always alone. Does your husband never accompany you?"

"Not as a rule. Austen is very busy, you see."

"Very busy, just so. In the commerce?"

"Dear me—I mean busy with his club, or, perhaps, his friends, and his books, and he is very keen on politics."

"Ah, so am I, but not so keen as to prevent me from coming here every morning to look at the pretty ladies on horseback and—afoot."

The lady he met in Vienna passes before us again, walking her horse. She is certainly an arresting type of woman. Pretty she is not. She has an eighteenth-century face, piquant, without regularity. She has small, delicately carved features, mocking eyes and fluffy hair, which would look well under powder. She looks fragile yet strong, astute and obstinate, like a blonde spider.

The Captain follows her with gluttonous eyes. I can almost hear him swallow and stop breathing. So that is his type of woman. Her eyes are longer than mine, her hair much paler, her chin less pointed, but I am very much like her in a coarser way.

Captain de Montiers turns his eyes on me, and there is a silence, while I dig holes in the gravel with my sunshade. I wish he would not look at me so persistently—my eyes are on the ground, but I feel him looking.

MY COMRADE OF LONG AGO

"Are you in London for long," I ask in desperate haste.

He starts slightly.

"I only came for the Horse Show. I thought of going back in a few days. I'll spend the holidays in Royan, I think. My yacht is there. I intend—I intended going on a short cruise, I don't know where yet. May I have the honour of calling on you before I go? I would like to be introduced to your husband."

I don't want him to call; he is a man of a disturbing presence. Yet, he was a friend of *petit père*. What shall I say?

"I would have been so glad, but we are starting for Biarritz in a few days—I don't know exactly when."

"We! Who are we?"

"My sister-in-law and my babies. My husband is on his way to India—big-game shooting just now."

"India!"—his exclamation signs are vehement and numerous—"but India is very far!"

"So I believe, though I don't know much geography."

Blaise de Montiers twists his black moustache and looks at me incredulously. It is strange—I have not met him for so many years, and yet I can follow the sinuosities of his mind as if I were intimate with him. He is thinking I am inventing my husband's big-game hunting expedition, because I do not want him to call. I answer aloud to his thoughts:

"Honest Injun, 'tis the truth, if not all the truth. But it is luncheon-time, and the truth will keep better than luncheon."

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" May I see you to your carriage ? "

" I came afoot. My home is ten minutes from here—
Grosvenor Square."

" May I escort you to your home ? "

" If you will."

We cross the Park together. I notice we have pretty much the same way of walking. He has not been long enough in London to adopt the fashionable slouch and the long steps of a land measurer. He picks his steps like a war horse, or, rather, like a cock, bust outwards and comb in the air. Thus he prances me to my door.

IV

MY DRIVE TO RICHMOND

Grosvenor Square.

TO-DAY I went to Richmond, all by myself, with Cavanagh. Before I left Paris I did not quite believe in types, because all the people I knew had that superficial likeness which comes from being dressed by the same houses, wearing the hair in the same way, using the same slang and the same perfume. At my *cours* there were some Spanish, one Greek, and numbers of English and American girls with the same bow over the same ear, the same pink coral necklace, the same fox's head peeping from the same shoulder. Until you heard them speak you could not have guessed they were not all little Parisian *jeunes filles*, so Parisianised were they; but since I have travelled—as far as England—I have learnt that there are people who flaunt their nationality in their very face.

Cavanagh is one of these. He is an Irishman born in London. He has the potato lip, a Cockney accent, and monumental extremities. He is ugly in a big sort of a way, of a violent, unabashed ugliness, which does not make you despise or dislike him. There is a kind of ugliness that's mean and disagreeable and which, however illogically, arouses your contemptuous disgust,

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but Cavanagh's features simply stand on incompatible terms with one another. He is blatantly ugly, withal a very clever chauffeur and a good soul, though, like most Irish people, he looks more of a good soul than he really is. I hardly understand him, and he understands me not at all. It's all the more enervating that with him all interrogations take the form of "which"; and sometimes I only remember this peculiarity of his after I have prodigated away unnecessary and lengthy explanations.

"I think" (I am getting so English that I am never sure of anything, I only "think"), "I think I'll go to Richmond to-day, Cavanagh."

"Which, m'lady?"

"Richmond-on-Thames, you know, on the other side of Kew Bridge."

"Which, m'lady?"

"There is only one bridge, I believe, but you'll ask a policeman."

"Which, m'lady?"

"Any policeman, they are all the same, the first one you meet"—"Oh, *mon Dieu!*" (mentally). "He is going to say 'which' again, the idolatrous fool!" "Drive to Richmond, Rich-mond. R, I, C, H, M, O, N, D."

"Oh, Richmond! Very good, m'lady."

One has smacked men's faces for less. The worst of English people (to be Irish Cockney is to be English) is that, when they don't understand, they decline to guess; yet it's easier and much quicker to guess than to understand.

The way to Kew from London was hideous with

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people, tramcars, mean shops, and the sort of houses that make you wonder who can live there and love. But the air was an orgy of spring with a dash of winter in it. The sun was like a lash of the whip across your eyes, not yet used to so much clarity. I decided not to look at the streets until we reached Kew, and I stared at the flowers facing me. In the long crystal vase of the car are two orchids, one large and fleshy, dressed in purple velvet, the other of a languid mauve, poised on its stem like some winged thing—a jolly bishop and a young widow.

We cannot go very fast because of the electric trams. There is a great deal of traffic on the road at Kew, but not at all the same sort of traffic as at Hyde Park Corner. We are stopped at every moment by carts, vans, and coal carts with a front like Roman chariots. Suddenly I look round and seize the speaking-tube excitedly:

“Oh, Cavanagh, stop! Whatever are those little beasties over there on that stall? Come down, I want to know. Are they snails?”

“Snails!” (with incredulous disgust) “—no, m'lady, people don't eat snails, them things is winkles.”

“What a jolly name! Winkles! And do people eat them?”

“Which? Oh yes, m'lady, and fust class they are for them as likes 'em.”

“Oh, I think—I think I'd love to eat some! Go and get some for me, will you, Cavanagh? First drive the car into that little by-street, and then go and get some of those nice—what do you call them—winkles—

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as if it were for you, you understand, and don't be long—they do look delicious ! ”

“ Yes, m'lady ; how much should I buy ? ”

“ Oh, I don't know, a pound or two, I suppose. Ask the man how he sells them. ”

I wait impatiently for Cavanagh and the winkles. I have never wanted anything as I want those winkles. Why, the very name is appetising. He is such a long time ! Suppose all the winkles were sold when he got there ? They must be very rare because I've never seen any before in any of the shops. I must ask the Army and Navy Stores why they don't keep them.

In the little ugly street where I wait, women in hair-curlers and torn aprons are beginning to display an objectionable interest in the throbbing car and my profile.

Old or young, they are for the most part toothless and all unappetising. They stare boldly, if unintelligently, and express to one another, from house to house, on myself and my hat, opinions which I am very glad not to understand.

When Cavanagh comes back, very red in the face, and grinning vastly, he has to break through a circle of children of varied years, and of equal squalor, with pathetic hats on moth-eaten hair, buttonless boots and patchless clothes. Why should Englishwomen have more children than they can wash, comb, feed, love, and sew for ? The children of the poor in England are like the dogs in France, obviously wanting, and not wanted. Among these slum children it seems to be the survival of the filthiest.

MY DRIVE TO RICHMOND

I have visited board schools both in France and in England, and though I am the least *chauvine* of patriots, I am glad to say the little French scholars reflected a mother's pride in their shiny faces, their lustrous hair, their polished boots and patent belts. They had to shine or stay at home, for their mothers have *amour propre* for themselves, and a clean love for their children. It is true that the girls had no feathers in their hats and no embroidered pinafores, but their hair had been brushed, they smelt strongly of cheap soap, and their black lustrine overalls had no holes in them. Those who were too poor to wear decent boots had slippers, *espadrilles* or *sabots*; but I saw no toes protruding. All those children of the English poor, why are they there at all? Do they owe life (and a bad debt it is for them) to ignorance, fatalism or a wrong conception of the duties of citizenship?

The car whisks onwards, depriving these wretched children of wretched mothers of their circus. On my lap are the longed-for winkles in a paper bag. Then suddenly:

"Oh, Cavanagh, stop, please, how does one eat those—winkles—do you know?"

Cavanagh frames his huge upper part at one of the windows. Seen at a close range he is all jaws, good humour, and ears obviously constructed on the best acoustic lines.

"Which? Them things. With a pin, m'lady."

"A pin? How funny! Would a hatpin do? Oh—ah, it's—it's not at all so nice as I thought, and it smells of fish!"

"Why, it is fish, m'lady. I knew you would not like

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them so much as all that. Gentry don't, as a rule. Shall I throw them away ? ”

“ No ; call that little boy over there. Here, little boy, it's for you—that. Now, drive on, Cavanagh.”

I look back at the little boy. He is the most comical little chap. He holds the bag of winkles at arm's length as if it were a bomb. He looks at it, then at the car with the funniest expression of suspicion and surprise. Perhaps he was like me—that little boy—perhaps he had never seen winkles before.

We are on the road to Richmond. What a lovely day ! I am as nappy as I can be without anyone to be happy with. Happy is not, perhaps, the right word—I am joyful !

Over the wall of Kew Gardens one sees the top of many trees and, like the hats in a shop window, they beckon to you to walk inside. But I have seen the gardens already, while I have not yet seen the view from Richmond Hill. Besides, I told Cavanagh to drive to Richmond, and it would never do to appear inconsistent (and childish) with the servants.

Just to live is enough on an afternoon like this. I look up with pity at the lion and the unicorn on the portal of the gardens. How hard to be of stone in springtime ! With the lion, I don't sympathise so much ; he is a British lion, and I believe he rather relishes being stony, strong, and stolid, surveying the small world under him from his portal. But the unicorn, on such a day as this, how she must long for her fabulous world ! It could never have been more wonderful than spring.

I am in such a good humour that I laugh with equal

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indulgence at the bumps on the road and the silly names on the villa gates on each side of the way. Why is not Austen by my side? There is no fun in being bumped if there is no one to bump against. The fact that I always think of my husband only shows what a nice little married woman I am—for a Frenchwoman; and then, I love him! It would be great fun to know a few French novelists and confess that to them—wouldn't they be surprised and shocked! It's all so unorthodox.

It was really worth passing through Hammersmith to see the view from Richmond Terrace. The trees have not yet achieved their full splendour and allow all the sinuosities of the grey river below to be seen. It is a pretty view if somewhat *précieux*. But to me a view is not made more lovable because it happens to be extensive. On the contrary, I prefer intimate corners—a wood to a plain, a brook to a river. A country lane seems always so full of promises, while a long, straight National road is not worth investigating. I love condensed beauty. A magnificent view impresses, but oppresses me. Red roses on a fainting roof, a stone bench all green and *mordéré* with moss, turning its back to a wall riotous with clematis, some disused well all rust and lichen, as lonely and derelict as a gibbet—for such things I feel a tender admiration. A tub where a donkey drinks from is more beautiful than a warship. The warm human charm of homely scenes and homely things is the one which envelops me and holds me best.

We waited on the terrace until the sun was a prisoner between two flat cedar branches, dark green across its bloody gilt, and then we went down the hill at a terrific

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speed. A car as a mere means of conveyance doesn't amuse me, nor does it Cavanagh. He is a dare-devil, and so am I. By a tacit arrangement, when I am alone in the car I experience sundry little pleasant shivers and closing of eyes at precipitous descents and angular corners.

In passing over Kew Bridge I saw something—something—I have no adjective sufficiently poignant and ignoble to label it. A crowd was leaning over the parapet with tense backs and tragic necks. I knew they were watching something terrible. I got out of the car and looked down too. On the very edge of the river, going across the field towards the road, there was a small procession—a policeman, and a man in his shirt-sleeves tramping slowly, carrying a small body covered with a white sheet. One could not see anything of what was under it except the pathetic fold of a grey skirt—limp, dripping and swaying as the men walked. All around was a horrible, greedy little cortège of small boys, nursery-maids and loafers—like ants with a dead worry.

How could she? How could she go out of life on a day like this? On an autumn evening or a rainy winter dawn, it would have been conceivable, but in April and in the country! Had she walked only across the green, she would have been among the blue-bells in Kew Gardens. How can one leave spring behind? How sad her skirt looked! Did she put on a grey skirt on purpose, I wonder?

I think she must have been quite old, or disfigured perhaps; or else how could she have renounced the sunshine and all the good smells in the air? And to do

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it she chose the least attractive part of the river. I would have preferred to drown myself where I could see beautiful green river banks before going down in the mud.

Poor drowned thing in the dripping skirt! . . . I know . . . she must have bumped alone all the way.

Grosvenor Square.

THERE are many pains that have no name. To-day I have a pain almost unbearable, and I have no words to tell it even to myself. It is raining. It was raining when I got up. I had breakfast all alone, and luncheon all alone, in the large, dark dining-room. Just as I started luncheon an organ came into the Square, and chopped *Sole Mio* plaintively. I endured it throughout the fish; then, fearing to cry in my plate in front of the servants, I said I had finished, and left the dining-room. How unappetising to eat alone! I shall go upstairs to the nursery. I feel a small thing in a big space—I can't be alone just now. I want to feel the soft, uncertain hands of the darling babies on my face and neck. From outside the nursery door I hear the rusty contralto of Gracieuse, subdued and monotone like the drone of a bee. She is singing a naughty old French peasant song, but she does not know it's naughty, nor does it sound so as she sings it. She pronounces the words as if they were not words but merely sounds born of one another:

“Qui frappe, qui frappe? Mon mari est ici
 Qu'est ce que tu dis, qu'est ce que tu dis, ma femme?
 Rien, J'endors le petit, mon ami.
 Rien J'endors le petit.”

MY DULL DAYS

As I open the door Graciusa raises two furious eyebrows and exaggerates the narcotic monotony of her chant. "You-must-not-come-in," she sings, "they-are-almost-asleep."

I turn on my toes and go to my room. There I kneel on the side of the bed, put my head under the eider-down, and cry over all the big and small miseries of the past, present and future that one sad moment can evoke. I cry over my old sorrow of *petit père's* death; over the absence of Austen; over the littleness of the unsatisfying twins, always asleep, or drinking, or crying; over my solitude, and, principally, because of the rain and of the organ.

What is it I want? I want to be wanted. I am in one of those moments of sad lucidity when everything seems nothing. I am healthy and young and good-looking and kind-hearted, but I am useless. I am necessary to no one at all—now that father is dead. There are so many people who make love to you, and so few who love you—none in fact. I want somebody to love and have near me—a sort of substantive shadow of myself. I would be content with one companion, but that companion should be perfectly intimate and congenial, and as happy in me as I in—in whom? Him or her? I think I meant "him." I often thought I would like to have had a twin brother, to grow up together, with one brain and one heart in common, and then marry him. Marry him without fear of disillusion, incompatibility, caprice, racial estrangement. In such a marriage alone could there be the perfect communion, the instinctive knowledge of each other, the thousand and one ties of two

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childhoods entwined, the absence of shame, the sympathy, the elbow-to-elbow attitude which can only exist between blood relations. There would be no mystery, and consequently no impure curiosity—no, there would be no illusion, but a sweet matter-of-factness and clairvoyant love. Yes, love, why not? Love, passion and romance do not need the artificial spur of novelty and adventure, for, if it were so, then the actual conditions of marriage are atrociously immoral. After the first year there is no novelty and no adventure, but there should be love. Romance does not need the lies beautiful to exist, if it is robust romance—youth, instinct and the force of life, the grip on life—these are sufficient. Every being, young and healthy, carries romance with him, ready to pour it out like some precious perfumed oil on the feet of the chosen one. I have wondered again and again why unions between blood relations are sinful and illegal. They are illegal, but I cannot consider them as sinful. I have a simple and infallible way of knowing what is sinful or not. What is neither ignoble nor cruel is not a sin. To marry a young beautiful brother with whom you have fought for fruits and flowers, with whom you have danced and sung, with whom you have bathed in the same spring, and slept in the same ray of sun—a brother you have admired as a fearless Robinson when you were alone in the forest, and pitied in the drawing-room on your mother's day—a brother who has despised you because you shrieked at a spider, and admired you for your superb lies to authority—a brother, another self, but stronger and braver and more noble, more frank, more

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generous, more ready to forgive—a brother with whom you can speak silently from one end of the table to the other by merely moving your lips, who knows all the words coined by the family, all the tunes you sang and he whistled, who has petted the same pets, panted over the same adventures of Jules Verne or Mayne Reid, stamped under the same table at the same execrable sums—a brother who has hated with you, and, without knowing her, the same severe school-teacher—who has loved on trust pretty Marie Martin “who sits at the desk next to me”—a brother, the only male who will ever confess to you that he is superior to you, and the only male from whom you will accept and believe it, though what you like most in men is that very same superiority you grudge them so much. Would it be a sin to marry such a wholesome and admirable companion rather than some unreal and, for all you know, vicious, cruel, diseased, unjust stranger, who loves you because he does not know you, and will cease to love you as soon as his curiosity is appeased? Perhaps my moral sense may not be of the usual pattern, but incest, instead of being a crime, appears to me to be the nicest fastidiousness. But what a great sin it is to marry anyone old, ugly or unhealthy, for his fame, or rank, or fortune, and divide your energy into lying with your lips and brain and body, and, wishing for the quick death which would put him aside. That is twice a sin—it is both cruel and ignoble. If union between close relations is wrong morally or hygienically, which comes to the same thing, then the basis and beginning of our world is wrong.

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I think that the average marriage is not intimate enough. How can it be? What do you know about your husband, a man of another country, sometimes of another race, except what he chooses to reveal? Then, you have children in pain and anxiety and adoring expectation, only to find that they are more his children or his people's children than your own; that your little baby girl, towards whom you looked for friendship, grows up like that minx of a paternal grandmother, who was notorious for her heartless flirtations—a breaker of many home lives, the cause of many duels; that your son is doomed before birth to be a brutal, thick-headed drunkard, because of his paternal uncle, Marmaduke, whose nose and career were red. The children of your brother would be twice yours . . .

I hear every door of my rooms opened and shut softly. Gracieuse has succeeded in putting the twins to sleep, and *now* she comes to look for me. I do not budge, I remain with my head under the eider-down, my two arms limp and desolate on each side of me. She shall see what an unhappy "little cabbage" I have become. She shall have remorse for having curtailed so much of her love and time from me. . . . Gracieuse has opened the door of my bedroom, she sees me and gives a gasp, she rushes to me, and all the insecure things in a woman's room tinkle, shake, and oscillate under her dragoon step:

"Whatever is my little cabbage hiding her pretty face for?"

My smothered, tragical voice says:

"I am hiding from the world. It's warm and dark

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and soft underneath here. Outside all is vast and empty. . . . No one wants me. . . . You, yourself, since I gave you the twins, you love me no more. . . . You are almost as ungrateful as a man."

Gracieuse lifts up the eider-down with a big fist that shakes :

"Day of my life!" she says, which, I believe, is a swear, "the whole world loves you—too much—only we can't keep on telling it to you all the time—with twins in my arms, too. We have all spoilt you between us, and *voilà!* What stories 'to-sleep-at-standing-up' has the child put into her head now? You know I'd give my life for you, villain."

"Yes; but you'd give mine for the twins."

She answers nothing but a tearful "*Boun Diou,*" because there is nothing to answer to what we both know for the truth, and she seeks in my pocket for my handkerchief, which is not there. Finally, she sits down and takes me on her bony knees, and wipes my face on a corner of her apron :

"Ah, *boun Diou,*" she mutters, "but they will all turn me into a donkey, these children—there! Now, look at her face, full of little fluffs of down stuck on it . . . and that hair that I did so nicely this morning. Come, villain, that I wash your face."

But we are in no hurry to have my face washed, and she dandles me in her lap to a bass of nonsensical grumbles, until I laugh and kiss her on her high cheekbone, which is the least prickly and smoothest part of her face . . . then I believe I fall asleep with my arms around her neck.

VI

MY EDUCATIONAL AND OTHER VIEWS

Grosvenor Square.

THE twins are without doubt improving with age. They have less wrinkles and more hair. It will not be red like mine. I am very glad—three blazing heads under one roof would have been quite monotonous.

Little May has good features, a well-proportioned face, somewhat insipid, but one which will bear inspection. I can quite see that her good looks will be of the genuine kind, and that she will not have, like me, to coax people into believing her pretty—which is a very good thing, for she would never have managed it. She is a thorough English baby, she will grow up as a thorough English girl; and an English girl is either plain or very good-looking. She does not know what it is to get admiration under false pretences. The good looks of my daughter will ensure me the homage of men long after my own attractions have faded. No man can be gallant enough to the mother of a pretty girl. I wonder whether this second-hand courting will satisfy me.

Reggie's face is a medley of good and bad points, the latter predominating. His ugliness is of the sort that

MY EDUCATIONAL AND OTHER VIEWS

tickles your liking. I'd much rather he should be ugly than plain.

Videar prefers him immensely to his sister, because of his sex, and also because he appeals to her feminine perverse taste more than if he had academic features. If he were uglier, she would love him still more.

Men, compared to women, are healthy, pure-minded creatures. No man in his senses and, certainly, no senses in man could be attracted by an ugly, repulsive woman; while it is an indisputable fact that woman has a perverted appetite for monstrosities in the male shape—the dwarf, the pimply, the bald, the obese, the poplarly, the vicious, the legless, the consumptive—she can love them thus. Consider woman's taste in hats. Again the same kink is revealed. And in food! What woman knows how to eat! Her appetite goes towards all that is unwholesome—pickles and green fruits.

How I envy my children the fifteen years to come! After those life will still be pleasurable for them, but not in the same measure. At fifteen May will begin being troubled with stays and a conscience, and long skirts and algebra. Reggie will have stiff collars and a hankering after "good form"—"what a fellow can do, and what a fellow can't do, don't-cher-know."

I wonder whether those children will be all orthodoxy and tradition like Austen, or the "anyhow" sort like me.

They have fifteen glorious years before them, fifteen years during which nothing will matter much except to grow, to feel oneself expanding under the good sun.

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Fifteen years spent in climbing trees, keeping house in the hollow trunks of giant beeches, feeding there, with mysterious voracity, on greasy remnants from a disdained dinner in the dining-room—to one's great relish, and no less great detriment to one's pockets.

Fifteen years spent in just being happy ! To feel, and feel only, without spoiling it by thinking ! To feel the rugose bark of a tree between your bare knees, the sea wind against your face as you run barefooted on the firm sand, the newness and perfection of every limb and organ, the divine immunity from every care and almost every harm ! How I wish I were growing again together with my children !

I was intended to be the youngest child of a numerous family, to be much and often petted, scolded and directed. Here, living between frivolous elders and grave infants, without anyone of my own age, I feel a sort of moral decrepitude invading me, I am becoming old through not being able to be young, like those apples plucked too soon that wrinkle without being ripe.

I am very sorry I had not the twins in my youth, I mean when I was fourteen. Then we would have grown up together and been pals. When they are my present age I'll be quite an old woman, and they shall give me their love and their respect, not their trust, their confidence, their comradeship—I, who have always longed so much for comradeship ! Gracieuse says that it is necessary that parents should be much older, so as to guide and teach ; but she is mistaken in most things except in the making of broth and chignon. Gracieuse's cleverness is merely *l'esprit de cœur*.

MY EDUCATIONAL AND OTHER VIEWS

Sometimes I shudder when I think I have got a daughter and that I'll have to bring her up somehow. As to the boy, that's very simple—I'll just let him grow—and he will mix with disreputable people, as all boys like to do, I believe, and they will teach him better and worse than I could ever tell him. But the girls! You have got to inculcate things in girls—false sense, and wrong shame, and manners. And my sense is my very own—my shame is nowhere—my manners are just instinctive, like those of a cat who withdraws her claws when she is stroked the right way. I am pleasant with most, because all are pleased with me.

Shall I talk goody-preachy to my girl, as all older women talk to me (Gracieuse, my Aunt Barbara, and even Videar, clever Vi), and feel a rotter all the while, as they must feel—chiefly Vi? I know so little (of course it's all Austen's fault). I thought marriage was to bring me a tremendous revelation, like a rocket lighting the very sky; but it is not that at all, not *my* marriage anyway; and now here I am with two young people on my arms to educate. And what have I got to impart? I think I must begin now, at once, to accumulate worldly wisdom, to feel for myself what life is like before I plunge them into it, as Gracieuse tests the hot water in their bath, with her big, bony, yellow elbow, before her encouraging "Poum! now, my little cabbages!"

If I had my way my children would not be taught anything during those young blessed years but what is instinctive and without effort. Instead of finishing their education by "accomplishments," I would start by

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these. I would teach them to sing, and to dance, to draw, to paint, to tell their thoughts. I would teach them the names of plants and beasts and stars. I would improve their natural humanity. I would help them to think before teaching them to read. I would not have a minute wasted in a classroom at an age when immobility is a torture. I would develop their bodies and leave the mind lying fallow until it was ready to receive the seed. I learnt to read in three months, but I was ten!

I am afraid I shall not be able to indulge in my pet educational methods. Austen would not approve, nor would Videar, nor my aunt, nor Gracieuse. I could struggle against one of them, but my effort thus drawn and quartered is a dead effort. It is in the same manner, by sheer numbers and tenacity, they prevented me from feeding the twins. Some ass of a doctor told Austen it would weaken me very much; Videar said it would spoil my lines; Gracieuse prophesied I would forget to feed them regularly (no doubt so as to have them all to herself), and my aunt shook her bonnet in disapproval, all the more formidable that it was silent and inscrutable. I have an idea that she did not think it quite proper. What was I to do against four?

If I had been firm my babies would love me only, while as it is they prefer Gracieuse. I am the one who plays silly games and tries to make them laugh; they look down on me with the austere severity of infants. Gracieuse is the hand that holds the bottle—vive Gracieuse! Down with that monkeyish frivolous mamma with sharp-pointed teeth and sparkling hair!

MY EDUCATIONAL AND OTHER VIEWS

Is the creature quite safe, do you think? The twins are not at all so sure as they look up from my most propitiating grimace to Gracieuse's dear old forbidding face.

I can't understand it; but I am much better appreciated by the very old than by the very young. I wonder whether the Churchwarden is dead. I hope so.¹

¹ See "Phrynette and London."

VII

MY SOAR-R TOOTH

Grosvenor Square.

THEY told me Mr Thingemebob was engaged just then and would I see his assistant? Certainly, I would see his assistant; in fact, I preferred it—him—I should say—assistants are generally young and, consequently, unhardened. The Buttons showed me up some stairs, climbed after me with his eyes glued on my gaitered boots, opened a door and said "Thank you." Why?

"Sir," I said to the assistant (it's no good—I cannot drop the Sir, or the Madame, or the Mademoiselle), "Sir, I like jam, but when I eat it my canine tooth on the left side teases me."

The assistant bowed and audibly licked his lips. "A-ah," he said. "We shall probe, we shall locate."

I was willing he should locate, but he made altogether too much of the probing. I looked at him, he waved me from the elbow—that is, as if his forearm sprung from the elbow—to an ugly-looking chair covered with dry-blood-coloured velvet. My cowardly heart jumped against my corseted ribs. I thought of the door, and considered the assistant speculatively. He was consulting with a multitude of small drawers and an array

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of fiendish, needle-like instruments. The morning was grey, my feet were cold; the blood was in my cheeks. If only my tooth could have ached a little! I wondered why I was ever born, and planned flight.

"Will not my hat be in peril?" I asked, fishing for a pretext. "And had I not better come back to-morrow with a small toque?"

"I was just going to ask you to remove it," said the assistant, washing his hands with gusto. "Better get it over now. I promise I won't hurt you."

I sat in the evil chair with my hands holding each other tightly, like two orphaned things! I looked at them, thought how pathetic they were, and swallowed a sob. The assistant flaunted a little Japanese serviette of crinkly paper, which reminded me of happy picnicking days and brought tears to my eyes. He placed it on a sort of head-rest padded with blood-curdling velvet, and the thing began to go up and grope for my head all of itself. I closed my eyes and thought of Austen with despair—my strong, kind husband how far he was! Would I ever see him again? Why was I here alone and unprotected, thrown by fate into the arms of an inexorable chair and of a probing assistant.

"In America," I said, as in a nightmare, "they electrocute. . . ." The assistant hovered above a revolving tray in front of me, making a deliberate and fearful choice among his tools.

"So they do," he conceded, and pounced upon a small mirror.

"And in Spain they garrot from behind like that. They make you sit on——"

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"Open a wee bitty," he said. "Which one did you say was soar-r?"

"I am not sure," I pleaded; "it only hurt this morning as I was eating the jam."

"You must not worry," said the assistant terribly close to me. "What are you worrying about?"

"Well," I protested, "there are other delights, you know."

Each of my teeth looked at itself in the little mirror, then a long curved knitting needle investigated. I thought of the Inquisition, of the rack, of Russian prisoners, of the late Sultan of Turkey, of Tripoli, of Teheran, of the hospitals.

"There was a strawberry pip between your gum and your tooth," said a heavenly voice with a Scotch accent, "that's what was making it soar-r." The assistant handed me a glass of tepid water and said "Thank you." Why?

"No hole?" I asked from the seventh heaven.

"Nae, nae," said the delicious man, and he laughed.

I wanted to laugh too, but my mouth was full of water. What excellent creatures dentists' assistants are, to be sure! I wished I could do some gracious act for this one—paying his bill seemed so inadequate, considering he had had me in his power and had let me go unhurt. I decided to stay for a few minutes and have a chat with him. I thought he would enjoy a little human converse, poor devil, to whom everybody showed their teeth. He was quite young, and pleasant-looking too, in spite of his frock coat and his red hands, and he certainly looked less professional now than when I entered.

MY SOAR-R TOOTH

I stretched myself luxuriously in his villainous arm-chair, and tried to remember how people spoke in Thrums.

"I was just a wee bitty—afearred," I said haltingly, and then I looked up in triumph. I wanted to add "maun," but thought on the whole I would not.

"There is no shame in being afearred, not for a woman, they are puir, gentle creatures."

Then the conversation halted.

"I have read Barrie," I put forward.

"And Burrs ?" he asked.

"Yes; but I prefer prose to verse, don't you ?"

"No; I am poetical, though I am a doctor and a dentist."

I sat up. "So am I—I mean poetical—that's why I prefer prose! Maun, isn't a brook that flows where it will more grand than waterr worrks ?"

The assistant looked unhappy and stared at his red hands.

"I quite understand what you mean," he said humbly and untruthfully.

"Well, then ?" and the query was revengeful.

The conversation lapsed again.

"Howver did you come to do those things? You look kind though, and you like poetry."

"What things?" he asked, in the tone of a schoolboy who has many different sins on his conscience.

"Well—probing, and—and false teeth, I suppose."

"One must do some sort of worrk, and a dentist makes more money than a doctor. But I am happy enough."

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Happy! in a room wainscoted in wood—painted reddish-brown! Happy! for ever facing a window framing a furniture depository. Happy! standing all day in hard boots on a soul-chilling linoleum. Happy! in probing dolorous cavities. Happy! in dispensing gas to hysterical females. Happy! Poor boy!

"And then there are Saturdays and the Sabbath."

"But it rains on Saturday."

"Not every Saturday," he replied optimistically.

"You should let me see your teeth from time to time," he advised; and hopefully, "there may be a real hole some day."

When I was downstairs and saw myself in the large mirror of the hall, I found I had no longer the pink carnation I had worn and I ran upstairs again. The assistant was standing in the middle of the room looking sadly at his red hands—my carnation looked like a target of flesh over his heart.

"My flower," I said, before I had seen he was wearing it. His two hands went up, looking like two crimson culprits, and fumbled at his button-hole, and he and I were as crimson and looked as guilty.

"Please don't," I cried, "please keep it, it's—I don't want it back—I—and," forgetting the seasons, "the garden is full of them," and I ran downstairs again.

A dentist is a man for a' that!

VIII

MY TORN-UP LOVE LETTER

Grosvenor Square.

MY OWN, DEAR, BEAUTIFUL MAN,—It is a month to-day since you left me for tigers. If you stay much longer, I shall have forgotten how to kiss by the time you come back—but it will be sweet to learn again.

Austen, my beloved husband, don't you understand that I want you madly, that you are being cruel, that you should not have taught me to love if it were to leave me loveless once initiated? Perhaps, if I had dared be myself with you, you would not have left me; but, ridiculous as it may seem, when we are together a false shame and a fear of you paralyse me. I am terribly afraid of your censure (even unspoken). If I had dared let myself be prompted by love and instinct—I might have kept you—I might have kept you. . . . That thought haunts me and rankles, and at night prevents me from sleeping. Have I been *maladroite*? Are you tired of me? But you do not know me, not the true Phrynette. You do not know what a tumultuous heart knocks against my blue corset. Oh! my love, you have created in me something which hides itself from you, something which might be a treasure of delirious

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happiness, but which instead torments me fiendishly in my loneliness. Austen . . . Oh ! my man, my man, come back, I can't stay alone like this—come back while it is only you I love, only you I want. . . .

Tigers ! What a waste of energy, of youth, of strength ! Tigers ! . . . *mon Dieu* ! . . . and I am here, withering and writhing, with my arms empty, empty, empty. . . . And yet they are pretty, girlish arms, with blue veins on the ivory skin, and long and slim, like snakes—two arms that could knot themselves around a man's body, around his neck, and throttle him, and kill him to sleep—and keep him, keep him. . . . Poor empty arms that not a cartload of babies could fill ! Why did we have the twins ? Perhaps it was they who estranged us, even before they were born. And now they steal some of your heart from me, and much of my time from you. What are those little pink nothings compared to you, glorious man, so strong, so brave, so immovable !

Austen, beloved, I am lovesick, terribly, and you are so far. And even were you with me, you are so tantalising, so unsatisfying. . . . God help me ! Surely it is not my fault if I happen to be in love with my husband. Everyone has his own peculiarities. And I am not responsible either for my temperament or for your—lack of it.

I believe I should be glad if you drank, or gambled, or beat me, yes, above all, beat me. I would be grateful for anything that could stir you to the rhythm of my pulse.

I wish you were brutal to me. I would love you to put your beautiful big British foot on my neck and

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press it—there—where it throbs. I know you are very kind, dear, and it is sweet of you to wrap me up in my cloak so carefully every evening so that I shall not catch cold ; but, ah, how gladly I would welcome bronchitis, if one wonderful night you were to snatch my wrap from me so as to kiss my throat !

Do you remember the last night we spent together ? We had been to see *La Tosca*, and we came back taut with music and passion. It is six months ago—let me see, what is the half of three hundred and sixty-five days ? One hundred and eighty odd, isn't it ? Austen, dar'ing, isn't it an awful long time ? In the morning I smuggled your pillow-case from your room to mine, and now, when I feel particularly tender, I unlock the linen relic and bury my nose in it. It has kept the odour of your blond hair—it's brilliantine really, but good brilliantine, and I love that blend of field flowers and Egyptian cigarettes. But, oh, Austen, that pillow-case, what a poor substitute for you !

Dearest, I have re-read my letter. I am afraid it is a very foolish kind of letter, and that you won't approve of it. I am sorry. Don't be cross. I retract lots of it. Besides, I won't send it to you.

I'll write to-morrow.

IX

MY NICE INDIGNATION

On Board La Grive.

THIS is too much. I am very indignant, I am very indig— Oh, rot—what a humbug I am! But, all the same, his audacity is without equal! It's a great pity I can't manage to be offended—I ought—if I were a nice woman!

He is here—on board. He is going to Biarritz.

Two days ago, on Thursday, I went to the Horse Show with Aunt Barbara. Captain de Montiers was competing. He did not see us until he went to fetch his cup in the Royal Box. Then, as he was coming down he passed before us, saw me, stopped short, bowed low, and, of course, I had to introduce him to Aunt Barbara. There was a seat next to her. He ingratiated himself into it, and began a regular siege of her. He never once looked at and hardly addressed me. All his smiles, his cajoling tones, his tit-bits of information as to what was going on, were for the benefit of Aunt Barbara. Finally, he asked her if he might call on her before his departure. I was thunderstruck. The machiavellianism of the man was not perceived by my innocent mind until we said to each other good-bye. Then to me,
sotto voce:

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"You live with madame, your aunt, you told me, did you not?"

I could not help laughing at so much diplomacy wasted.

"I lived," I said, "before my marriage. Adieu, then, Captain, I shall probably not see you again this season. We start for Bordeaux by Saturday's boat *en route* for Biarritz."

We left him on the steps under the marquee, holding his trophy upside down in a lamentable grasp. I felt a little sorry to have parted so coldly from him. After all, he was *petit père's* friend, and I had dismissed him as airily almost as one dismisses a waiter after the liqueurs. I actually pitied him for his evident regret.

As I see now I had undervalued his eagerness or—my own attraction. Whichever it is, it has brought him here.

We have two of the four deck cabins. I, Gracieuse and the twins occupy one; Vidéar, and many cabin trunks, fill the one opposite. As I was coming on deck just after tea, after having helped Gracieuse at sorting feeding bottles, Turkish diapers, sponges, blankets and other possessions of the twins, I was actually struck immobile with incredulity seeing Vi amicably conversing in neighbouring deck-chairs with the Captain! I approached with, I am afraid, the gait and expression of the village idiot.

"Is it a sea mirage," I asked, "or do I behold Captain de Montiers of the 57th Hussars?"

He rose and bowed.

"Himself, dear lady, in the act of turning over, with

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Madame your sister-in-law, many souvenirs of a delightful acquaintanceship."

"Imagine," Vidéar chimed in, "I had no idea you knew Captain de Montiers. The Captain tells me he met you and Lady Barbara on Thursday, and that you never said a word about leaving London. He thought we were still in town, and looked so surprised when I told him you were on board!" The Captain smiled and offered us exquisite cigarettes!

Is it my fault, I ask you, if some men are born hunters?

To-night, before dinner, I saw him in earnest confabulation with the head steward, as a result of which a poor, bald, meek old gentleman with rheumy eyes, who was just starting his potage, was requested to change seats, as that of Captain de Montiers had been given to him by mistake! The old gentleman had been sitting next to me. After that, nothing will surprise me. If Blaise shows such disrespect to age, how can I expect him to respect my youth?

We were sitting at the skipper's table. Vi sat next to him, and I sat between her and Blaise de Montiers. The other people were English, and Blaise took advantage of the fact to keep up in French a smothered fire of little nonsensical nothings, which are too futile for me to write down, but which gave me, at the time, the sensation of being sprayed with minute drops of perfume, soothing, cool and impertinent, splashing their dew on my ears, my lids, my lips, and down my bare neck and hot throat.

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Captain de Montiers is not a gentleman. I disapprove severely of his bringing-up. I shall not speak a word to him to-night but leave him alone to Vi. The seats at the table are twisting arm-chairs, like business people have in their offices. After dinner Vidcar got up first, and, as she twisted towards me, I twisted naturally in the opposite direction. Blaise de Montiers chose that very moment to twist also, and on my side, so that my feet were prisoners between his feet. He apologised with much grace, but I was angry. I am certain he did it on purpose—only a bounder or a Frenchman would do that.

To-day, Sunday, we played quoits and bull-board on deck, but the piano in the music-room was locked.

The skipper says we'll be in Bordeaux on Tuesday evening or Wednesday morning.

I am on my back and wonderfully near the ceiling, so near that I could count the crevices in the white enamel. I am in my cabin, in my little bunk. I am supposed to be having my afternoon nap. Gracieuse insisted—ladies' maids have no pity, they are doubly feminine—and I obeyed as always. But no one can force me to sleep.

We only left London twelve hours ago, and I have already forgotten what the air feels and smells like over there. Around the *Grive* it's an orgy of freshness, of breeziness, of limpidity. The gusts that come to me through the port-holes make me lick my lips after I have breathed; they taste salt and sweet. The sky is the colour of Austen's eyes and the sea is like green nougat. I could see it all ever so much better from the

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deck, instead of being pinned down here like a dragon-fly; but I am so accustomed to obey everybody that I do not yet realise that I am married now, and can please myself in everything—that, in fact, I am free! I don't know where Blaise is—smoking a pipe, perhaps, in the captain's cabin at the corner of the deck. Blaise knows already everyone on board, from the captain to the red-haired boy who rubs the brass. I want to be introduced to everybody. I am looking forward to knowing the red-haired boy. It's very considerate of him to wear my colour. I think we will get on beautifully together. I wonder whether the captain will let him play skittles on deck with us when all the brass is rubbed. But an English boat is the cleanest thing at sea. The very nails' heads are as shiny as mine or the boy's. Poor little beggar, perhaps he won't have time to play with me.

I have forgiven Blaise—besides, I don't think he did it on purpose really. We had the same impulse, that's all.

The nights are enchanting—if we go far enough towards the prow we do not hear the “musical” people in the Ladies' Boudoir. The people on board are less hideous at night as they go about—inoffensive shadows—than in the daytime. The women are cloaked, and flowing veils cover their heads. The tweeds of the men, their red faces peeling off under the sea air, are unseen ugliness.

Videar is a bad sailor and keeps mostly to her bunk, and, as I cannot read at sea—feeling too far from civilisation to be interested in it—it is not such a bad

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idea of Blaise after all to take the same boat. He is an amusing companion, and he can talk—it is a great pleasure to listen to a man who has a vocabulary and a voice full of meaning after two years of slang from inarticulate English “nuts.” His personality is not exactly a soothing one, but even he cannot prevent me from feeling, as the ship journeys forward, as if I were gliding unseeing and fearless into eternity.

X

MY BALCONY

Les Arbousiers.

BIARRITZ is to me full of *petit père*. We had been so happy here together. He was so gay, so whimsical, so full of vitality. It was in Biarritz one year—I remember, though I was only a little girl then—that father wrote some verses of welcome to Queen Victoria, who very gracefully acknowledged them, and afterwards mentioned them eulogistically while sitting to father for her portrait.

I tried to secure the villa father rented every year and was lucky enough to get it. So I am less lonely. If my husband is away, my father's presence is more than ever with me.

My balcony is a little marvel of forged iron and jessamine. My room is not situated very high—it is merely above a basement—and the tops of bushes in front of the house push forth hardily (through the intricacies of volute and cornice) branches and shoots and flowers, until it seems as if the stone itself had blossomed.

I love the garden, ill-kept as it is, because of its unbounded, extravagant profligacy. The very paths are smothered by the freedom of its vegetation, much to the

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disgust of my sister-in-law, who would find fault with Paradise itself if its luxuriance was detrimental to her veils and her lace sunshades.

How small is the largest room without a balcony ! A balcony, a stool, a warm night, a ray of moon, the nightingale in the arbutus-tree—has my room any walls ? A balcony, the morning scents, the sun playing bo-peep through the acacia-tree—I am just up, yet how far from my room ! All the gorgeousness of the day is mine. But it is at night I like it best—my balcony ! On dark nights when standing on it, like in a barque on a green sea, I go forth on long journeys, sad journeys, to an impossible land.

How fortunate that this garden, in spite of Justin, the gardener, has no pretensions to be a well-kept garden at all !

A well-kept French garden is most often an abomination. What space the close-clipped lawn occupies in England would be filled by flower-beds in the shape of a star or a crescent. There would be a round basin with goldfish, a water-spout, and a huge glass ball on a pedestal.

Our garden must have been hideous at its birth ; even now the trees are squatly instead of tall, through having been too much rebuked when they were young. But for many years now the trees and bushes have taken the responsibility of their growth into their own branches, and the result is charming.

The house belongs to a well-to-do retired pork butcher and his wife, whose son some twenty years ago was drowned bathing in Biarritz. Since then the parents

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have never lived here again. They let the house through a notary to a succession of different tenants each year, according to the season, for Biarritz has, in turn, a Russian, French, English and Spanish season, with all the year round a motley crowd of small-footed Basques and taciturn Spaniards.

Finding that they could let the house just as well without bothering as to its condition, or that of the garden, the landlord has left both deliberately alone, so that the house is execrable and the garden delightful. It is a large one surrounded by high walls decorated with broken bottles. Once you are resigned to the broken bottles, the rest is charming. There is a profusion of tamarisk which was intended for hedges, I suppose, but which care nothing for their mission and pry into every corner of the garden. There are arbutus-trees with lovely bloody berries, pines, acacias which show signs of having been repeatedly truncated, elder-trees, *sumac vernis*, laurels, magnolias, one oak, and four beeches.

I have the passionate love of the town-bred for the country—for things that grow. I know most plants and every tree by their vulgar name always, and by their Latin name often. I would be ashamed not to, though I don't know the multiplication table nor the names of the reigning families of the present time.

It's extraordinary how some people will remember the name of persons they have never met, whose history they don't know, simply because they are supposed to be somebodies.

Vi, for instance, knows only the flowers that are used for decorative purposes on the table, or on her corsage,

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but she does not know which is heliotrope and which wallflower (the garden is full of them). On the other hand, she can tell you whose daughter it was that that charming boy Dudley married in 1899: "His own grandmother was, of course, the daughter of the Duke of Northunbury who——" Why "of course"? To begin with, it is not proven she was his daughter: it never is; and secondly, it implies that everybody should know the career and adventures of his Grace's daughter because she was his daughter.

Goodness Divine! And to think that some people even read social columns in the newspapers and relish them, and hunt up the eldest branch and the cadet branch to their most minute ramifications. I am sure that had I met his Grace's daughter she would have been to me "The woman who closed her eyes while speaking, or the woman with the dead tooth." Whatever salient characteristic she had, I would have remembered it, and forgotten her father's name.

Where was I?—in the garden with the beech-trees. Beeches are the real mourners, not weeping willows. They are pallid and shivery as if sorrowing or insufficiently clad; they give me a feeling of nudity and desolation. The willow is a female tree of night character. You think she is weeping, but that is only her art; in reality she is merely dishevelled and yielding to every new breeze.

The statue of Cupid is still there. I never knew it in its babyhood. He must have been once a commonplace chubby creature, half angel, half child, but the years and the damp have given him dignity and pathos. He

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still smirks with one fat finger on his lip, but the rain has traced two rivulets as if of tears on his round cheeks. His two wings are broken, and, where he is not grey with age, he is green with moss. Thus dirty and battered, he is more real and touching. He is no longer a child, but something that cannot grow old.

Near him is a bench, charming and insecure, which convolvuli are doing their best to bind together. I often come and sit on that bench with a book—I drug myself with novels—my journal, or my manicure-case, or a *tartine* of bread and honey.

Yesterday Blaise found me there.

“What are you doing sitting full in the sun?”

“I ripen.”

“I would not if I were you. I wonder what you will be when you are ripe. It is all very personal and very rude, isn't it? But there are so many things in you which puzzle me, things that are there in embryo, and which may develop into delightful or perverse traits. You are a woman in the making; I see you changing every day, and I am not sure whether it is for better or for worse. But then I am not sure of anything about you.”

“Are you not? Well, my hair is mine, my teeth are mine, my age is mine——”

“Is your laughter yours?”

“No, is it not? Oh, Blaise, why did you ask? I know I am changing. I, more than anyone, know that I am changed, and for the worse, I think, Blaise. It is now particularly I need my father. I feel less and think more than before, and there's no one to help me to think.”

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Blaise got up and walked three times around the Eros of stone, his hands clutching one another behind his back.

"A young woman, especially a young wife, should not think alone. It is not good for her, and still less for her husband."

"You are going to suggest thinking *à deux*?"

"No; I never think in a beautiful garden, so close to Cupid too—it troubles me. Let me sit down and become merely receptive. I'll close my eyes and be happy."

"But why close your eyes?"

"I don't know. It's the orthodox way of being happy. Besides, I see you better with my eyes closed. There, now, I see you outlined in green like a saint in a church window, and the background is yellow and purple, and it's all worked out in a pattern, exactly like a cubist's lucubration."

"That's because you fixed me in the sun!"

"Yes; tell me, when I came you looked forlorn in spite of so much light. Why?"

"Oh, please let's talk about somebody else, preferably something else. What would you do on a day like this?"

"What would I do just now?"

"Yes; but don't say anything gallant, because my nerves won't stand it. I wish you would not talk 'pleasant' to me, as if you had just been introduced."

"Well, strangely enough, I was thinking about something quite ungallant, if you only knew."

"Oh, do tell me, was it about me?"

"What a question! You'd be very angry if I told you."

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"I won't be angry if you swear there's no flirt in it!"

"No flirt, I swear. It's just savagery. I was thinking— No, you'll be wild if I tell you!"

"Oh, do go on, or else I leave you here on the bench alone with your—what did you say—savagery?"

"Well, I would like to take you by the hair and drag you on the grass all over the garden, and bang you about, and bully you. There—now I have told you, I suppose you'll never want to speak to me again! I can't account for it, it's just viciousness. Sometimes I'd like to pet you as when you were a *gosse* in your father's studio, do you remember? But to-day you are in one of your moments that I dislike. You are the elusive, superior, reserved young person. I'd like to make you cry a little."

"Yes, I understand; but it's not cruelty, it's just play, brutal play, but it's only that. I've often felt just the same—with—with the twins, for instance. I want to roll them on the floor, to pull their little fat legs and bite their dimply little arms, not very hard, you know, but just hard enough to make them resist me and pit their little soft strength against mine. But it is not cruelty, you see. How could I be cruel to my children? It's play. We don't play enough in our childhood, or, rather, we are taught to play idiotic games with all the natural roughness and exuberance taken out of them, and so when we grow up we hardly know what to do with all that pent-up vitality. As to that teasing and gentle bullying that seems to trouble your conscience, have you never watched two young dogs—friends,

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mind you—playing at a sham fight together? They knock one another down a great deal, they bite a little, they pretend to be very angry, they roll ferocious r's at the back of their throats, they stare fixedly, cold muzzle against cold muzzle, ready to spring again, and now and then one of them will bark triumphant, like a trumpet call, 'What ho! old boy, isn't a dog's life worth living!'"

Blaise pulls sceptically at his black moustache.

"I accept your translation of the bark—and isn't there an English proverb that says 'Every dog has his day'?"

"Yes; that's where he has the advantage over man."

"How discouraging! I am most disappointed in all you say. Here am I telling you the instincts of my savage breast, and, instead of blushing and not knowing what to say, or getting angry, you deliver me a lecture on how bullying is puppy's play, and all that is natural and proper. I believe the two are synonymous for you, aren't they?"

"Yes, of course; but why did you want me to blush and be angry?"

"Oh, for private and mysterious reasons of my own, I suppose. Phrynette, on my word, you are the most trying thing on earth."

"No; the most trying thing on earth is a restive comma. Oh, you may shrug! I must exchange this fountain pen, I am not making any headway with that letter to my husband. There, I may be trying, but you must admit I am very polite."

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"That means that I prevent you from writing, is that it?"

"How very perspicacious you are!"

"I wish you were not so frivolous. One can't talk of anything important with you."

With a show of great reluctance I close my blotter and screw down my pen.

"Oh no; you don't wish anything of the sort! Serious people abound everywhere; they are the commonest species of beings, and have absolutely nothing to say, important or not. You see, they start life by making a huge knot in their handkerchiefs, and all the time they keep their thumb on that knot and their mind on that thought, 'I must remember to be serious.' If you had ever tried it, you would know that it is such a difficult thing to remember. It takes up all your mental energy. You don't know my aunt, do you?"

"No, though I believe your father showed me a portrait he had done of somebody who might have been——"

"No, it might not—but what I was going to say is that my aunt has tied the largest knot in the largest handkerchief in the whole of London. Well, what happened?"

"Oh, do tell me what has happened?"

"Nothing, big silly, it shows that you don't know her."

"And I don't want to know her. People to whom nothing happens are not worth it."

"Worth what? Mister Conceited—knowing you, or having an avalanche of things happening to them?"

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"Oh, for the right to shake you ! I thought you were going to say something."

"Well, I have been talking for fully half-an-hour."

"Saying was the word I used, I think. Here you are making my mouth water with that mysterious aunt of yours—you dragged her into a most private conversation——"

"As a rule, aunts are not dragged in, they just intrude by putting their foot down. As I was saying when you interrupted me, my aunt never achieved anything except the art of never smiling at any time—like that game we play when we are little, you know. Somebody tickles your nose and chin with a feather or a long grass, and your lips must not even twitch."

"How jolly ! Let us play that game, I'll——"

"You see, interrupting again ! I, who never pretended to be serious——"

"Could even you pretend so well as all that ?"

"Silence ! I have achieved many things already. I made my father very happy, I gave Gracieuse someone to love, I had the twins, I won five pounds at Ascot, I made Austen—— Oh, never mind Austen. As for my aunt——"

"Madame your aunt does not amuse me. Go on speaking about yourself."

"I'll choose my own subjects, please—who loves me loves listening about my aunt."

"Then I love listening——"

"Oh, I did not mean it like that at all. What an audacity !"

PHYNETTE MARRIED

"I am not sure that I did mean it either," he said, with a puzzled look at the clouds.

I got up.

"There, and now you are being rude. It would be much better that I should finish my letter indoors!"

"It would be much better, but not so good!"

I stamp my foot and leave him laughing in the garden, with his back against Cupid.

Videar has a new maid. She engaged her this morning. I wonder how Vi can consent to let that beautiful creature wait on her. To me it would seem a desecration to let such a goddess unlace my boots. She is a Breton girl from Douarnenez. Her origin reveals itself in her very distinct and unusual type. She has of Armorica the melancholy and apparent mysticism. She is a creature of the sea and of grey skies. She has somewhat of a drowned look. Her beauty is of the sleek, slim, smooth type. Her hair is limp, and frames her face closely; her skin is pale, her eyes green and wide open, distant, as if from looking into *glaugue* depths. Her mouth is always slightly open, and her chin raised. Her arms hang, her clothes cling to her supple limbs. She is long and languid as a sea nymph.

"Well, what do you think of her?" Videar asked.

"She is the pet daughter of Thetis. What a skin, what eyes! She smells of mists and brine. Won't it be uncomfortable for you to make up in front of her? It sets my teeth on edge to see that wonderful creature in a black cloth dress. Oh, Vi, imagine her in pale green

MY BALCONY

chiffon ! Don't you think you are guilty towards society in accepting her as a servant ? She should be an Empress or a painter's model."

"She is rather pretty," concedes Videar, "but she can cut out quite nicely !"

XI

MY NEIGHBOURS

Les Arbousiers.

OUR nearest neighbours are some English people living at "Sea Spray." Why "Sea Spray"? Ah, *voilà*, because the sea never touches it, of course. Of all the stupid names, the stupidest of all are cornered by the seaside landlords. There is a villa not far from here called "My Wife's Idea." Now, is it not mean and caddish, I ask you, putting all the blame on her? Words and names count enormously with me. A rose called, say, porcupine, would not at all smell as sweet. Who can tell me why most white dogs in France are called "Black"?

The people at "Sea Spray" are two, and a negro man-servant. The husband is a middle-aged man, fat and bald, in knickerbockers and a pipe. His face is like a sunset, his eyes are bulging and bloodshot and whisky-fied. She is very thin, wears her hair like the Queen, and dresses in white. That is a great pity, for a white dress must have a cut and cachet if one is not to look grotesquely rustic in it. The lady's age I cannot guess; she may be looking precocious at twenty-five or well preserved at fifty. She is one of those precise and yet vague beings, the sex of whom you guess at by their chignon and their skirts. Her partiality to virginal

MY NEIGHBOURS

piqué and a white sailor-shaped hat, trimmed naively on one side with a bow of pale blue satin, makes her look like a pickled pensionnaire. Her dog is called Bidgoo (Bijou). Poor thing! I don't mean to be uncharitable towards my neighbours at all, but, really, it is hard to understand why some people should go out of their way to be ridiculous. And then, perhaps, I am a little angry with them for the bad quarter of an hour they gave me the other night. I was preparing for bed, Gracieuse was pottering about the room, folding this and hanging that, the window was wide open, and we both heard a hair-raising woman's scream from "Sea Spray." The opening notes were as deep as a drowning cry from the bottom of a well, terminating in a succession of acute, shrill screams like a locomotive in a fog. I stood up, brush in hand, immobilised with horror. Gracieuse was staring at me with dilated eyes, her fingers pulling, pulling idiotically at the string of a petticoat until it came off altogether. "Sweet Jesus," she gasped, "there goes a soul in pain!"

"It's the English lady," I cried; "that drunken beast of a husband is murdering her. Come on. Help me with my coat. Let us run!" Then another shriek, and another, and another. On the stairs we met Vidcar in her dressing-gown with a pale face.

"Did you hear?" she said.

"Yes; it's from 'Sea Spray.' We must go and see—quick—her husband is cutting her throat."

"No, he has just passed the gate. I heard him whistle his dog and call 'Bijou, Bijou!'"

"Maybe it's the black man that's assaulting her,"

PHRYNETTE MARRIED

said Gracieuse, with the relish of a *fait divers gourmet*, "they say they are not safe, the blacks."

"Nonsense," Videar protested. "He may be black but he is not blind. Let's go to bed. Besides, she has stopped shrieking. An Englishwoman's villa is her castle. Just think how foolish we would look to invade the place half-dressed and at this hour. Go to bed, go to bed. Whatever it was it is all over. Sleep well. Good-night, Gracieuse, don't read *fait divers*, and don't dream of negroes."

We all went to bed, but I slept very badly and so did Gracieuse. That was not all; last night at the same hour the shrieks started again, and this time Vi, Gracieuse, Justin, the gardener, armed with a pitchfork, and myself with a revolver went in force and at a sharp run along the dark road toward "Sea Spray." The nearer we got the more pitiful the noise was. Somebody was being drawn and quartered—the white lady of the square villa was agonising. When we reached the laurel hedges, panting and with our hearts in our mouths, we heard also a piano accompaniment. The English lady was singing!

XII

MY SISTER-IN-LAW PHILOSOPHISES

Les Arbousiers.

MY sister-in-law stands in the hall with her back towards the open door. She is in a riding-dress and quite at her advantage.

Like all her countrywomen she looks best when dressed on straight lines, and most soberly. Vi told me that it was Queen Alexandra who started the fashion of tailor-made costumes. I hope her subjects were grateful to her.

Englishwomen are the least feminine-looking of women. Serge suits them better than silk, they seem to flounder in flounces, and a train can never reconcile itself to their stride. As Blaise said once, truly if a little cruelly: "Pity Englishwomen should be so much like Englishmen!"

We admire their men for their long straight limbs, their determined jaws, their rather hard, sabre-cut mouths, their big strong hands and feet, their abrupt speech and manners which pass for frankness in a man but for coarseness in a woman. In her, all these traits are hardly intoxicating.

My own sister-in-law is not a brother-in-law in petticoats, which does not prevent her looking her

PHRYNETTE MARRIED

best when turned out by a tailor. She stands at the open door—a credit to him and to her race—drawing on her big gauntlet gloves.

The sun, an immense sun, an intense sun, almost a boisterous sun, overflows from the sea, from the town, from the garden, into our narrow little corridor, and Vi stands there against that huge gaiety of the open air. The sun puts *pepitas* into her hair, and licks her high, glossy riding-boots. There is an air of pleasure—coming activity about her. The summer, the heat, the light, the gladness of the outside world seem to pour into her by that door, to envelop her, to claim her as one of the joyful beings, one of those who just put out their arms and embrace joy, as you embrace a beautiful child, without stopping to look if its face is quite clean.

Vi seems one of those ephemerids that dance and die in a ray of sun, just one of them, much bigger but quite as light.

I sit on the last step of the staircase, facing her, with my chin on my knees and my two arms hanging down, each more despondent than the other.

“I am beginning to think,” says Vi, “that I am getting old.”

“You hide it well,” I mumble. “However did you discover it?”

“That d—— Major, of course; he is fully a quarter of an hour late—second time a man kept me waiting.”

“And the first?”

“Archie—we all thought he would die of apoplexy long before he did. Oh, that Major! And to think that

MY SISTER-IN-LAW PHILOSOPHISES

up to now it always was I who practised the art of how to keep people waiting. What are you reading ? ”

“ I am not reading. I have finished it—Sterne. Isn't it strange the end is just as delightful as the beginning—very unusual for a sentimental journey.”

“ Hum, Sterne, is it ? Oh, I know—‘ Around the World in Eighty Days.’ I've done it faster myself. Oh, Verne, was it ? Never mind, I've never read either. But you read far too much, that's what makes you so dull, my dear.”

“ If I don't read I think, and not always nice thoughts—sometimes they are only stupid. I was just wondering how it is there are such a lot of majors in the world. Do they always evolute from captains to majors, or do majors breed other majors-like rabbits ? Hotels, liners, seaside casinos, garden-parties, bazaars, golf clubs, riding schools—wherever you go you are sure to find majors strewn on your path. They are never quite young, nor are they quite old ; they are all retired, so, I suppose, as to have more leisure to conduct *cotillons* and masculine fashion columns, and escort good-looking widows on horseback.”

“ What rot you do talk ! Besides, this one is a real major. I knew him in India.”

“ Oh, are there majors in India ? I thought they were only *from* India. I suppose they are none of them husbands or they would not be so prodigal of their presence.”

“ Ah, ah, *je vois où le bât vous blesse*, you little donkey ! All these sarcasms and these dark humours and these melting attitudes because madame's husband is not for ever in her petticoats. It's a way of speaking—

PHRYNETTE MARRIED

yes, I know, dodo petticoats. I believe he is quite faithful to you anyway."

I laugh, but it is not a pleasant laugh.

"Your 'quite' amuses me! Are there many degrees of fidelity? I am sure he is faithful. Do you suppose a woman does not feel the beat of her husband's heart? That's why, whereas a wife may *deceive* her husband, he can be *unfaithful* only to her. I know Austen loves only me. What I complain of is that he does not love me *enough*. You can grapple with a vice, you can supplant a rival, but what are you to do with a tepid-natured husband?"

"I don't want to take his part just because he is my brother—you are my dear little sister for the matter of that—but, now be just, if you compare him to other men——"

"I can't compare, perhaps you can——"

"There, there, draw in your claws, please; though, however much you tried, you could not offend me this morning, it's too glorious a morning. Well, then, if I compare him with other men I don't find him guilty of any unpardonable wrong after all."

"He has the unpardonable wrong of being absent!"

"Well, my dear, if you can't do without Austen for three months, you should have married a Turk. I believe they are the best, all-round husbands: they have a strong sense of their responsibilities, and are always at home."

"Oh, it's not that, I could part with Austen if it were for some reason, however unreasonable, say war, for instance, or exploration, or study, or illness, but—for mere pleasure!"

MY SISTER-IN-LAW PHILOSOPHISES

"How can he? Did I ever go anywhere without him?—not even to the dentist. But three months tiger-hunting! You see, this constitutes a precedent. After this there is no reason why he should not go for two months' yachting, one month fishing, one month shooting, and like that all the year round, and without me if I am to fulfil my purpose and bear him children. You know I don't think it wise. Everyone needs to be encouraged into doing one's duty. Every wife, like a fruitful land, needs to be husbanded. It's not so much he that I regret now (that stage is passed) as the waste of me!"

My sister-in-law flipped her boots with her riding-whip and shrugged her shoulders:

"As to that, it's yourself is the waster. Look at me, am I wasted? Why, you, young and attractive as you know yourself to be—oh yes, none better—why you should mope over books for hours that might be more youthfully spent—Oh, I have no patience with lachrymose Penelopes!"

"I am not lachrymose, I am angry."

"Quite as detrimental to your appearance. What would you say if you had been a widow for fifteen years like me?"

"I would say very little about it."

She laughed:

"You are getting more English every day. You must take care that your charming French impertinence does not degenerate into rudeness. You have not got the build and the manners that go with it."

"Vi, dear old thing, forgive me. If I loved you less

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I'd be with you the politest of sisters-in-law. Tell me why did you never marry again ? ”

“ Oh, because short-lease marriages have not yet become the fashion, and—seriously—it's so much more simple like this. If I married now I would have to take a boy. I'm getting too old to marry anyone of a suitable age—and boys are so terribly exacting ! They have all sorts of adorable, foolish notions about you, yes, even modern boys. One can only suppose they don't read novels and never go to the play. Anyhow, to live with a young innocent soul is a perpetual effort—that is, if you want to retain his love. You must be for ever furbishing up your prestige and be very vigilant over the roots of your hair. To love a young man is very sweet ; he is grateful for so little (if he only knew how little !) : but to live with him is just hard labour. You must smile while your young husband and an old rheumatism are both at the same time at your feet ; you are for ever afraid lest you forget the keys on your dressing-table ; and the dear boy will always insist on giving you the seat that most faces the light. No ! no boy for me, not on conjugal terms, anyway. . . . Ah, well, shall I send you any novels if we should pass a lending library ? We may go through the town.”

“ A lending library ! You won't find one in the whole of Biarritz. You forget we are not a nation that cares for literature. We produce, it is true, but, like chemists, we are afraid of consuming our own products.”

My sister-in-law glances over her shoulder into the sunlit garden, then she frowns at the watch on her wrist :

MY SISTER-IN-LAW PHILOSOPHISES

"You are too old a companion for me," she says, "and much too worldly-wise and clear-sighted for happiness. Ah, here is the Major. There, child, you need not run away. What would *vieille barbe* (that's how she calls Aunt Barbara) say if she saw you jumping three steps at a time? . . . How do you do, Major? What an early worm you are! I am afraid I'll have to keep you waiting, I am not quite ready yet. We said eleven, didn't we?"

And my sister-in-law goes upstairs nonchalantly to practise for a quarter of an hour the feminine art of keeping people waiting.

"Yes?" asked my sister-in-law.

I looked up.

"I did not say anything."

"No; but you have been smiling to your hairbrush for the last three minutes, and I want to know why. Did anything happen at the casino to-night?"

"No; that's just it. I was reflecting that to be married has some advantages."

"I'll let that pass because I want to know the end——"

"It enables you to be more consolatory, less harsh in your dealing with other people; it leaves them a sort of open door of hope."

"Yes?"

"Oh, you know what I mean. When a girl says 'no' to a man, it means she does not like him; when a married woman says 'no,' he may suppose she has a conscientious objection, and his feelings are spared."

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"My dear Phrynette, you take my breath away—an old fox like me too. Well, you are a very good girl, as girls go nowadays, but I must say that your goodness is of the complicated order. It's curious how you deal with existing facts—you seem to turn everything around you into footstools for your little feet."

"It would be quicker to say that I have a sense of humour. And what do you mean by goodness—fastidiousness?"

"No. I mean virtue."

"And by virtue?"

"Oh, well, chastity, purity. You know very well what it is I mean."

"We don't mean the same thing then. To me virtue is self-love, self-exaltation, a sort of spiritual selfishness. Sometimes that egoism will stretch and embrace another love, conjugal virtue, for instance; or, sometimes, it ranks itself as a superhuman quality and apes the divine, like religious chastity; sometimes it is a proud rebellion against Nature's plans, like vegetarianism and self-imposed spinsterhood; and the commonest and most tragical sort of virtue is the virtue of women whom nobody wants. My own goodness is merely fastidiousness. I gave myself to Austen because he was more lovely than I was, and because, next to myself, I loved him best. I happen to be good, as you say, because I love my husband, or because I happen to be married to the man I love. But, do you know, if Austen had said to me, 'Come and be my own, *sans* priest, *sans* paper, and *sans peur*,' I would, I would, I would."

MY SISTER-IN-LAW PHILOSOPHISES

And you would say I was wicked, and yet it would be just the same me."

"Don't make me laugh," said Vi, "while I put on my chin strap—it splits the caoutchouc. I can't imagine Austen saying, 'Come and be my own,' you know."

I sighed.

"Nor can I, Videar. Austen is not enough of a splendid savage. Why, instead of that tame wedding, why did he not, by the right of the male, seize me by the hair, throw me on his shoulders, and carry me away? It has always been my belief that the Sabines were willing."

"Well, there is no one to contradict you."

"But there is my instinct—and yours—to confirm. The pity of this age, Videar, is that the women have still preserved their instinct of beautiful preys, while the men are no longer the conquerors."

Videar teaches me a philosophy all her own. This morning she came into my room while I was dressing. Captain de Montiers was to come and fetch us for a motor drive.

"Would you wear a brown or a white veil with a blue hat?" I asked.

"I thought you had one to match."

"I have, but I don't know where it is" (feverish search). "Oh dear, ring for Gracieuse, will you?"

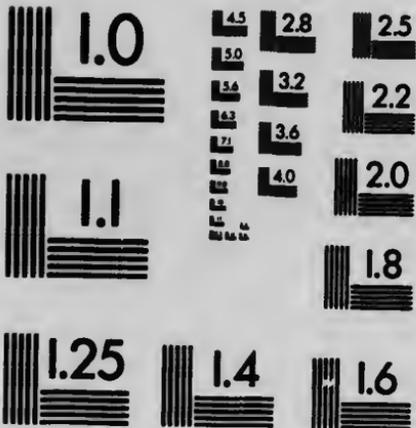
Gracieuse appeared, a feeding bottle in hand and safety-pins between her lips:

"Madame's blue veil? *Mon Dieu*, let me see, I had



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it in my hands this very morning. I must have put it away with the bibs of these darlings. I'll go to the nursery and see."

The wheels of a motor car crunched the gravel under the balcony.

"Never mind, the brown one will do," I cry after her. "I haven't time now."

"Phrynette," said my sister-in-law, while rouging her lips, "never neglect your nails for punctuality."

I extended towards her ten coral-tinted digits.

"Yes, yes, I know. It was merely a *façon de parler*, but, all the same, you choose the wrong veil for the sake of fifteen minutes. Men are used to waiting, my dear. They don't mind that, but they like to anticipate perfection."

"I was trying not to keep *you* waiting."

She shrugged her shoulders—a habit she took from me.

Who is supposed to be my chaperon, Vidéar, Gracieuse, or the twins? My sister-in-law is the worst chaperon any prudent husband could choose—she attracts men instead of repelling and dispelling them. A chaperon should have leisure, and should be plain, ill-natured, angular, unsympathetic, unmarried, jealous and inquisitive. Vidéar has all the reverse qualities; and, as for leisure, what with her toilet, her bathing, the casino, the flying visits to the nursery, and her own numerous flirtations, she manages to be quite as busy in Biarritz as she was in London. As for Gracieuse—well, I can't understand how it is Gracieuse never had children of her own. It is true she was never married

MY SISTER-IN-LAW PHILOSOPHISES.

(and I don't think she would have liked a husband even if she could have got one), but it is for women like her, the plain and the sour, that there should be some dispensation of nature to enable them to have children without matrimony or human agency. Meanwhile, my children are more hers than mine, for, whereas I love them, she adores them. She sleeps in my dressing-room, which communicates with the nursery and my bedroom. I can sleep through the most catlike wailings from the cots, but Gracieuse awakes before the wailing starts—she just feels it coming on, I suppose! In spite of her flat chest and her moustache, she is motherhood itself in flesh and bones—principally bones. With her it is mere instinct—there is no merit in it really—she does not reason, her heart merely goes out to the smallest. I am certain she prefers the girl to the boy—because she weighs two pounds less! Gracieuse would love a baby hedgehog more than any grown-up genius. I am nowhere since I can blow my own nose. No, I am exaggerating, and showing much ingratitude; but I am very meanly jealous of my babies. My maid still loves me, no doubt, but I am no longer the “little cabbage.” After all, it was I made these twins.

XIII

MY LITTLE INDIAN BROTHER

Les Arbousiers.

THIS afternoon my sister-in-law came into my room bringing me a long box of grey wood, like a doll's coffin.

"Look at this," she said, "the Major has just brought it. He wants you to see it. He said to me, but in confidence, that he finds it curiously like you ; and, if you like it, it would give him great pleasure if you would keep it."

"You make me quite curious. What is it ?"

"A little statuette he bought several years ago in India from a native artist. Open the box."

It was a small terra-cotta figure of an Indian boy, sitting with his knees drawn up, and his two slim yellow arms hanging down, presenting the empty, half-closed palms of the very thin hands. At his feet he had a curious instrument, like an old-fashioned bed-warmer.

"As for me," Vi protested, "I can't see at all why he should think it's like you—a boy, and practically nude too ! There's something in the attitude, perhaps—you often sit like that, you know. I don't care for it, do you ? If I were to look at him long that boy would grate on my nerves staring into nothing like

MY LITTLE INDIAN BROTHER

that. And that queer instrument—why does he not play on it since it's there, instead of waiting? What is he waiting for, do you think?"

"I don't know, perhaps the passing of a princess in a palanquin—cymbals, gold cloth, red rose, white smile—perhaps for a kick."

"What does he stare at?"

"At a flood swelling, swelling up, or perhaps at a famine——"

"Poor little chap!"

"Yes, poor little chap! He is too sad to be beautiful—but I'd love to keep it. Give my thanks to the Major. I thought he was all dancing pumps and waxed moustaches, but he has eyes as well. Tell him I am very grateful, that the lone boy is exquisite and eloquent and—not a bit like me!"

"Of course not, not in the slightest," and Vi glides out triumphantly to report to the Major.

I touch the two pathetic little terra-cotta hands with my hands of flesh:

The sculptor saw you before he made you—of that I am sure. Once there has been a lonely boy staring at something, perhaps a big river containing all the tragedy of continuity, and waiting, waiting for something which he did not quite expect. Oh, you are so like me, my poor little Indian brother!

XIV

MY LATE FRIEND MOSES

Les Arbousiers.

KARAKAKSOPOULOS is stretched at the foot of my bed pretending to sleep, but if I move my feet under the eider-down he is awake and pouncing, digging his claws in the satin while his tail wags slowly and triumphantly. There never was such a cat for pretending. He pretends that my toes are a brood of plump mice. He pretends that the train of my dressing-gown is a moving staircase, and he lets himself be carried by it throughout the room. He pretends that my hair, as I sit at my dressing-table, is swinging purposely for his amusement. I do not love him much, but he intimidates me. The yellow wisdom of his eyes stares me into something like respect. He loves me and I pretend to love him. Having saved his life creates moral obligations towards him; the principal one is an effort to love. Also, the death of his brother lies on my conscience.

I even push pretence so far as sometimes to kiss him. I am not at all so disgusted with animals as with human beings. I'd rather find in my soup the hair of the strangest dog than that of the dearest friend. I'd rather drink after a bird than a person. Animals have an all-

MY LATE FRIEND MOSES

excusing grace. To see a hen drink is a pleasure. She hops without haste to the water jar, she has no fixity of purpose, she is thirsty, and her instinct leads her to the water. She does not make drinking an important business as we do—drinking does not prevent her from a quick peck, as she passes, at that insufferable, white Orpington—"a cat or a hen, my dear, cot—cot—cot—codock!"—nor from scratching a hasty acquaintance with that temerarious worm venturing from under the old broken flower-pot. Then there is a hop and a grating of claw on the glazed surface of the basin. The hen has taken possession of it, has annexed it, and she picks a drop of water as one picks up a pearl, swiftly, daintily. Her greed is as nothing compared with her precision and grace—she lifts her head to swallow, and it seems as if she were going to burst into a song of thanks to kind nature. Your neighbour at table opens thick lips in the middle of some inane sentence, and glues them to some exquisite Venetian glass of which he is quite unworthy. His thick brain forgets you in a sort of warm dizziness of well-being and while, bored but polite, you say to him tentatively, "Then you do not think the Bill will pass before next session?" he is saying unto his glass, "My own '98 Lafite would knock this one into a cocked hat." And when he puts back the fragile crystal glass, you can see that it is defiled by a greasy crescent below its gilt brim.

A fortnight ago Blaise and I rescued the two cats from a pond not far from the house. Blaise did not want to rescue them *à* all. He dislikes all animals; but, when he saw me kicking off my shoes and tugging

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at my stockings, he sacrificed his antipathy and his white flannel trousers, and waded in resignedly.

It was three sorry creatures that came out of the pond. Blaise was green and slimy up to the knees; in each hand, held at right angles from his immaculate coat, was a viscous and inert little kitten of the size of a rat. One was called Moses for obvious reasons. His brother, who is as black as a raven, was called Karakaksopoulos, which means (in Greek) "son of a jackdaw"; at least, Blaise says it does, and my ignorance, strange to say, is not of the aggressive kind.

I brought up both Karakaksopoulos and the late Moses on the bottle, as they were too young to feed themselves. They were the dearest little foster cats one can imagine, quite an example to the twins; only, try as I would, I could not keep them warm. In the daytime I used to place them both inside my chinchilla muff, and the muff full in the sun on the hot stone of my balcony. I do not think Gracieuse should have scolded me so soundly about it—fancy preferring dead chinchilla to live cats! At night I used to take them in bed; they liked it very much. I suppose I was as warm and soft as their own mother.

And now I'll glide over things because I come to the tragic part of the story. I feel like a murderess. I had never killed any being before except spiders and fishes, and then not even fishes, for I always asked *petit père* to take the hook off for me, and I always closed my eyes while he did it.

Unfortunate Moses! I could not have felt more sorry if I had killed a human being (except one I loved). For

MY LATE FRIEND MOSES

homicide there might be justification—the death of a human being is sure to bring deliverance to somebody or other—but Moses was sinless and beautiful. He had as yet killed no mouse, stolen no chicken, upset no workbasket, and the rings on his tail were perfect.

Karakaksopoulos, don't look at me like that! You know it was only misplaced kindness. I loved him too well if not wisely!

Poor late, lamented Moses! I rolled over him one night and suffocated him in my sleep!

Blaise and I buried him together in the garden. Blaise dug the hole, and then looked sadly at his hands. If the twins had not been such babies how they would have enjoyed Moses' funeral! All children do, almost as much as peasants.

I sowed forget-me-nots on his tomb. Blaise said that in Greek "myosotis" means "mice's ears," and I thought that had Moses lived he would have developed an interest in mice.

I had to tell Blaise how he had died, and he said—I don't think he should have said that—"Here lies Moses, the blessed cat, the three times happy Moses, who died without having known his happiness." I buried my face in my hands and pretended to weep, but I am afraid that even my neck was red.

XV

MY BÊTES NOIRES

Les Arbousiers.

THEY are here, both of them—my Aunt de Tréveret and my cousin Jules.

They are just as disagreeable as in the past, and much fatter. A cube surmounted by a globe, that is Jules; he is quite a block of the old ship, as they say in England. We met them yesterday in the Rue Mazagran. I would have pretended I had not seen them, but my aunt stopped in the middle of the road. "Hold," she cried, "but it is that dear Phrynette. How very droll to meet her here!"

Why droll? I have been stumbling against dozens of people I know. To that stupid remark she added one stupider.

"And this," she said, staring at Vidéar with the bulging, bloodshot eyes of a female too tightly laced, "and this is, of course, Lady Barbara. I have not had the pleasure of meeting you before, but I easily recognise you from Phrynette's letters."

Vi did not feel flattered. I explained matters and people, and we all walked together to the confectioners. My aunt had grabbed me by the arm, and was making me feel very hot. I don't like being touched by people I

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dislike. Vidéar and Jules walked in front. She looked all sweetness and youth by the side of that fat little old-young man. He had no elasticity, no enthusiasm in his walk at all. How sad it is to be old at his age !

My aunt asked me many questions which I answered wrongly because I was not listening. She has the effect of a cook-curiosity which surely is the most ignoble of sins ; flesh, which is disgusting ; and *bêtise* which is unforgivable. Her eyes are the eyes of a common soul. They are black, round and very piercing, and for ever investigating. What gives them that look of vulgarity is their lack of rest. While my aunt is speaking, she is listening at the same time to what other people are saying, computing the cost of other women's things, counting the feathers in their hats, and the rings on their fingers. In a word, she is small. She told me the news of my old Paris friends with many details and little charity.

"And Gabrielle," I asked, "how is she ? She sent me a *faire part* of her marriage last year."

"She was divorced last month. She divorced her husband, though I am sure that if he had cared to—investigate, he might have been the top dog. Of course, my dear, she had lovers, only, as they were all poor, she kept up appearances. Well, it is clear. For a pretty woman whose husband is poor to have no diamonds is in itself a certificate of virtue."

"Ah ?" I said, "it never struck me." My aunt peacocked. "But, then, by wearing paste one may give away one's reputation."

"Oh, it always shows, my dear. You can always tell

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paste. Now I could tell say, within a hundred pound the price of any jewel. Those pearls Lady Dare wearing, for instance, what would you say she gave for them?"

Really, I thought, this is a matter for her own conscience!

"It all depends," went on my aunt, "how long ago it was."

Very true, I reflected, but odiously uncharitable.

"For, as you know, value goes up every year."

"You don't say so," I gasped. She was reversing all my notions.

"Yes; every year—invest in pearls if you can. You will always be able to sell at a profit."

"Oh, pearls? Oh, I see——"

What a pawnbroker of a woman!

At the *pâtissier's* she and her son ate enormously. I had a better look at him. He is still more displeasing when you see him near. I can't think how Vi can say he is handsome. To begin with, he is so thick. I like men to be lean and iron-built. I am sure that if I were to dig my index sharply into Jules' arm, it would plunge into it like a bolster, and to-morrow his skin would show an echymose. Then his ears are not hemmed round at all—they are flat, yellow, and slightly pendulous. His other features are regular. He has his mother's eyes. His little moustache is chocolate in colour, with hair to match. He has unsympathetic hands, covered with warts and reddish little hair. He bites his nails to the quick. I can't truly say he is ugly, but it would be much better for him if he were. I daresay he looks quite

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handsome as a photograph. I hope we won't see much of him or his mother.

We parted near the Russian church.

"Rather nice boy that," said Videar, on the way back. Poor Major! I prefer the Major with his pepper-and-salt hair, his brick-red face and honest blue eyes. He is wholesome anyway, not like that sly seminarist, Jules.

Oh dear, we are in for them, I fear. It is obvious that my aunt wishes to cultivate us; but why? She was not at all so amiable in the old Paris days. We saw them twice since that first chance meeting of yesterday. We have just come from paying a call at my aunt's—Vi dragged me there—and this morning Jules came and bathed at La Grande Plage at the same time as we did. His mother kept on the sands as near as the waves allowed her, and shouted to him now and then "not to go too far"! We had water only to our armpits! Jules is still more unlovely in bathing costume than in his clothes. Was it not in Sparta there was a law against obesity? Then I approve of Sparta. Jules' arm is white, soft and round like a lazy woman's. I wrote yesterday of digging my index in it! That was before I had seen it properly. I could not touch it for an empire! It has no sex, that arm. It is monstrous! All the beautiful complicated little sallies and hollows, the nervosity, the character, the despotism and power of a man's arm, like Blaise's arm, for instance—there is no trace of all these in Jules'. I simply can't understand Vi—she swam with him, they taught each other tricks in the

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water. As for me, I put my foot on a jellyfish, and this time it did not make me feel sick.

It is pure joy to watch Blaise in the water. He is straight, brown, and spare, like a poplar in winter. He is as beautifully made as a savage. His skin is dark and stretched, and his muscles tense. He is so lithe that he seems to grow with each motion as he walks or swims. I hope Reggie will be bodily beautiful, like that. Austen is splendid, of course, but just a little too massive. Of the two a sculptor would choose Blaise. I wonder Videar does not mark the difference between Blaise and her flabby boy. But she is the sort of woman who does not pay attention to men's beauty, only to her own. Such a state of mind strikes me as indecent!

XVI

MY PITIFUL SEX

Les Arbousiers.

BY nature I am singularly truthful. The exigencies of my sex often prevent me from following my instinct, which is to tell the truth whenever it is convenient.

I have been telling Vidéar all about Blaise, partly because of that aforesaid inborn penchant for truth, and partly in the hope that she would protect me against that other new penchant for Blaise. I told her about our first meeting in the Park after all those years.

“He wore a brown suit, a soft brown hat of some plushy, shining stuff, and, with his dark bright eyes, his sallow skin and sleek hair, he looked like some happy chestnut.”

“A happy what! What rot you do talk!”

“Yes; I should have said a radiant chestnut. It always looks as if ready to burst with well-being—so smooth, so glossy, so snug and ripe. Captain de Montiers looked like that.”

“Ripe?”

“Well, yes, ripe, contented, full of sun—he looked like a man who had just had a *bonne fortune*.”

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"You should not say those things, my dear. Besides, does it give one a particular expression?"

"Don't frown so anxiously—it only shows in a man."

"Phrynette, really, you are vulgar and—and unkind."

"Videar, you know I am not. I did not mean to be unkind. It was only a silly joke. As for being vulgar, I see nothing vulgar in what I have said, it is—un-English, if you like—correctness varies so. I have heard English people speak of their corns and their false teeth. To me those things are unmentionable—the people who mention them are for ever robbed of their aura in my eyes—and you look shocked because I speak of a look of contented love! Why, I think it is rather fine. Don't you say 'lovesick'? I prefer 'lovelful.'"

"Oh, I don't know; it's rather beastly, I think."

"Beastly! It's fine, I tell you, even if, or because, it is beastly. Animal joys are the purest of our joys. Beastly! Why, Videar, imagine a lovelful animal, a pigeon, for instance, full of the lazy complacency of fulfilled love."

"Oh—love?"

"Passion then. Can you see him, Videar? The beautiful sweet creature with its swollen, contented neck, strutting in the sunny courtyard, pecking at the little blue flames of his collar, looking sideways at a world which had given him all he could take of it. Let the hand that gave him grain wring his neck to-morrow as hands do to pigeons. He can die—he has lived!"

"Very pretty," said Vi, looking at herself in the glass,

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"he can live, he has died! Ah, yes—and, speaking of collars—you did speak of collars, my dear, didn't you? Well, I think I had better not wear those Peter Pan shapes any more. Oh, Phrynette, isn't it dreadful?"

She had a truly agonised look.

"What is dreadful? What's the shape of a collar, low or high, as long as it does not stop half-way?"

"Don't you see it's not— Oh, Phrynette—it's a vital matter with me. I can't wear low collars any more—even with evening dresses I have to wear a dog collar of pearls. Oh, Phrynette, you may shrug, but it is dreadful—every day to renounce something! I can't wear short sleeves without long gloves, my arms look old—they are white and plump and soft, but there is a terrible empty groove from wrist to elbow." She lifted the sleeve of her *peignoir*.

"Look," she said pathetically.

"It is a beautiful arm," I said warmly.

"It is the well-preserved arm of an old woman."

Her hands went up and covered her face, she gave a moan that gripped my throat.

"Not that," she sobbed, "not that! Oh, the fate of women! Oh, the cruelty of God, who takes their beauty away, and leaves them to live! Phrynette, I grow less lovely every day, and I have to watch my loveliness die. That is the horror of it. I see it die, I tell you!"

"Don't. Some women have to watch their children die. Vidéar, be proud, be brave; I know it must be hard, darling, but you exaggerate—you are a beautiful woman still, you will be beautiful for many years to

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come. Don't sob like that, Videar, it is too terrible, and someone will hear you—don't."

My sister-in-law dropped her hands and looked at me with two despairing eyes staring in a grotesque mask of wet *kohl*, *poudre de riz*, and carmine; there were deep lines on each side of her mouth and little wrinkled pouches under her eyes. I never loved her so much. I took one of her feverish hands and kissed it. She started crying again as my lips touched her.

"Each age has its beauty," I said, pleading for her to herself.

She laughed with the bitterness of what she thought:

"Yes, except middle-girlhood and middle-womanhood. A girl of thirteen and a woman of forty-three are at their worst. A girl of thirteen is at the awkward age, a woman of forty-three at the pathetic age. I am not yet picturesquely ancient. I may be beautiful again, perhaps, when my hair is white.

"Dear girl," she said, "you do not know what I feel; it is too poignant for you, at your age, to imagine. Listen, and try to understand my—my torture. You speak of years to come, but these last five years have been a daily agony. Do you know what I have done, what I would be ready to do, just to keep my beauty a little longer? My life is becoming more and more a desperate struggle. I have made my purpose a fight against age, and I lose, my dear. Oh, my dear, if you could see me at night, for instance, you would laugh; no, you would cry, you would pity me—I wear a mask of caoutchouc which gives me a headache. My face and neck are coated with greasy stuff. I wear special stays

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to reduce my waist during sleep, but I do not get much sleep, how could I? I lie with my head perfectly flat, so as to prevent a double chin, and I have always been used to a high pillow. A woman's middle age is her martyrdom, Phrynette. And did you notice my eyes lately? They hurt me. I saw an oculist, he told me to discontinue hair-dyes, he says they affect the eyesight, and he says I should wear glasses"—she wrung her hands—"glasses!—can you imagine me with spectacles? You speak of children. I never would have them—I was afraid for my beauty. Isn't life unjust? I do not regret the children, no, I do not. The sacrifice was worth it. Can you realise what beauty, my beauty, is to me—I love it better than life. Listen, if I could, by being flayed alive, regain a new youth with a new skin, I swear to you I would endure it—I would—I would. Now do you understand?"

She had dropped on her knees by my arm-chair, and in her agony was biting the brocade of the cushion. I felt so full of frightened pity that, if it had been in my power, I would have given her joy with some of the years of my youth. She still moaned, rolling her head on the cushions like some wounded sheep. "It's finished," she said dully, at last (I had put my hand tenderly on the back of her neck, but could think of no words soothing enough). "It's finished—I am done for—I am an old woman—finished—finished——"

"Come up," I said, lifting her and kissing her red eyelids, "let's go to the nursery. You shall be loved—more—and otherwise. You love the children, do you not? I will share them with you—they will be *our*

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children—you can have them as often as you wish—you know they do love you, don't you? Come to the nursery.”

She passed her hand over her forehead and over her lips in a curious mystical way which I could not understand, and which I am sure she did not understand either. Then she looked at me with dazed and sore eyes :

“ No,” she said, with an humble delicacy, lovable and touching. “ No, not just now—I am not good enough ! ”

XVII

MY FATHER CONFESSOR

Les Arbousiers.

THERE had been a fête in the village, and the adorable little church was roofed with good intentions in the form of paper chains in crude blues and pinks, admirably symbolical of the naïve souls of the parishioners. We entered it, Vidéar and I, with our bodies hot, our ears humming with the symphony of country noises, and our eyes half-closed against the aggressive clarity. And, all of a sudden, we seemed to be descending into a vault—the little dark church sucked us in as in an icy draught, we could hardly see enough to guide ourselves through the rows of rush-seated chairs. I plunged at hazard my unglomed right hand into the cold *bénitier*, my nails scratched against some grains of sand, and I set my teeth and shuddered. There were only two confessionals in the little church ; that of Monsieur le Curé on the right near the sacristy, and that of Monsieur le Vicaire facing it. There were four beautiful windows through which you could hear faintly the sharp quarrelling of some birds in a neighbouring tree, and the whistle of a very fast train—Paris-Madrid Express, perhaps. In the first window, portions of a beautiful soldier, held together

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by lead, represented the holy limbs of him who was destined to become the great St Martin, Bishop of Tours. How did I know it was St Martin ? By his deed you will know the man. St Martin was in the very act which rendered him for ever holy—he was cutting in two, with one stroke of his short sword, his beautiful red cloak (which I like to think was of the finest velvet) to give half of it to an almost naked beggar. The legend has it that the unlucky beggar was quite naked ; but he knew that in Rome one must do as Rome does, and when I last saw him he wore in spite of the season a scarf-like arrangement of white muslin around his spare body. The beggar, who was knee deep in the snow, seemed strangely enough to be suffering not from the cold but from jaundice. The horse of St Martin, which, I suppose, was a French horse and used to short commons, was grazing the snow with equine equanimity—it amuses me to use words that are much of a muchness, and yet quite different, and which at the same time actually mean something. All my sympathy was with the beggar and the horse. As for St Martin, the very fact which seems to have dazzled posterity as to his generosity shows him to me as a very niggardly fellow, and a waster to boot. I am not Sainte Phrynette (I am not so sure there ever was one—Phrynette has an unsaintly sound), but I would blush to give my maid half a dress—it would spoil the dress, and both the maid and I would be worse off than before. St Martin had in addition to his cloak a coat of mail, a short skirt (which was shamelessly to be plagiarised by the Scots), and beautiful high boots that seemed com-

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fortable as well as ornamental. Why could he not have given the whole of the cloak?—a big strapping fellow like him—if one may call a saint a fellow, even one who does things by halves. In the next window also stood a saint, who had at least the merit of thoroughness, judging by the palace in the act of crumbling under his leaden index. Videar, a good judge of proportions if not a respecter of creeds, whispered to me frivolously, "He probably sat upon the palace." It certainly looked possible.

I love stained-glass windows. I find joy in their simple perspective, their daring colouring, and the archaic rigidity of their lines. As I was still entranced by the holy anarchist, the verger came out of the vestry, with a long extinguisher in his hand. Here was a verger of absorbing interest! His face was of the same faded whiteness as that of his ancient tapers. He had, in his robe and tunic, so much the look of a Chinaman that it was surprising to see him without a pigtail. The very way he looked suspiciously at us from the corner of his black eyes, between two snuffings, held all the comprehensible distrust and dislike of the East for the West. What should these two smart ladies do in his church which is filled only by country women?—the old ones with a black kerchief over their heads (which belongs to all ages, and frames the sunburnt, wrinkled faces with reposeful dignity); the younger women with ambitious and maladroitness hats in which they looked common and ugly. Year by year, in the little church, as in all churches, the men were fewer and fewer.

We had left the door a little open in entering, and,

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by the aperture, a lath of light had fallen on the stone flags of the church. The verger went and closed it (for fear of the sun, no doubt), and, having seen the car standing outside, came back looking more bilious and more fiercely Chinese than ever, rattling two chairs which were not in his way, though they were not responsible for the presence of two pretty modern women in his church and a handsome automobile in front of its portals—desecration! Being a verger and a peasant, the man was doubly conservative. He resented our being young (Videar can easily deceive a verger), he resented our red lips, our floating veils, our mannish coats, and our perfumes which were rivalling the incense. I can imagine Fontenille-les-Pins' parishioners. We were a new type of woman to the verger, we were different from the peasants, and from the rheumatic old Countess in brownish-black, who had not only a chair but a *prie-Dieu* at Mass, and who represented the nobility of Fontenille-les-Pins. Different also from the fat and florid wife of Monsieur le Maire. The Mayor-ess came afoot, the Countess came drawn partly by a horse, which can only be described as of impure *sang*, and partly by the will-power not to have a mortal sin of omission on her soul. We came in a motor car, that new invention of the devil—yes, new! for what are twenty years in the life of a verger spent between tombs and traditions?

I love churches—their vastness, their beauty, and their peace.

As we were driving back home, "I shall give that little church a statue of the Virgin," I announced to Videar.

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"But there is one already. Didn't you see it?"

"I wish I did not. Her fatuous smile, her characterless hands—statues of the Virgin are almost invariably an affront to Catholicity. But this is the worst I have seen. I can forgive Rubens for making Marie de Medicis meet Henry IV. on a cloud, but I cannot forgive sacrilegious idiots making of the Holy Mother a vulgar pink and white, silly German beer-madchen."

"But for all you or anyone knows, she may have been just like that."

"She couldn't, silly. Nor could Napoleon's mother. Great men's mothers are not wax dolls. I think I can see Mary, wife of Joseph, almost as she must have been. She had the half-sullen, half-mystical look of the Oriental. Her eyes were long and black, not blue and round. She had black hair, probably crisp, a very brown skin, a low forehead, a sharp Jewish profile of the spirituelle order (for Christ was her son), a strong, obstinate, fanatic mouth (for Christ was her son). She had nervous brown ankles, with cheap bangles around them, and perfect, rather broad feet, like those who walk barefooted. She had strong, spare limbs, for she was a frugal woman of the people, and large flanks, for she had borne several children as well as Christ."

"Oh!" protested Videar, for no reason whatever.

"And, be sure, she wore no pale blue sash (there was nothing insipid about her) and no beads. Can you not imagine it all, Videar—yonder clump of palm-trees, under which squats that little flat-roofed village of Bethlehem? In front of her house Mary herself is milking her goat in a terra-cotta jar. Her bare arms and

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bare feet are almost of the same beautiful sun-kissed colour as the jar. She is on her knees on the hot sand beautiful in the supple harmony of her limbs and of her falling, loose draperies of white linen. As she milks her goat there is a gentle tinkle about her from the bangles on her brown arms and ankles.

"The jar is full, the goat is free. Mary goes back towards her house, carrying the jar on her head, with as much dignity and grace as if it were a crown. Her two raised arms, supporting the jar, are pure lines of ochre against the indigo sky; and, as she walks, her two brown heels lift the white hem of her robe rhythmically. So goes the graceful and useful Mary on the yellow road of Bethlehem, leaving behind her the odour of perfumed oils from her hair and bod."

Videar showed she was listening by this practical criticism:

"How will you be able to show her perfume in a statue?"

"By making that statue an Eastern woman, not a nondescript thing of sugar and cheap paint."

"An Eastern woman! My dear Phrynette, the unworthy parishioners of Fontenille-les-Pins won't like your gift."

"I know they won't. But it will make them think. Thinking is better than praying."

"I don't know," Videar sighed; "but one can't do both."

"You and I are going to Bordeaux or Madrid to find a sculptor who will do what I want—a Spaniard would understand what I mean better, I think. He would

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dream of some Moorish ancestress perhaps. But a Frenchman would understand what I say better—I can't speak Spanish, Vi."

"Do you mean what you say, my dear?"

"Do I not? I can see that statue now as if I had chiselled it. I can imagine Mary of Bethlehem better than I can imagine by own mother. I can see her baking flat cakes on a stone hearth, going to the well with an amphora on her head or shoulder. And she sang, I imagine, some soft, monotonous song of the desert while she worked, and sometimes she chided little Jesus for teasing the goat or for throwing the stones of his dates at his brothers. I want the statue to be not the mourner but the mother—any woman can mourn a son. What do you think, Vi?"

"That it sounds rather impious—no, I mean, unorthodox. It tilts against our conception of the Virgin Mary."

"Our conception? Is it yours then? I hope the twins will ask me what I asked father—'Why did the Holy Family fly from Herod on an ass, *petit père*? Wouldn't a camel have gone quicker, and St Joseph wouldn't have had to walk?'"

"An ass is much cheaper, *ma belle*, and St Joseph was poor. A carpenter's trade was not a fat job in a land where people chiefly lived in huts of sun-dried dirt."

"What you call orthodoxy, my dear Vi, is just sluggishness of mind. Inaccuracy and anachronism, so delightful in the ancient artists, are exasperating in the modern manufacturers of objects of piety. I love

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legends, but they should be true in details. Art is either all fantasy or careful realism. Compromises are quite uninteresting—they are like wine and water mixed like good wine or pure water, good music or silence splendid lie or the truth. Have you any patience with the idiot who tells you an inartistic fib, and then squirts down his nose until you have to help him out? Rather than wear an ill-fitting dress, I'd rather go naked if the law allowed it. Who said laws were made for men?"

Videar laughed in my face!

"How extreme you are; you make me feel quite old."

"I am not extreme. But, I suppose, as a painter's daughter should, every thought of mine is formed as a mud house. When I think of Jesus' greatness, I see His little mud house."

"The house was little but the desert was near," Videar said.

"Oh, Videar, I love you when you speak like that."

"Like what?"

"As if you saw Him as I see Him, not placid and fair, content and tidy, in a new pink robe and a blue tunic, but with a wild beauty—a great power which could not be cruel—like some bird of prey which could soar, but had forgotten how to tear."

I have written to M. le Curé of Fontenille-les-Pins offering his church that statue of the Holy Virgin.

This morning I was on the bench in the garden scratching Karakaksopoulos behind the ear when I saw a black soutane stopping at the portals, and the bell rang. I saw Dominique opening the door, and hoped he

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would take the visitor straight to the house, for I had not been merely scratching Karakaksopoulos behind the ear, I had been making him very uncomfortable by crying over him. Cats do not like tears. He was, therefore, sadly unsympathetic, but he was something warm to be held. Dominique, like a fool, brought the priest straight to my bench, and slouched away, dragging his sabots on the gravel in a way that sets my teeth on edge.

I rose. "Bonjour, M. l'Abbé, will you sit down in the garden, or would you prefer the shade and coolness of the house?"

He elected to sit in the garden. He was a young man of about twenty-five, singularly shy-looking and rough-hewn. His hands and his feet were enormous, his hair more like wire than anything else, his sleeves very short in spite of knotted wrists—thin, flat and red.

"I am not M. le Curé," he explained, "only the Vicar. M. le Curé is taking his holiday. I sent him the very kind offer of madame your mother, and he advised me to call and thank her, and tell her that we accept gratefully in the name of the parish."

"It was my offer, M. l'Abbé, I have no mother."

"Forgive me, I pray you, madame."

"On the contrary, I am charmed, M. l'Abbé."

The Vicar looked at me in confusion, then quickly dropped his eyes as they met mine. His glance fell on my feet and ankles, clad, as Gracieuse says, in onion peels (she calls thus every transparent stuff), and quickly shifted on to the contemplation of his own footgear.

"My child," he said, "tell me if I pain you in alluding to it, but when I came up I believe you were crying."

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Whatever your sorrow, do you not think it would lighter if you were to cast it on the bosom of God ? ”

His accent—that of a peasant—is a curious contrast to his choice of words—a trait one often meets in French priests.

“ My father,” I say, “ you guessed right—my soul heavy, but nothing can make it lighter. I am sorrowing for my husband.”

“ Is he dead, my poor child,” asks the priest gently “ or a sinner ? ”

“ He is a very good man, very much alive, but—leaves me alone.”

“ Perhaps he cannot help it, my child.”

“ Oh yes, my father, he is hunting tigers in India.”

The good priest looks at me doubtfully—hunting tigers in India—this is indeed an unprecedented case of conscience—am I telling him the truth though ? Tiger-hunting ? He has never heard of such an extraordinary pastime. Wait, though, did not Tartarin of Tarascon hunt lions in Africa ? Yes, but Tartarin was a hero of romance, and a bachelor to boot. The good priest twirls his thumbs and interrogates the thick leather of his big shoes.

“ And otherwise, my child, he does not ill-treat you ? ”

I sigh. Why ever did I begin telling that dear man anything of my affairs ?

“ No, my father, he does not care for me so much as all that.”

We are no nearer than before to the sore place in my heart.

“ Ah, well, my child, take patience; he will come back.”

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"My father, do you see this garden, the owners of it have not tended it for a long, long time. Things grew into it which they had never planted; big trees and strange flowers were sown there by the wind of chance. Nothing can make this garden their garden now—it is Time's and Hazard's and Solitude's."

Now the priest feels on his own ground.

"Things grow, my dear daughter, it is good they should—if one is careful to separate the good seed from the bad."

"And who is to do that? A garden can only stretch itself under the sun. Some roots are deep and some flowers too beautiful to be dug up."

"Phrynette!" calls the voice of Blaise at the portal, "are you or are you not coming to the sands? It is a sin not to bathe this evening. I came to fetch you. Let us swim from the sands to the setting sun—it has laid a path of gold over the sea."

"A garden!" says the priest as he rises, "what is a garden in the sight of God compared to a rich, a useful field that is torn by the hoe and the plough, so that it may produce good harvest?"

There speaks the preacher and the peasant. If a garden were not as pleasant to God as a field, why should He have made it so lovable?

The priest goes heavily down the road in the same step as his ancestors who were shod with sabots. As he disappears slowly, like a gigantic black beetle on the white road, Blaise takes me by the wrist, and we run together towards the sea where the path lies that leads to the sun.

XVIII

MY SCULPTOR

Les Arbousiers

WE found his plate, with many others, on the gaunt door—cracked, dirty, and sinister—a gaunt, grey house on the Quais St Jean. The Quais St Jean are a portion of old Bordeaux facing the river. On the ground floor of every other house there is a *debit de vin*, where Apaches and sailors get drunk and fight together, and sometimes—far too rarely—do one another to death. It was M. Bompard, the Director of the *École des Beaux Arts*, an old friend of my *petit père* (from whom I had inquired for a young sculptor unknown and talented), who had sent me to Felix Perrier's.

Videar pressed one of the bells with a white kid index and a shiver of disgust. The door opened of itself unexpectedly, and in front of the black, evil-smelling cavernous hall that threatened us, my sister-in-law and I gripped each other's arm, and made a step backward.

"If only," said Vi, "we had taken the Major or Blaise with us."

"Bah! At four o'clock what can happen to us?"

"Typhoid fever," said she, with her handkerchief over her nose.

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"I am not afraid even of the plague," and it is quite true. A spider on my neck would send me into hysterics, but I would walk into a cholera ward and wonder whether my nose wanted powdering. I am afraid of nothing that is not animated. I would rather climb a volcano than wander alone near the fortifications in Paris or the Quais St Jean in Bordeaux.

In spite of my courage we left the door wide open behind us, and Vi struck her little automatic lighter (prohibited by the French Government). She did wisely, for we were making straight for an uncovered drain alongside the wall.

M. Felix Perrier lived on the fourth storey. His private door was open, and standing on the mat was a young woman, with a gentle, sad face, carefully dressed brown hair, a discoloured blouse, a large blue apron, and red *espadrilles*. She had an intent look of curiosity, and, when she saw us actually stop in front of her, she made first as if to run away; then her two small hands went instinctively behind her waist, as if to undo the strings of her apron; but, finally, she did nothing at all but bite her lips and blush all over her pretty, ivory face.

"*Oui, Madame,*" she answered Vi, in a gentle but trepidant voice, "*mon—mon maitre est chez lui.* If these ladies will come in and sit down I will tell Monsieur Perrier."

She led us through small spaces of darkness into a drawing-room, very clean, very much bewaxed, with some old-fashioned furniture, not old enough to be deemed beautiful, merely old enough to be depressing;

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and some new furniture, very cheap but very simple. On the walls were some good water-colours, very modern but sane, perhaps by M. Perrier himself, or by some fellow-student. There were also some photographic reproductions of masterpieces and some family photographs. There was not a flower in the room, but there were many books, all good; and on the piano was open some nebulous Grieg with what looked like verses written on the margin.

All this we saw at leisure afterwards. But when we first entered, the room was only a shade less dark than the rest of that sombre house. The shutters were carefully drawn together to exclude the sun, the air and the flies. We sat haphazard in the dark, as the young woman begged of us, trusting Providence that there were seats just behind to receive us. There were. Satisfied, she made for the door, hesitated, came back, dived under some furniture, and deposited at our feet cubes of darkness which turned out to be footstools. We thanked her very much, and kicked the awkward things away as soon as she had departed. From outside, we could hear the tooting of the electric trams, the whistles of boats on the yellow Garonne, the calls of coster women crying grapes, and the incessant whipping of the horses, the swearing of the carmen, the iron shoes of the overburdened beasts slipping on the cobble-stones, failing to get a grip, slipping again with a clatter, then the imprecations of the driver, and always the swish and clap of the whip—*Hue—dia, Hue—dia!*—and ugly words in an ugly voice, and the clack of the whip cutting the air. I loathe the sight of machines of all

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sorts, but I bless every machine that takes the place of an animal. It matters not that a man should kick a machine to pieces—it's man's loss—but animals take a long time to die of kicks. It is strangely sad to think that when human beings will be educated to such a point that it will no longer give them pleasure to torture animals, there will be no animals to be tortured. Horses, though far more valuable, will be as rare as Red Indians ; a small automobile will cost less than a donkey. So no one will dream of possessing a donkey, just at the moment when no one would dream of using sticks with a sharp, long nail at the end of it for the encouragement of donkeys. We passed dozens of little donkey carts on the Madrid road this morning, and every driver had a stick of that kind. All reform comes just a little too late to be of great use. When the State makes it a law to build fireguards for each fireplace, it will be at about the same time that the mothers will deliberately cease from having babies. It seems a perpetual race between the need and the needful. Every day makes new conditions, which the next tries to perfect, but to-morrow can never catch up to-day. It was an oversight on Nature's part to have given Man a brain, and, withal, expect him to remain her simple, obedient child. When Man has perfected himself, and is able to lead an almost perfect life, he will discover that, on the whole, he would rather dispense with life, however much perfected. For man is more just than the Force which made him.

A fog of sadness enveloped me and made me feel lost. All the ugliness and the cruelty of life rushed on me in

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an ugly blast, and almost prevented me from breathing. Vi groped towards the window and with her little strong hands pushed hard at the shutters. They flattened themselves with a bang against the wall. The sun poured into the room.

"Why," said Videar, "you are crying, *petite*."

I blew my nose.

"Oh, Vi, I am so glad I came."

"Is that it?"

"I can't help the horses, and I can't remove the ruffians and the *débâts* and the smells, but I can help him."

"Who?"

"My sculptor. He'll never do good work as long as he stays here."

"Well, see what we can do, dear. But, for all you know, he may like this place. Anyway, dry your eyes."

Just then my sculptor entered. He was quite a young man, in spite of a long and bushy beard of a reddish-black, with hair thinning on top, and the mystic brown eyes of a poet. His face and hands were pale and flabby like a priest's, and his nails were none too clean. He wore a navy blue suit, very neat and business-like, yellow boots, with long, square toes, a fantastic plaid shirt, with many tiny pleats, and a very high collar. A plaid handkerchief hung gracefully from his cuff. In fact, he was ill-dressed; but not more or less so than the majority of Frenchmen; and he had not, at least, fallen into the pretentious *négligé* of the "artiste." His voice was exceedingly rich and soft. He had a

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strong meridional accent, against which he struggled valiantly, except at moments of extraordinary excitement. His beautiful voice and atrocious accent combined were suggestive of the singer; but he was neither vulgar nor conceited. Outwardly he was perfectly at his ease with us, but I noticed that his hand trembled as he was showing us sketches and models of some of his work. It was evident that an order did really matter with him. We could feel his eagerness in the nonchalant voice, in the avoidance of anything like self-praise.

"Here is a little thing of mine," he would say, pointing out the details of a fountain with a shaking index. And we could feel the eagerness of the worker, the pride of the artist, the poverty of the man, in spite of all his reserve and lightness of self-appreciation. I could not possibly say whether his work was good or not—I could only think of that struggling human being in that dark flat, with the same horror as I would watch someone drowning in the black, slimy mud of a narrow pond.

"I am sure," I said, "you will conceive my statue of the Virgin exactly as I conceive it, and you must come down to Biarritz as soon as you can manage it—you must see the church and the old statue. We can put you up at our house. You can work there, and stay until you have finished it. The country will inspire you, and, if you prefer to stay at a hotel (artists are the only persons whose whims are not argued against) you must please yourself. But you must come soon, for I want you to make a group of my twins in a howling duet. And I, also, would be so happy if you can find time to make my bust. I want it for my husband's birthday

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present, and——” But Vi pushed my elbow before I had given him an order for chiselling the whole family.

But how I was rewarded for my indiscretion! My hirsute sculptor saw us through the different dark-nesses to the street door. He lit match after match with one jubilant scratch, which, seeing they were State matches, proves what glad energy was in him. His long yellow boots were flitting over the precipitous stairs with the sheer contempt of luck. His bass and Southern accent were filling the catacombs gloriously? What did he care, I ask you, for his o's and his e's, and his finales? A man of the future, a great sculptor—“*eh té*, whom ladies in a motor car come all the way from Biarritz to fetch. *Eh bé, pardi!*”

He remained on the threshold of that sinister-looking door, one hand clutching his beard, until, I suppose, we had reached the Place Richelieu. My last look at him showed him flaccid, pale, radiant, against the black horror of the hall, like some statue of wax melting happily under the sun.

“I wish I could have invited the little wife right away too,” I said to Vi, between two jolts on the rough cobble-stones of the quay.

“But you don't even know whether he is married.”

“Oh yes; it was Madame Perrier who let us in, of course. Didn't you see her wedding ring and how upset she was to be caught with her apron?”

“But she said distinctly, ‘My master.’”

“Of course. She was not going to shame her great man by admitting he had such a homely little wife in a faded muslin blouse and blue apron. But didn't you

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notice how well she spoke ? Besides, I saw her in one of those photo groups in the drawing-room. She is his wife, I am certain. That's why I mentioned his staying at the hotel. She would not come to our house now, but he can take her to a hotel in or outside Biarritz, and we'll respect her *incognito*, if she wishes it. Poor little woman, how she will enjoy the good air and the blessed light again ! ”

We stayed in Bordeaux the rest of the day. We shopped in the narrow, infect Rue St Catherine, the Bond Street of Bordeaux, where shopkeepers live above their shops in dark, insanitary rooms. There were coster girls selling fish on the doorsteps of fashionable *modistes*. Vi got the wrong change at one of the desks of a big store, and got abused by the cashier for protesting. She wanted to report him but I dissuaded her. She is exaggeratingly British in her views of life. She actually expects cashiers to be accurate and polite. If a cashier was a gentleman, he would not be a cashier. If he did not make mistakes, he would be found nowhere except in German books of philosophy. A cashier is not a superman.

We bought bully hats at the Cours de l'Intendance for half what we would have paid in Biarritz. There are too many English people in Biarritz—they have the same magnetic power on the price of things as the moon has over the tides. A place frequented by wealthy Britishers is *ipso facto* inaccessible to people who have a conscientious objection to robbery, and also to people who have nothing to be robbed of.

XIX

MY HUSBAND'S FRIENDS

Les Arbousiers.

"SINCE we are here in Bordeaux," said Videar, "why not see the Montcharmants?"

"If you like," with my usual amiability, "but what is it?"

"Don't you know the Montcharmants? Well!" and my sister-in-law checked herself in the very act of looking at me through her *face à main*, which is her usual way of expressing surprise. She sees just as well without it, but she is fond of playing with it vivaciously in a way which she believes to be French, but which is principally meridional; also her lorgnon is an ornamented, elegant affair.

"I am sorry. Ought one to know them? Are they some new pictures?"

"My dear, they are Austen's best friends. Surely he must have told you about them?"

"Not about them—either"—my shoulders raised themselves in self-pity. "I have told him absolutely everything that has happened to me since I was born."

"You have a good memory!"

"No; I have Gracieuse. But he never volunteers any fact about himself."

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"What do you talk about then?"

"Me, and the things he hears, sees or reads, but never anything that he does or thinks; and as I am not at all inquisitive, and never ask questions, it happens that I know nothing at all about Austen's past. From his extraordinary reticence, he might be an escaped convict. Who are the Montcharmants then?"

"Well, they are legion, to begin with, but I only know one, really—the patriarch, the Professor. Austen was a pupil of his at the college at Vanves. Surely you know that Austen spent several years at Vanves, don't you?"

"No. Why is it then that he speaks French so badly?"

"Because you are French, because he loves you and does not want you to laugh at him. He is very shy!"

"Nonsense. Tell me about the Montcharmants."

"I am trying to, but you are for ever interrupting, you know. Well, one year I had smallpox, just for the vacation, and it was decided that Austen, instead of coming home, should spend the holidays at the college. It would have been ghastly, of course, if Professor Montcharmant had not asked him to come to the seaside with him, his own boys, and the whole family. Austen had never had such a time, poor boy! They were jolly, happy, simple people, as closely united together as the fingers of one hand. You see, we, Austen and I, had never had a real home life when we were young. Our parents were very excellent people, but very mid-Victorian and uninteresting, and strict disciplinarians. My mother would never allow Austen to smoke in her

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presence, for instance, and the bonnets I had to endure when I was young ! My dear, the very thought of them fills me with raging shame to this day. I believe that I would never have been so fond of pretty clothes, once married, if I had not been made a guy of when I was a girl. I married at eighteen the very first man who proposed to me. Poor Archie ! He never knew that I accepted him so promptly just to escape from my mother's taste."

"And the Montcharmants ?"

"They were people, just as our people were not, delightful, happy-go-lucky, poor and cheerful, and to Austen an entirely new species of human beings. He only spent a month with them then, at some seaside place or other, but he learnt what home, the home we speak so much of and know so little about, was like. The wife of the Professor, it seems, was a particularly charming woman. Austen lost his heart to her anyway. Oh, my dear, don't frown, she was already middle-aged then. The old Professor has retired now and lives in Bordeaux, I believe. An extraordinary thing is that Austen has never lost touch with them. One of the boys went on the stage, and Austen met him often after that in London and Paris and Vienna, and the old Professor came several times to London, whenever there was some historical crush or other ; and I assure you it was touching to see how pleased Austen was to entertain him. He became almost loquacious, if you can believe me. And the Professor was a dear old man really. Even now Austen tells me he receives now and then some product of the South, a barrel of grapes from the vineyard, some

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sunny *chasselas* on a bed of ground corks, and so carefully packed, with the address so beautifully written ; or else it is some *cèpes* plucked in the woods near their house, and preserved by Madame Montcharmant."

" *Cèpes*, oh, Vidéar, you make my mouth water. It is years since I ate *cèpes à la Bordelaise*. Let us go and call on your friends by all means. Where do they perch ? "

But Vi did not know, and we had to consult the *Annuaire* to get the address. It was not in Bordeaux at all, but on the road to Arcachon, in a village called quaintly The Lark. We found it easily by following the National road, which is a dream for motorists or cyclists.

Once at the The Lark I got down and entered the largest of the two shops of the place in quest of information. It was a café-restaurant, pork-butcher's, grocery, tobacconist, and dairy combined. The mistress of these stores, who, when I entered, was using one of her knitting needles as a toothpick, was a woman of some circumference, with very black and very greasy hair done *à la dernière mode*, and caught by tortoiseshell pins. Her fingers might have been meant as an advertisement in the flesh for her sausages ; in fact, they were bunches of sausages, very red, and so fat that her wedding ring had made a groove for itself and disappeared between two rolls of purple flesh.

When I entered the shop the shutters were closed ; it was perfectly dark, there was a buzz from hundreds of victims on flypapers, and an appetising odour of charcuterie, garlic and truffles. Though I could not see the woman, she, used to the obscurity, was, I

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could feel, "promenading her regards" all over me; indeed, her curiosity prompted her to open her shutters.

"Pardon, madame, could you tell me where La Closerie is?—the property of Monseieur Montcharmant."

"La Closerie?" she asked. "Ah, and mademoiselle is going there? Mademoiselle is a friend of the family, perhaps? You will find it very hot there in the pine forest; but perhaps mademoiselle does not intend to stay long there? There is not much to see except the course of iron-water, and the church of St Médard. But, perhaps mademoiselle has seen it before? Or perhaps mademoiselle intends to settle down in these parts? It's very good for the health, they say; but mademoiselle does not look as if she wanted it and——"

"No," I said; "I only want to find La Closerie, if you please."

"Ah—*eh bé, ma mignonne*, you follow the road until you arrive at the fifth lamp-post. But it's much farther—there are no lamp-posts in their part. I should know, seeing that I am the lamplighter for the bourg. Then you turn on the right and follow that road until you come to a lane with very high hedges. There's no name to it, but you can't mistake it, as there are pine woods on each side all along it, and when you come to the end of it you'll see the white portal of La Closerie. You can't mistake it, there is no other house about, not what you'd call a house; besides, you'll hear them before ever you get there, *ma mie*. Yes, like you'd hear a school on the stroke of four. It's full of children, that house, you'll hear them for certain from the beginning of the

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lane. Perhaps mademoiselle will find it a lonesome way to go by; but there is no danger at this time of day. The good-for-nothings, they chiefly keep to the high-road; besides, mademoiselle is not alone, with the chauffeur and the other lady, your mama, of course, *ma mignonne*. The likeness jumps to the eye, as one says."

Before she had quite finished I was back in the car telling all I had learnt to Cavanagh. To make sure, some two miles farther on, we stopped and inquired from a butcher, remarkably like Don Quixote, in a blue overall, and a blue cart fashioned like a gipsy's caravan. He shouted in a cavernous voice, "La Closerie? *Eh, bé té*, I have just left a beautiful leg there, and liver—oh, *eh*, you will be there in a minute, *parbleu*—with that automobile—*eh*, like that, you come from Bordeaux then?"

"On the left, did you say?"

"No, not on the left, on the right. *Eh, bé té*, you'd go straight to Gazinet if you took the left; not that Gazinet not a pretty village; for a pretty village it is, a pretty village. My mother keeps the Buvette and the tobacco shop opposite the station, and, on the other side of the railway line there is the *source ferrugineuse*; there is also a——"

"Thank you very much. Then it's the next turning on the right?"

"As you say, *té!*"

And in five minutes more the white portal of La Closerie was facing us.

It is a long, low, one-storey house, except for one wing with a pointed roof. It is built of very white

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stones, and its many French windows are of a cheerful red. There is leading to it an alley none too well kept and bordered with acacias. It is one o'clock, the heat is terrific; perhaps they are all at their siesta, for, in spite of the prediction of The Lark's factotum, there is not a sound, and no one is in sight. Nothing is doing except the cooking of the peaceful scene beneath the white hot sky.

"Sound your horn, Cavanagh."

The sound has the same effect upon the ambient immobility as a heel upon an ant's nest. Cavanagh's music has created life. A chorus of dogs answers him, a cow surges out from some bushes, and gallops away with furibund fear and a mad tinkling of bell. A wheelbarrow abandoned in the middle of the alley begins uncannily to move (of its own accord as we thought) until we saw three scarlet pinafores wriggle out from underneath it, and, ranging themselves in a line, survey us, hand-in-hand, at a distance. From behind the shady refuges, tall grasses, tubs, shrubs, watering-cans, and even flower-pots, other scarlet pinafores revealed themselves. Geese, remembering a more famous invasion, cackled our approach; a sack apron, surmounted by a black bonnet, appeared from one corner of the house, with a pile of linen in its arms. Another maid-servant, in a pink frock and blue apron, flitted to and fro with unnatural, inefficient swiftness, as they flit on the stage.

"Madame, madame," she shrieked. "*V'la du monde, madame!*"

At this three times repeated "madame," there ap-

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peared three ladies, either through the magic of the fatigical number or, perhaps, because there were actually three "Missuses" at La Closerie, and that the maid had called three different and separate persons in one name. One of the ladies said something which we could not hear, and the maid then shouted afresh, "Abel, despatch thyself, run and open the gate."

Abel, who wore, in plus of his prototype, a red flannel vest, sleeveless, and very much *décolleté*, blue linen trousers and a blue apron, "despatched" himself towards us with a small trot interlarded with bounces after the manner of kangaroos. To this marsupial trait he added another in the form of a front pocket, out of which raphia grew, and in which other things jingled. Having no hat, Abel saluted us by pulling the lovelock that adorned his forehead. "*Bonjour, m'sieurs, et dames et la compagnie,*" he said, and opened the gate. Now there were no m'sieurs with us except Cavanagh, and the "company" was limited to Vi's Pekingese; but one must not look for meaning in formulas of politeness. In the avenue, the little scarlet overalls, still hand-in-hand, were now in a line. Abel, as he came to the gate, had interrupted his kangaroo run to put the wheelbarrow between two acacias. As we came near the house we could see that the three ladies were evidently mother and daughters. The mother was tall, stout, with the hair around her face very white, and that at the back of her head perfectly brown. She must have been remarkably pretty when younger. Her nose was beautifully modelled, and her eyes, which were not large, in fact rather small and very deep set, were two oceans

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of maternal tenderness. They were as blue as turquoise, and infinitely sweet. She wore a mauve dress of foulard which, though well cut, could not hide the fact that she had lost her waist, and managed in spite of it to be an enchanting woman. Her eldest daughter was a young woman of about thirty, smaller than her mother, though of medium size and very slim. She had a pale, intelligent face, with regular features, greenish eyes, and a small, red, firm and very well-drawn mouth. Her most striking feature was a monstrously heavy mass of light brown hair, so big as to be unsightly and to cause the rest of her person to appear disproportionate. She held herself with her chin upward, her head drawn back by that calamitous weight of hair. She had the nervous, keen look and twitching face of one who is an habitué of migraines. She wore a white linen dress, very simple, tight and fashionable. The other daughter, who looked a few years younger, was tall and very healthy-looking. As she had a pink skin and light eyes and light brown hair, she affected pastel shades in her clothes. She wore a very pale blue muslin dress trimmed with vieux-rose, and had grapes of yellow acacias pinned to her corsage. The effect, purposely Louis XV., was rather facily pleasing. She would have passed as good-looking so long as she talked or smiled ; at other times she had merely a freshness, unusual in a Frenchwoman, an obvious good temper and indulgent lips. She laughed a great deal, perhaps, because, like me, she had a dimple in her left cheek, or, perhaps, had she a dimple because she laughed a great deal ?

Videar spoke first.

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"Madame Montcharmant ? *Bonjour*, madame, I hope we are not intruding. This is Austen's wife, I am his sister, and we——"

But she could go no further, for the three ladies were all talking at the same time.

"*Tiens !* Oh, is it possible ? *Quel bonheur ! Comment allez vous ?* Papa, papa, come quick !"

Madame Montcharmant said to her daughters as sternly as was possible with those soft blue eyes of hers : "Be silent, *little ones !*"—the big daughters, duly chided, subsided at once—"you are tiring these ladies. Go and fetch your father," and to us : "Be the very welcome, mesdames. Come in the shade and refresh yourselves. It is very amiable of you to come all this way to see us—in this scorching heat too !"

A lisping, high-pitched voice asked with great deliberation : "Did they come all the way from London just to see you, *bonne-maman ?*" and one of the scarlet overalls took hold of my hand, "Tell me, mademoiselle."
"Jean," said *bonne-maman*, "what signifies this ? You talk to these ladies before you ever presented your respects to them !" Upon which the boy took delicately the gloved hand of Videar in his earthy little paw, touched it with his lips and said, "*Bonjour, chère madame,*" dropped the hand, made a pirouette, went through the same ceremony with me, and "*Voilà,*" he said, with a sigh of self-approval. "Now, tell me whether you came all the way from London to see us ? Did you bring me a policeman ? *Bon-papa* brought me one last time in wood, and to Francis, a sold——"

"Jean, that will do ; go and prepare chairs for those

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ladies and tell the children to wash their hands. Afterwards, they may all come—in turn.”

At this point we arrived at the house almost at the same time as an old gentleman emerged from a summer-house, a flower-pot in one hand and a book in the other.

“*Mon ami*,” called his wife, “come quickly. Guess who is here? Austen’s sister and wife!”

“O surprise of the most agreeable indeed!” said the Professor, with genuine eagerness. On joining us he put the book on the ground and prepared to place the flower-pot in his pocket. His wife picked up the book without saying anything, and took the flower-pot from him. He then shook hands with us.

“Do not let those scamps escape, *bonne-maman*,” he urged; “they have devastated the heliotropes.”

“The naughty children!”

“No, not the children, the snails in the flower-pot!”

“But there are none!”

“Oh yes; there must be,” persisted the Professor, peering in the flower-pot from above his spectacles. “I remember distinctly picking them up and putting them in that flower-pot. Very curious. They must have climbed out again.”

“But, *mon ami*, this is not the time for snail-hunting. After the rain is the propitious moment, or in the evening.”

“Ah,” sighed the Professor, “a fascinating hobby is gardening, but full of difficulties. So many complicated rules to remember. How is our dear young man, Austen?”

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"Dear *gamin*," exclaimed the *bonne-maman*, and her turquoise eyes became wet, "I hope he is very gay and turbulent now that he is married!"

I would have laughed if I had not so badly wanted to cry. Austen as a "turbulent *gamin*" amused me, but I inferred that they, those dear people, had always considered him as a lonely, unhappy boy in a homeless sort of a home.

"Would you prefer to go indoors or to sit on the lawn under the acacias?" asked *bonne-maman*. We all voted for the lawn.

"Children, bring the trestles! What would you prefer, madame? Some *sirop*, some lemonade, or tea——"

Here the Professor:

"Tea, I think, *bonne-maman*. We can offer you some very excellent tea from London. It is your very amiable husband, madame, who has the goodness to send it to us."

Here a legion of scarlet overalls invaded the lawn. They had evidently made the most of their time. They all had very clean little red hands and their socks were beautifully drawn up. As they approached us they all looked at their *bonne-maman*, at their hands, and at their legs. Then all the boys kissed our finger-tips and inquired after our health, and all the girls made us sample one round cheek after another, and very good cheeks to kiss they were. Vidéar told me afterwards that amid all those children dressed alike, and so exquisitely mannered, she believed herself in a reformatory school. As for me, I was thinking of an open-air theatre. The green lawn, the scarlet clothes of the children, their

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baise-mains, and their filing in seemed like a sort of representation given for our benefit, all the more so when the children began setting the table for tea. Some placed the trestles, others the planks, some brought the chairs, one came with the table-linen, others were running, very self-conscious and important, with baskets of bread and biscuits. It had the aspect of a mediæval banquet served by very young pages.

We all sat down around the rustic table which had been covered with an ornate tea-cloth, and a little serviette to match was placed under each plate. Every biggish girl had a smaller child under her care, who called her "little mother," and over whom she ruled.

Videar and I had to give ample news of Austen. When we came to the twins our three hostesses cried out together, "Oh, how charming! Are they alike? How is it you did not bring them with you?"

We had to explain that we had only come to Bordeaux on business, and that the *bébés* were more cool and comfortable at the seaside.

"Oh, but I would love to see them!" exclaimed *bonne-maman*, clapping her hands like one of her grandchildren. "Austen's *bébés*! Fancy, how boys grow! I have always had my hands full of babies; in fact, I cannot imagine a house without children's voices, without their tramping, quarrelling, chirping all together like birds at breakfast, and"—she glanced around the long table, with an adorable smile—"it certainly looks as if I would be well supplied with babies until my last days. All my children are not here to-day," she went on, "my two sons are missing, and also my sons-in-law;

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but they will all be here for dinner. We do not live together always, but in the summer we make it a point to spend the holidays together, and this house is the headquarters of the whole family. Did you," she asked seriously of her daughters, "explain which of the children are which?"

The youngest daughter laughed, and then bent and kissed her.

"No, *l'adorée fine*. Would it not be rather confusing and uninteresting for those ladies?"

Videar and I protested warmly.

"Those two big girls and this boy are my son George's," said the old lady. "That boy who is licking his fingers—don't do that, Guillaume—and those two little girls are my son Charles's. I think, my dear"—she turned to her eldest daughter—"Marcelle ought not to have any more biscuits; she'll be ill again. The very fat little boy, that very fair girl, and the baby are my daughter Suzapne's. No, Rose's—no, I said right—Suzanne's. I often get mixed myself. Then those two are my youngest daughter's. I think that is all," she said uncertainly.

"And," said the Professor, apropos of nothing, "so our friend Austen has stayed in Biarritz then."

We had explained at length where Austen was, why, and what for, but I suppose the Professor was still pondering on the miraculous escape of his snails and paid small attention to the conversation. His eldest daughter reiterated the facts in a few words.

"*Tiens, tiens!*" said the Professor. He fixed his spectacles into position, stared at me in the manner of

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short-sighted people. "What a strange idea! India, indeed! *Tiens, tiens!* Biarritz is a much pleasanter place than India. Tiger-hunting indeed! Very droll! If he likes hunting and does not fear the heat, he should come here and help me to catch snails and weasels—worms are also a great nuisance—my roses are ruined!"

At the suggestion of Austen hunting snails, I choked myself with my very weak tea. Rose also began to laugh, and got up and kissed her father. It seems to be a habit with that young woman to laugh at everybody, and then kiss them for it.

At this point, a little boy with mustard-coloured hair sneaked himself beside me and pulled at my sleeve. "Do you see," he said, sweeping the country with a very stumpy arm, "do you see all those trees? *Eh, bien*, I planted them all!"

"Well done, young Hercules!"

He had spoken in a whisper and at once a chorus of voices rose, "What has he said?" "What did *le gascon* tell you?" But I would not betray his confidence, upon which they all explained to me at the same time that his nickname *le gascon* had been given to him because of a fabulous tongue, inventive brain, and self-appreciation—in short, all the qualities which have always pushed to the front the men of Bordeaux, Marseilles, Toulouse and Carcassonne.

"Has he been telling you another story?" asked the Professor, adjusting severe spectacles and looking everywhere for the culprit, except behind my sunshade—where he was.

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"Alas," said *bonne-maman*, genuinely distressed, "we cannot eradicate that defect in him. The child is always vaunting himself, putting himself in evidence. I am afraid he will become a *député* some day." By her tone she might have been saying, "I'm afraid he will perish on the guillotine some day."

Upon which Rose, the mother of the future *député*, laughed again, and hoisting *le gascon* in her lap, kissed his yellow hair. After tea the Professor asked us whether we would care to make the *tour de propriétaire*. We accepted joyfully. It was now late afternoon, the heat was less acute, the sky was getting pink towards the west.

"There is not much to be seen," said the Professor apologetically, "only heather and furze, ferns and pine-trees; but the air is a tonic and an elixir, and I can promise you a sunset all that is most magnificent."

The children had come with us, buzzing around us like a herd of cochineals. They showed us their pets, rabbits, chickens, lambs, sucking pigs and their mama all ultimately destined for the table. Of kitchen gardening there was hardly any. As the Professor told us, they found it cheaper to buy their vegetables from the neighbouring farm than to grow them themselves.

"We have only Abel, the gardener, to look after this land, and though I help him with the garden, I am, as a rule, most unlucky in my agricultural attempts. What I sow, does not rise, what I graft dies, what I plant withers. Also, this place is so large that it requires a good memory to remember exactly where you plant things. I have often tried to grow fruit-trees, but, after

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planting them, I could not locate them for several days, and when found they had succumbed to thirst; or perhaps the holes were not deep enough for the roots. Ah! those roots! the square roots of Algebra are babes' rattles compared to those of a cherry-tree! I took up agriculture too late in life. It interests me exceedingly, but it is difficult."

There were many things to see, in spite of what the Professor had said—a charming well, a placid pond, with self-complacent ducks, diving and paddling in it, a deserted windmill half-a-mile off, and heather, purple, coral, and pink, everywhere. The Professor suggested the wisdom of walking in the path, rather than on the tall grass, as we might tread on vipers before seeing them.

"Are there vipers?" said Vi, horror-stricken, poised on one toe and lifting her skirts up to her garters.

"Quantities of them," piped *le gascon*. "I have killed dozens already with a big stick. But one must not kill adders; they don't bite, and they kill the insects."

The Professor stopped short, blew his nose, and adjusted his spectacles.

"I observe, my dear boy, that you make, in common with many ignorant minds, the error of believing that the couleuvre (from the Latin *colubra*) does not bite. Let me point out to you, gentlemen, that the couleuvre, like many other species of ophidians, does bite, but, lacking the venomous glands and the mobile fangs by which the wounds caused by snake bites are poisoned, the couleuvre is considered, justly, as quite inoffensive. I beg you to observe, further, gentlemen, that it is

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easily recognisable from the viper whose size is much smaller. The viper's head is shaped like a heart, and its skin is——”

“*Bon-papa*,” said a laughing little voice, “you called us gentlemen !”

“Did I ? That is, indeed, very droll, and I must have imagined myself still addressing my students.”

Under a verandah running at the back of the house Cavanagh was sitting at a table, his big ears pointing forward, his big eyes dilated, his big mouth cavernous, making merry between a bottle of wine and the wicked-looking servant girl of the pink dress. She was scraping carrots and carrying on a velocitous conversation, punctuated by loud and frequent “*V'comprenez, eh, l'Anglishe ?*” To which Cavanagh would answer, “*Voui-voui, darlint.*”

At a distance, very busy spitting into the well, Abel, the marsupial, was watching the pair from under jealous eyebrows.

We waited outside for the sunset which, seen from between the dark pines, was indeed a thing “of the most magnificent.” And I have seen many beautiful sunsets, the extravagant, riotous, fierce furnaces at the seaside, and the Turneresque, veiled, elusive skies at four o'clock in Victoria Street on an autumn afternoon, with spires, chimneys, roofs, and telegraph wires, as only fragile shadows to be guessed at behind a languid vapour of mauves and greys.

The windmill was now *mi-parti*, one side orange, the other thrown into such a deep shadow as to look purple.

“We never miss a sunset,” said the religious voice of

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bonne-maman, who had joined us; "it is an evening prayer." Then, with that quick change of mood of a poetical soul with a huge family to feed, "I hope you like rabbits. My husband says they are not eaten in England, but my daughter Suzanne cooks them so excellently. Oh, but, of course, you are staying for dinner, and for the night too, and for several days, I hope. The beds are made, the rooms ready. Where did you think we were, my daughters and I, leaving you like this, if not seeing to your rooms?"

We protested *pour la forme*, but, at bottom, we were very glad to stay on with the dear people. As soon as we had accepted, the children formed a dancing ring around us, shouting, "Bravo, bravo, the English ladies are staying—we will all drink some champagne—as for New Year—and for the fête of *bonne-maman*. Bravo-o-o."

"It was I who made them stay on," announced *le gascon*, shouting all the others down. "I told this one" (pointing at me with a grubby index) "that there would be a cherry tart for dessert. Bravo-o-o!!!"

And he had indeed told me. What had he not told me, that prolix, plausible *député*!

As we were tidying ourselves before dinner, Videar, whose room I share, asked suddenly, "Did you hear what the daughters call Madame Montcharmant?"

"Yes, *l'adorée fine*—rather quaint and sweet."

"Well, I did not know what it meant. I thought it was a new French expression, and I asked Rose. She said that it is her own patented invention. (She must be younger than she looks, for she still thinks life is a per-

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petual pleasantry.) 'When I was a little girl,' she told me, 'I had such an idolatry for my mother that no name seemed great enough, beautiful enough to call her by. I was only five—my vocabulary could lend me very little—but from it I selected the most gorgeous words—and they were *l'adorée fine*. They became her name. Indeed, I don't think I could find names as fitting even now'—touching, isn't it?' said Videar, closing one eye for some mysterious reason while she was kohling the other.

"Some girls have all the luck," I said jealously. "Why should that bouncing girl, with her pink cheeks and her cascading lar-gh, have such a mother and not I? Rose should be happy anywhere, with anybody, under any circumstances."

"She seems to appreciate her happiness anyway."

"I would too," I said, with a tight throat. All those happy people make me feel an outcast from happiness.

Our room had no window, but was leading straight into the garden by a large glass door, now wide open. The evening had the limpidity and the sweetness of a chant of a flute. The voice of the crepuscule always seems to say to you, "Listen," and you listen and hear other voices which you never hear except at this hour. I love them so well, those noises of the country. On the highroad a herd of cows is passing. One beast, belated near a tempting patch where grass is greener, runs away suddenly before the stick of the man or the teeth of the dog, and as she runs her bell rings frantically, brusquely, fiercely, like a bell-ringer possessed of the devil—the stable cries—the sleepy cackle of hens

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searching for a place on the perch—the batting of the washer-women in yonder spring—the rusty voice of the pail in the well—the grave message from the belfry—the furtive shivers of wings in the air—and the distant converse of peasants so accustomed to shouting their words that their gentlest meaning has a sound as of insult—voices, hours, perfumes, striæ of the fading sky, things crepuscular, elusive and velvety as the dust of a moth's wing—I love you well.

And that dinner partaken of on the dark lawn in the quietude of the ending day! The lamp made a table centre of light luring all the insects of the forest to a greasy grave in our potage. The hands of those dear people were white under the glare, their faces almost invisible, their voices subdued by the sanctity of the twilight. It was not a dinner, it was a communion feast.

Videar went to bed early, as she had missed her afternoon siesta. I retired at the same time, undressed slowly, and stood by the door, with soft limbs, a languid heart, and a brain somewhat drunk with the odour of hay. Facing me, an oak-tree knotted, twisted, bent, rent, bursting its skin, and wounded by the saw or the lightning, had its tortured shape bathed by the moon.

On the road to Arcachon the next morning, after leaving La Closerie, at a village called La Teste de Bush, we saw a car coming to meet ours, and in it Blaise and the Major.

“How did you know you would meet us?” I asked.

“Oh, we were not sure, we could only hope,” the Major said humbly. “We knew, however, that if you kept to the best road we were bound to meet.”

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He suggested that Cavanagh should take back his car to Biarritz and that he (the Major) should take control of ours. Vi assented graciously. I said nothing. I was surveying Blaise, who seemed cross and changed. Cross he certainly was—changed he was not; but I was seeing him afresh after forty-eight hours. He is really very handsome, and crossness becomes him.

"Where did you stay in Bordeaux?" he asked.

"We did not stay in Bordeaux, we spent the night at some friends'."

"Who?"

I looked at him with as much hauteur as I could express—it is difficult when your nose is of the jolly, familiar sort. Intentions count, however, when one deals with subtle minds.

"I beg your pardon," Blaise said. "I—really—I was not conscious of what I was saying."

Near Arcachon we had a breakdown. The Major went into the dust, Vi sat in the car and smoked a cigarette, Blaise and I walked a little ahead, glad to be moving and to be together.

We came to a bridge, stopped, and looked down at the river. It was almost on a level with our feet and very swift and sullen. The tops of the trees sat on the water looking like huge skeleton cabbages.

"How ridiculous," I said to Blaise, "for such a little river to look so angry. Shallowness should be all ripples and azure colour—a snarling Pomeranian is all that is most absurd."

While we looked at the river an adorable old witch was looking at us, not at the dirty sky, nor at the tragi-

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comic waters, nor at the dead branches waltzing, stopping, knocking against other branches, barring the way to hordes of herbs and dead insects, frenziedly changing position, and—pointing the easiest way—disappearing towards another village and another bridge. The witch never looked at so much swiftness and uncertainty; the mad hurling shapes in the river did not interest her, but we did, very much—I especially. Blaise was only a man with men's clothes, and a man is like every other man when he is not the brother of Miss Isidora Duncan: but I . . . there were a thousand attractions about me, my sunshade with a duck's head, and my thin stockings. She wanted to look closer, to see or touch if they were really silk, but she did not dare; not yet. Then my bag—such a big bag—“*Boun Diou*! what for?” I could see her puckered old lips say unto her mouth—and that little funny bonnet like a granny's bonnet!—*Eh, bé té!* I met her eyes, very black, sunken, and both weak and acute.

“*Adios mémé,*” I said tentatively.

She came a little closer, put on the bridge's rail two touching, old, black hands, very rugged, with big veins running under the crinkled skin like rivers on a map. Her black sun-bonnet came close to my face like some huge telescope, and her cricket-like face stared into mine.

“*Adios mainade,*” she said in her old, old voice, “and, like that, you come from afar, from Pessac, perhaps?”

“No,” I said; “from The Lark.”

“The Lark, eh, and, like that, you live in The Lark, then, eh?”

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"Yes; for the present."

"For the present, eh? and, like that, maybe you are the school-marm at The Lark, then, eh?"

"No, *mémé*."

"No, eh? And, like that, maybe you are the demoiselle of the post office, then, eh?"

"No, *mémé*; I am only a tourist. I live in London."

"Where's that?" asked the witch.

"In England."

She darts a black look, suspicious and reproachful.

Why tell stories to poor old country people, she thinks.

"*Eh, bé*," she resumes, hiding her blame as much as possible, "there are some that see the world and some that don't. As for me, I only went to Bordeaux once for my confirmation, but it's a mighty long time ago. They tell me there are electric trams there now. I never was one for travelling, though I would not mind going to Lourdes to do my rheumatism good, if it were not so far and so much money."

"Far," I said, "why, we'd do it in a couple of hours in the car." The witch peered around with a sort of angry curiosity.

"Like that," she asked, "you came in one of those automobiles of misfortune. Ah, Mother of God, I would not get into one, not if you were to give me"—she stopped to conceive of a staggering, enormous lure of money—"not," she said, "for twenty francs."

"Hi, you two," called Vi, from amidst a distant buzz.

We saluted the witch and turned on our heels.

The old, old voice cried after us:

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"Adichats mainade, take guard of those machines of the devil."

When we came to the machine of the devil, Vidcar was still enthroned and the Major still tinkering under the car of his goddess.

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XX

MY WANDERING HUSBAND

Les Arbousiers.

ONCE upon a time Biarritz must have been a place lovable and beautiful. Now there are too many flower-beds near the sea—seaweeds please me best—also there are too many benches everywhere. I loathe benches, they are so promiscuous and peremptory. Anyone feeling tired or too full of energy has a claim upon your bench. He has the right to analyse your profile, read the title of your book, count your sighs, keep watch over your gloves, your handkerchief and your sunshade, pick them up at inopportune moments, notice how you rip open the envelopes, how often you read the same passages of your letters, and is invariably inflicted with a cough. A bench-sitter, in fact, cannot call her soul her own because of the other bench-sitters. Also benches are objectionable because they don't give you a *libre arbitre*. You cannot turn a bench according to your caprice towards the sun, or towards the sea, as you would a chair—a bench is a small wooden destiny. You cannot choose your own site. Where the bench is there you must sit.

This morning very early I went to the Rocher de la Vierge. I had calculated that I would meet the post-

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man on the avenue, and I wanted to take my letters and read them facing the sea. When I am near the sea I am less far from Austen. I feel that he is somewhere on the other side. I am shamefully vague about it. I can remember the twist of a lane, the position of a hamlet, years after I passed through them, but empires seen on a map have no significance to me whatever. The postman gave me a letter from Austen, and odd ones without importance. I dropped them among the jumble of things I carry in my bag, and walked off with warm cheeks and winged heels. I really do believe that many people refrain from committing suicide because of the next post. If ever there was a blessed institution, it is the post. Everything about a letter is fascinating, alluring, mysterious and coquettish. It is an essence, a pretence, a glance, a stir. It possesses some of the charm of the most charming things that man has made—a perfume bottle, a mask, a half-open window, a fan. A letter, exquisite traveller, how I pity anyone who never receives a letter! I do not always read mine in the sun, but, it is invariably a sort of rite with me, the first post of the day. In town Gracieuse brings up my letters to me with my morning cup of chocolate. I can see them on the tray between the white folds of the lace mat, and the assortment of plates and things which servants inflict upon you for the simplest meal. I can see the vivid squares of stamps in the soft obscurity of the room before Gracieuse has lifted the blinds. I would not give the sweet first hour of any of my days for any complicated bliss. When I was a girl Gracieuse entered my room without knocking; now, she not only knocks,

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but emphasises it rather indecently by a pause. As a matter of fact, she need not be so pompous and correct, because I am always alone in my room in the morning. Austen says he can't sleep with anyone. He complains that I am like an eel, that I kick his jaw and poke my toe in his eye. His metaphors are always jumbled like that, and I suppose his bones are set, at his age, and he must sleep just so. With me, the more uncomfortable I am, the better I sleep. As long as I am warm and curled up I sleep. Gracieuse says that most often, when she comes in the morning, there is nothing of me to be seen in the bed except one foot on the pillow; so perhaps what Austen says is true. Only the worst of having a middle-aged husband is that he does not unbend, he never takes up new habits with enthusiasm, and comfort counts more than conjugality. However, there it is, as they say in England, when there is nothing else to be said.

And to come back to my letters, I don't read them at once. Gracieuse puts the tray on the foot of the bed and says gruffly :

" Ne gigottez pas, je vous prie, madame, ou tu vas tout renverser, mon petit chou."

Then she takes from the dressing-table, brush, comb, hand-mirror and powder-box. " Jesus, Marie ! " she exclaims, before I smooth my hair and powder my face, " but it is now that one ought to photograph thee ! " Gracieuse has a masculine penchant for women *au naturel*. Then I loll back on my pillows and she washes my hands. I laugh when she dries them between each finger. When I was little it used to set my teeth on edge, now it tickles me rather agreeably.

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"There now," says Gracieuse, "eat your toasts while they are hot, and mind you don't make spots on my eider-down." It's Gracieuse's way to call hers whatever is mine.

I don't yet open my letters. I drink my chocolate, I crunch my toast, and I speculate on all those envelopes. It is a truly entrancing moment. Some letters I know at a glance, others keep their secret till the end. Oh! letters, letters, how I love you! How sweet and brave of people who have never seen you and want to, and say so naively, trustingly, as children write to Santa Claus. For, though I am not a variety star, I am pretty well known in London now as Austen's wife, and as the victim of photographers, and I often receive letters asking me this, that, and the other thing, to play amateur theatricals, to hold stalls at charity fêtes, to accept and wear Professor So-and-so's hygienic corsets, to try and recommend the best mouth wash, to eat the new bread of long life. In a year or so I suppose I shall not open all those letters myself, but now it is so new and flattering to be appealed to and to be of some use or pleasure. I think it's rather charming to be asked rather than some other woman—Aunt Barbara, say—to play Cupid in those *tableaux vivants* for the benefit of reformed drunkards, and it's great fun to write, "I shall never wear any others," in Professor Thingemebob's Press Album. If a swineherd wrote asking to see me, I would walk miles to his hut. I have always envied a queen her popularity. It's so easy and so sweet to be popular.

Even a little woman in a linen dress and a sailor hat,

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demure and simple, can prove more popular than she wishes. I had hardly sat down on my bench and opened my first letter than a consumptive *marchand de sucre d'orges*, coughing, and shouting his merchandise, came to offer me his goods and his germs. Then a post-card seller of doubtful sex (it certainly had a skirt, but no less certainly a beard). Then an old gentleman with a red face, *Le Rire*, and a white sunshade lined with green, came and sat ostentatiously on the extreme end of the bench. I knew that he was too distant to remain long so. All humbugs are given to exaggeration. By the time I had read twice over Austen's letter my neighbour had worked his way to the middle of the bench, and was exclaiming that "Mademoiselle will believe me if she will, but it is, at least, eighty-five degrees in the shade. *Si c'est pas malheureux une chaleur pareille!*" and, taking off his panama, he wiped the inside and his perspiring forehead slowly with his handkerchief. He looked like a toad afflicted with a sunstroke. I felt very disgusted and indignant, not that he should address me, but at the operation with the handkerchief. A year ago, when I was young and inconsiderate, I might have frozen him, in spite of the thermometer, with a look of contempt; but now I understand men and motives more broadly, more pitifully. It was as natural for an old, ugly, commonplace man to try to share with me the only things he could possibly share—space and speech—as it would have been for an old, ugly, commonplace woman to blame my hat, frown at my face, and dread my presence as she would the light of day. Those things are natural. I would have been within my

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right in pretending that my toadish neighbour in the white linen suit was apostrophising the blue immensity with his remark on the heat—indeed, quite in the right—but I would have felt very mean and prudish. Besides, his white canvas shoes dangled pathetically quite two inches from the ground. I smiled my most dimply smile. “It is well true,” I acquiesced, “*c’est à n’y plus tenis*, I can no more of it,” and so left him, regretful but not humiliated, to the whole bench, the full sun, the post-card seller and the germs vendor!

I went with my heart filled with gall against my husband. This was the letter I had run out in the white heat of a summer day to read by the waves:

“DEAREST PHRYNETTE,—How are you getting on? And how are the darlings? We are awfully fit here. We have had splendid sport since I wrote you last, two cubs and their mother—she made a fight for it, I can tell you. Poor Ritchie lost his forearm through the brute. Had to have it amputated. She munched it as you munch your *pralines*. It was ghastly to hear it. It might have been worse, but I was lucky enough to despatch the brute in the nick of time, so that poor Ritchie and I are in the same boat now. Still, sport is worth sacrificing something for, is it not?

“You have no idea how hot it is here. We have not shaved for a fortnight. I am sure you would not kiss me if you saw me now.

“I am afraid I shall not be able to start back next week, as I told you. We have heard of an old beggar, a magnificent brute, it seems, and his name is keen on

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going for him as soon as his arm is healed. But this will be our last.

“Kiss the darlings’ little tootsies for me, dearest.

“With my fondest love.

“Take care of yourself and wrap yourself up well when you leave the casino. Your loving old hubby.

“*P.S.*—By the way, you should keep a sisterly eye on Vi. I know she means no harm, but her frivolous ways may be misunderstood by men. We met a chap in the club the other night, and he did not know, of course, I was her brother, and—well, anyway, he knows now! I’m afraid I broke his jaw for him. Not that I am sorry. I would do it again, rather! But tell Vi not to provoke those little unpleasantnesses.”

There! Isn’t that just like him? I feel in a rage. Was there a more stupid, more short-sighted letter ever written?

He is staying on there because of an old, evil-smelling tiger. I wish the brute would eat them up altogether. Yes, I do, the fools! Then I’d be a widow. Now I am nothing. Just a very humiliated little wife.

“Kiss the darlings’ tootsies for me!” What about mine? I am too miserable. “Take care of yourself!” Is it for me, I ask you, to take care of myself; what is a husband for then? He deserves—oh, he deserves—What does he *not* deserve? I don’t care what Vi does; she is quite right. She has her fun and she does not care a rap for what men say or think—the blundering idiots!

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I am very angry with Vi. She said to me after lunch as we were having coffee in the garden :

"It's a bother changing again, but I am going to give notice to Yvonne."

"Oh, Vi, are you ? What has she done ?"

"Nothing, but she is not well. I am afraid there is something wrong. She fainted twice this week as she was doing my hair. I am not uncharitably-minded, as you know, but I can't help seeing things, and putting two and two together. She is losing her shape too."

"Has she told you anything ?"

"No; she is as sullen as a little mule. Naturally, I won't mention the matter to her. I'll simply find some pretext or other, and give her a month's wages. I can't have her in the house in that condition—it does not look respectable."

"Of course, you don't really mean all that. If what you say is true, you can't turn her out now at such a time."

"Yes, I do mean it. Why not ? She can go back to her people, or to the father of the child. You look at me as if I were responsible for this unfortunate state of things ! It is very hard on me too. I never had a maid who could sew like Yvonne. I can't imagine why girls are such idiots. There she is now, what is to become of her ?"

"That's just what I was thinking. If you are quite determined to part with her, I'll engage her myself. Gracieuse will be furious, but it can't be helped."

"Don't be so quixotic. You don't want that girl, you know you don't want her."

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"No; but she'll want me before long. She'll want a home and nursing and good food. I am surprised you don't see that."

"I see—I see that the girl is a fool and that I'll have to change again—such a nuisance! I have no patience with those stupid creatures. What do they want to have a baby for? They can't even afford to keep themselves. It's monstrous."

It was then I got angry. I am sorry, I am afraid I said hurtful things—they must have hurt for they were true—but I was indignant at Vi's callousness. Poor, beautiful Yvonne! she is not going to the hospital if I can help it. I remember the great trial too well—Gracieuse will have to be placated somehow.

XXI

MY LITTLE BEAST OF A COUSIN

Les Arbousiers.

“**S**AY, then, what hast thou, my poor daughter,” I asked of Gracieuse this morning, as she was hooking me into my dress.

Now, if you want to see people in their most lovable expression, you must not look at them while they are hooking your dress, especially when the dress is of lace where the eyes can only be guessed at. Also Gracieuse’s face at its best was meant to awe more than to seduce, but this morning, taking all those facts into consideration, I still found in my maid’s bristling moustache a bellicosity, a challenging, stubborn, sullen porcupine-ness, for which the above-mentioned facts did not fully account.

“What have I? I have nothing, thank God! I have a little good sense at least. The good God who made me might have kept some for the others, they need it.”

Now, I don’t like Gracieuse or anyone blatantly ugly to speak about the good God making them. It sounds sacrilegious. Perhaps He did make them for the fun of the thing, or to show Caran D’ache the way; but those little errors in æstheticism should be overlooked, especially by such a devout soul as my maid.

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I looked at her in the mirror. No human agency, impure and complicated, is alone responsible for her—her moustache she owes to her Bordelaise mother; that mania for lending the Almighty an interest in her private affairs is a characteristically German trait from her father, the Prussian officer. No snow-woman made from the clouds of Olympus, this Gracieuse! Just an unloved and, consequently, unlovely foundling.¹

"What is there then? That's the third time you have taken snuff before me this morning. You know I dislike it very much. What hast thou got to say—eh?"

"I have nothing to say. It is—it is monsieur thy cousin," she explains quaintly.

"Was he here?"

"No; but Clémence was here. She brought a book from madame your aunt to madame your sister-in-law, and she told me that M. Jules had said to his *maman* that you displeased him superlatively."

"Pooh, is that all? I render it to him well, I assure thee."

"Madame your aunt said, 'No, no, I did not like her as girl, extravagant, badly brought up, by her poor, mad, basket-with-a-hole-in-it man of a father; but now that she is safely married I have no objection that you should see as much of her as you like. Youth must pass itself—you are cousins, the world can say nothing about it, and her husband is evidently tired of her already; so he won't put sticks in the wheels in any case.' And he said, 'Pooh, why, she isn't even pretty. She has no hips, she looks like a cat that sleeps. What does she

¹ See "Phrynette and London."

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look like, I ask you, with that fringe of hair over her eyes? She dresses like a *cocotte* too!' And your aunt says, 'That is every lady's ambition nowadays,' and that if you have no taste it's no wonder, for your father was a painter. And M. Jules he says, 'Now her sister-in-law, speak to me of her sister-in-law, she's a fine woman, not a grasshopper, all teeth and red hair, and she is amiable at least. With Phrynette you never know where you are,' and madame your aunt says, 'Well, it is all the same to me if you prefer miladi, she is a widow. The husbands in that family, they are full of tact, not *génants* at all.' "

"Is that all?" I asked.

"That was all Clémence heard. They were on the verandah with the windows of madame your aunt's wide open, and Clémence was preparing the bed and she heard every word, and she always cared for you as a child, and she said she could have smacked his face for speaking like that about you."

"Listen, Gracieuse, it's quite wrong of Clémence to listen to her master's conversation and to repeat it to you. And it's quite wrong of you to repeat it to me, so don't tell me any more now. Of course, it was only your duty to tell me, my good girl. I am not blaming you (*in petto*: "*Duel muffle, ce petit!*").

"*Boun Diou,*" says Gracieuse, "but I wish poor dear monsieur could have heard that little 'worth-nothing' saying you dressed like a *cocotte*, poor monsieur who was so particular too about your clothes. There never was such a man to take such an interest in his daughter's *fal-lals*, never. He wouldn't have checks,

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he wouldn't have stripes, and he wouldn't have plaids, nor spots, nor vermicelle. He detested for you green, yellow, and garnet. And your hats, goodness divine, but they were affairs of state, not hats. 'Mademoiselle,' he would say to the *modiste*, with that smile of his that fetched your heart straight from between your ribs, 'Mademoiselle, it means nothing, those fruits together with the body of that ermine, a hat is not a *nature morte*. Let us try them separately.' And your shoes, *ma mie*! They must not have square toes; that is ugly. They must not be too pointed—it would spoil your feet. Then the heels—they must not be high, it's not healthy, and they must not be too flat, it's not dressy enough. I would go and say to him, 'The little cabbage has been naughty, monsieur.' He would say, 'Not biting her nails, has she?' 'No,' I would say; 'she has made a caricature of the concierge in black ink on the pink satin cushion in the drawing-room, and it's quite spoilt.' He would laugh. 'Never mind, as long as she does not spoil herself,' he would say. 'Be careful of her nails: and she must not make faces at people, as she did yesterday. It would spoil the shape of her lips.'

"He would come into the nursery and show me, as gentle as sweet Jesus himself, how to take care of your hair. 'You must not pull,' he would say. 'If it is tangled you must brush and brush until there are no knots before you use the comb. *Tenez, comme ca*, my brave girl. And in evening dress ready to go out, as like as not, he would start doing your hair for the night. 'This is gold, see, Gracieuse. One must be careful of

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gold, eh, Harpagon in petticoats.' I don't know why he called me Harpagon, *ma mie*: it was just his fun, *l'cher homme*! 'Twas he mostly who taught me my profession. What did I know, poor cowherd me, about a lady's toilet?

"And your first stays, *ma mie*! *Mon Dieu*, I shall never forget them! You were fully fifteen before you wore any at all. *L'pauvre monsieur* would not hear of it. Madame your aunt each time she'd see him she'd say, 'Has she got them on yet?' And he'd shake his head and laugh, and she'd say— She was just as spiteful then as she is now. No wonder her son—*bon chien chasse de race*, as they say—"

"Never mind them, go on."

"Well,' she'd say, 'you are mad, *mon cher*; that child will be as thick as a farmer's wife. And *l'cher monsieur*, he would look at her waist, without having the look of nothing, and he would twirl his moustache and say sweetly, 'Phrynette is like an amphora,' whatever that is, and your aunt, she'd shrug crossly. She did not like *m'sieu* looking at her waist between his eyelashes, as if she were far away and a picture, because she always was fat, *ma mie*, and at that time she was not wearing straight-fronted stays. She seemed built of superposed pillows, and she could have rested her chin on her bosom, and she had a stomach, if I may say so, as Lady Barbara is not present to take offence at the word. Until you were ten, you wore your waist below your hips; you wore all bodice and no skirt. After ten we shifted your waist under your arms; you were all skirt and no bodice; and when you were fifteen

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m'sieu said, like that, that you were to have a tailor-made and that the tailor would never make you one for love or money if you had no stays. Ah, that was a day to remember. *M'sieu*, he telephones in the morning to Dr Candé to come in the afternoon, 'Most important,' he says; 'it is for Phrynette': and the four of us, your papa, the doctor, you and me, we all went to Madame Gisèle together. Your papa he had made patterns in water-colour of what he wanted your stays to be like; he did not want them curved in at all, he foresaw the fashion, *ma mie*. And then the doctor, he examines the stays Madame Gisèle had and 'no' he'd say, 'this would press on the heart, the sides must be of caoutchouc, and also over the hips.' And the *corsetière* apprentices, they were looking at us from behind the curtains at the back of the room and giggling and making sweet eyes to *m'sieu* and the doctor, who were both *bien beaux hommes*, my angel. That's how you got your first stays, *ma mie*, and I have kept them too, and also your first pair of gloves in white silk. They might have been a doll's. I don't know that you could have been more cared for, even if your *maman* had lived. Mothers, being women, they always do just what other women of their class do as regards their children. They use their hearts but not their heads much when it comes to bringing them up. If you had had a *maman* she would have had you sit still for hours doing tapestry or crochet-work. *M'sieu*, he would not. He said he did not want a daughter with a round back and weak eyesight. You see, *ma mie*, he loved in you not only a daughter but beauty. I am only repeating what he used to say; and if

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you are as healthy and lively as a colt you may thank *P'cher homme* for it all.

"I have thought very often that, if you had not happened to be such a good little girl, your father would have spoilt you, made an idol of you, vain, selfish and arrogant."

"As it is, my poor Gracieuse, my father did not spoil me, not in the way you mean; but he did certainly spoil me for other men."

"*Ma mie*, there is not such another, I tell thee. I am a poor old fool, maybe, but I see clear, my white rabbit, I see clear. The men of to-day, they have no youth, they have a poor appetite. I don't mean only for their food, *ma mie*; they don't seem to hunger after life at all!"

"It is true what you say, Gracieuse, but you forget that the men of to-day are older than their grand-fathers, two generations older."

My maid backs a few steps and inspects the ensemble of my person before she answers.

"Maybe, my lamb, maybe; but all the same I find myself very lucky never to have embarrassed myself with a husband. I loved children; well, I have had thee, and now I have my dear little angels. What more could I want, I ask thee? What use could I have had for some fangled creature who calls himself a man? A man! oh, *la la*, it amuses me; not so much of a man as I am!"

Which was true and her tragedy!

I wish Gracieuse had not poked those ashes into little burning tongues of flames. I do not like to remember

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dear *petit père*, dear Dr Candé. Where is Dr Candé now, and his daughter Isabelle, a pale, plain, gentle, wise girl, with long, thin arms and long hands and ugly chocolate hair, always tied with a vivid pink ribbon like a peasant girl—a pink ribbon that made her face look a particularly unattractive saffron colour? Suddenly I feel curious to know what has become of my little playfellow. She was very quiet, very tidy, and so careful of my dolls. She was not brilliant at inventing games, but she had a genius for acquiescing. I can hear still her sweet, slightly veiled voice saying meekly, "If thou wilt, Phrynnette."

As for the doctor, he was a Frenchman—there are very few left—*petit père* was one—with the true pre-guillotine manner, tactful because highly sensitive, considerate because full of self-respect, polite and easily flattered. His manner with women was incomparable. I always loved him and he always adored me. I am sure that when he had to give me a nasty medicine, it was he who was the more sorry of the two.

Dear people, that I shall never see again!

Videar is less often with me now than in the past. My Aunt Octavie and her son come almost daily to the villa, and when she does not come Vi calls on her. I avoid them as much as possible. Indeed, I cannot understand what interest my aunt and Vi possibly can share.

Yesterday we were shopping together, my aunt, Vi, Jules and I. At one shop my aunt bought a shawl in wool of the Pyrenees. "This is a pretty blue," she said, fingering a shawl as one tempted, "but, no, I had better buy a grey or a black one. My mother being so old and

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feeble, I always buy things that could be used for mourning wear—I don't know that blue could be dyed black nicely."

Videar and I looked at one another with eyes round with horror.

Jules has taken a great fancy to the Major. It is not the Major's fault—merely that of his nationality. Jules' Anglomania is baseless but phrenetic. He knows nothing about England or the English except that it is *chic* to be an Anglophile. And so he is sporting a terrific, soft, round hat such as is worn in London—by American music hall artists! Poor Jules! As for me, I have lived through two English winters, one of them at my Aunt Barbara's, and so I can say that I love England with a love tried and constant. But not even my love for England could ever drive me to wear, for instance, one of those stitched cloth hats with a pheasant flavour, though perfectly genuine West End *chef-d'œuvres*.

The very same evening after Gracieuse's indignant outburst at my cousin's avowed dislike for me, I was able to judge for myself how antipathetic I and mine were to Jules.

It was after dinner. We, my aunt, Vi, and I, left the Major and Jules in the dining-room. I slipped out of the drawing-room as soon as I could, and entered the blessed shadows of the garden. Oh! the smell of it after the odours of the dinner, the velvety sombreness of lawn and bushes after the flushed faces of people who eat too much, in clothes too tight. I could have wept with relief and gratitude as the garden took me, soothed me, made me good and calm. My dream is to have a

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secret garden, high-walled and locked, where no one shall ever come, not even Austen—the twins, perhaps. It depends on what they will be. I am always best far from people, alone with growing things. All pettiness rolls off me as I take off my gloves and my veil to feel the touch of trees and grass on my hands and my face. I have a favourite branch in the oak-tree that stands guard over the bench. I dare not climb there in the daytime because one can see from the road the branches above the wall, but almost every evening I come and hoist myself up, and there I stay in the tree listening to the sea and to the beasties moving in the leaves.

The wind kisses my hair and cleanses my heart. Enconceed in the branches of the tree, I feel as in a refuge—a refuge much bigger than the tree itself. I know for certain that in its love of truth and nature there is rehabilitation for a human mind from its humanity, and there is also hope eternal.

When I shall be so unlovely that no one will love me any more, yet spring will come and make me sad when nothing else touches me any longer. An outlaw, I shall still admire the beautiful law. When the laughter of young people shall sound to my wise old ears like the innate cries of lunatics, perhaps I shall smile in toothless joy at the sumptuousness of a Judas tree. When no valse, however languorous, will unstiffen my joints, I may yet find enough strength to pick up a nest of young sparrows blown on the path.

And while I think of it, I must write down my wish not to be incinerated, but to be buried without a coffin or a wrapper of any sort. I want to be one at once

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with the good earth. I want it on my hair and my face.

I would not that people should see me perched in the tree. One dares not be quite simple for fear of seeming affected. They might think it is a pose with me. They could not know what happiness I find in that close grasp of something strong and restful.

Almost every evening I come to my oak, there to think in peace of Austen and to let night impregnate with sweetness that thing they call a soul, but which the nightingale shares with me.

Yesterday, then, I was untaut and soothed in my tree when Jules and the Major came out of the dining-room and promenaded in the garden, smoking their cigars and talking in that sort of careless, lazy voice that men use between themselves. I did not budge—their presence did not annoy me. The garden is large and leafy. I only knew they were there by their steps on the gravel, their voices, and now and then the glow from their cigars.

After a few minutes the Major came and cracked a match on the bench to light his pipe with. Jules sat down. After the operation the Major sat down also. Then Jules continued the conversation, the beginning of which I had not heard.

"She is not exactly my cousin," said the little beast, "at least, not a *German* cousin, you know. My mother married a brother of her father, and he left her a widow. I was born by her second husband; you follow?"

The Major grunted.

"So that we are not blood relations, if we are rela-

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tions at all, for which I am very thankful, I can tell you, as they are all a little eccentric, to say the least, in that family. My poor mother's first husband left her after a fortnight and went exploring into Thibet. At that time those were very wild parts. He got killed; served him right. They have not the bump of matrimony, the Chédors! Phrynette's parents never could get on, and now, look at her. As my mother said, it was to be foreseen. Her husband, who is a man *très bien* by all accounts, a clubman, quite sympathetic" (the idiot! It is I who say that) "has, of course" (I said it of my cousin, naturally), "got tired of her. No wonder! Who is that insufferable personage she drags with her everywhere, I ask you—that Captain who looks like a singer, always gesticulating and attitudinising?"

Then there was some more indistinct grunting, and I received a full whiff of tobacco smoke in my face.

"My dear sir, of course not. You are right; one must not judge. I am not judging them. I am only stating facts which to an English gentleman must seem very shocking."

He used shocking in the French sense, and when I heard the good-natured guffaw of the Major, I wanted to laugh aloud also.

"No, no, not shocking," said the Major.

"Most decidedly; and if I talk frankly with you on the subject, it's because we do not wish, my mother and I, that you should suppose we are countenancing such a—a—an American state of affairs."

The Major laughed again and swallowed a whole sentence, which my cousin's voice echoed plaintively.

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"A friend of her father! all the more reason for not compromising her or she him. I'm sure I don't know which," he added wittily. "Besides, they can't all be her father's friends. Did you not see her at the casino? Well! my mother says it's deplorable, simply deplorable. My mother was kind enough to offer to chaperon her; in fact, several times she kept a chair by her side for my cousin, seeing her sister-in-law dances too and cannot be expected to look after her. But no, madame my cousin prefers, of course, to flirt at her ease by herself."

"Can one do that?" making a brave attempt at humour.

"Oh, well, with her father's friends, as she would say. The fact is, her father spoilt her ridiculously. My mother and Monsieur l'Abbé, my preceptor, you know, often used to remonstrate with him about it; but it was no good, he would quote *l'Emile* or some such rot, as you say in English. And he was a Republican, of course. Very bad taste. My mother never invited him to her Mondays for that reason. We, I must tell you, are staunch Royalists, quite like you English people. I am a Camelot du Roy, and my mother is at the head of all the ladies' Royalist associations. As for my uncle, of course it was all cant. He was by nature, taste and atmosphere an aristocrat of aristocrats. He dropped his *particule*, very absurd, just to do the contrary of other people, that is all. That was on a par with refusing sitters, before he could not at all afford it—you know, before he was known. Often my mother found sitters for him from among her friends and he would say, with his

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lisp—he lisped, man, just fancy, of course it was all put on—‘Thank you, Octavie, but your friend, she would not inspire me.’ Inspire! who wanted him to be inspired! Are the successful painters of to-day inspired? *Poseur va!*”

At that my patience gave way. I did not mind what he had said about me or Blaise, or my poor uncle who had fled to Thibet from his Octavie, but I would not sit comfortably (that is sit, simply), and hear my father called a *poseur*—that—no!—I forgot what a lady should do who is eavesdropping in a tree, I only remembered that my father’s lovable trait—his artistic scruples, were being sneered at, and I’m afraid I did a very dreadful thing. I clutched a stout branch with my two hands and let myself drop and—that’s not all. As I dropped my right foot suddenly struck out and energetically came in contact with the person of my cousin just where his back changes its name. I did not say one word to him. My ambition was to recover my dignity and equilibrium. Both the men had risen, under the assumption, I suppose, that it was raining aerolites. I took the Major’s arm. “Come, Major, the tales of this little old concierge are spoiling the beautiful evening. Let us go and see the other toad near the water tank.”

I only plead extenuating circumstances. I was wrong to listen, but it was not premeditated. I was wrong to kick; but did I really kick, was it not an accidental if fortunate contact of my opportunist extremity in its descent with my cousin’s unsympathetic centre in its ascent? Or again, assuming that it was a kick pure and simple, what proof is there that it was delivered with

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malice aforethought? I may have been—what do they say in modern legislature?—acting subconsciously, or perhaps I am a degenerate, without much will-power. I fear that is my excuse. I feel a glow of unholy satisfaction which only the irresponsible offender can enjoy.

I wonder how Jules is taking it, or, rather, keeping it. Of course it is very cowardly for a woman to strike a man, but if it requires a surgical operation for a Scotsman to see a joke, there is nothing like a pointed hint to make a cad realise his caddishness.

I told Gracieuse in confidence that very night as she was folding me between the sheets. She stopped, put her long elbows at right angles from her waist and distended her lips silently. Gracieuse never laughs: she did not learn when she was little, and that is a thing you cannot pick up afterwards.

“Well done, *ma mie*,” she said, “that was a step in the right direction!”

XXII

MY UNASHAMED ANIMALISM

Les Arbousiers.

I DO not know if I love him, I am quite sure I do not like him. He shocks me at every moment, not by what he does—he is the essence of practical tact—but by the thoughts he reveals; and he reveals them quite matter-of-factly, as if they were everybody's thoughts or should be. I am shocked, as I said, but never surprised—I know that type of man so well. He is the amalgamation of all I dislike in the Frenchman. His mental attitude irritates me. He will say, for instance, "on my honour as an officer," which tempts me to ask him, "Do you keep several kinds?" And I do believe he does. I feel somehow that he would think nothing, for instance, of lying to me or to any woman.

He has a way very sweet, but none the less irritating, of saying things which he does not quite mean, but in which there is, nevertheless, enough truth to leave you puzzled as to the quantity of salt required. He smiles, tells you something exaggeratedly gallant, then screws up his monocle, and looks straight into your eyes. If you are a woman you want to moisten your lips before answering his amiable banter—you try to extricate the sincerity from the politeness. It would be easier and

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safer to discredit the whole thing *en bloc*, but how one would like to believe it all !

It is not cleverness that he possesses so much as nimbleness of mind. He has great charm of manners and very little kindness of heart. The other night at the casino Vi introduced him to a very pretty, slim girl of about twenty. Her mother was there. She was the girl herself seen under a magnifying-glass, the girl multiplied by twenty years of over-eating, over-sleeping, animalising.

"Isn't that Miss Pinker awfully like her mother ?" said Vi, apropos of nothing, as we were coming home, she, Captain de Montiers, and I, in the car under the dark blue sky.

"I should say *terribly* like her mother," said the Captain, with a light laugh.

It jarred on me. It was such a beautiful night, so placid and noble and generous, that worldly wit sounded quite small. *Rosseric* by the seashore always seem to me to be hissed and hushed to shame by the waves.

He has a taste almost too acute for a man. The other day he had tea with us in Vi's sitting-room. Just before he entered I had noticed with annoyance a beautiful pink carnation hobnobbing in a crystal jar with—ye gods!—yellow daffodils. Vi had committed this atrocity in a fit of aberration, and I had been both too lazy and too polite to interfere. But all the time my thoughts and my gaze were mentally shifting the carnation, and in quest of another vase for it, where it would be alone in congenial company. Captain de Montiers had not been ten minutes in the room when I could see the

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anomaly had also struck him, was, in fact, worrying him. But he is a soldier, a man of action, and a strategist—in a moment he was face to face with the enemy, and, while continuing the small talk with us, boldly plucked off the carnation with wonderful assumption of absent-mindedness. "Now, then, young man," Vi warned him, "don't despoil my vases for your button-hole." He spread his hands apologetically, and propitiated her with true Latin wit and spontaneity.

"Please pardon me, and let it off. These flowers were bad neighbours."

His talk is full of *finesse*, natural, impromptu, but also of false notes. He has the subtlety and tact a diplomatist should possess, if diplomatists were chosen for their diplomacy, and withal is as narrow-minded and retrograde as a Spanish grandee.

"I would be so very grateful to you for the slightest pretence of attention. Three times I have asked you the same question under a new guise, and you answered, 'No,—yes, certainly—of course not,' while you counted the acacia leaves above my head."

"My dear Blaise, please forgive me. It's a very bad characteristic of my mind. It likes to absent itself, and it departs *à l'Anglaise* discreetly, without my knowledge and permission. . . . Why do you shake your head?"

"Because no woman ever yet was absent-minded. She has no thoughts for the past and none for the future, her mind lives now and here, and, when she answers the same question three times differently, it's not that she is thinking of something else but of *somebody* else."

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"How well you guess—I was reflecting on my husband."

"I don't think he would like you to do that."

"Why? I only think good of him."

"So we do of the Pope."

"I think you are impertinent to the Pope and impolite to my husband."

"They should both be hard to please if they did not appreciate the *rapprochement*. Your husband is, I am sure, quite worthy of being a Pope—the Pope would joyfully be Pope no more to be your husband. I did not mean to be rude, but when I am cross I am apt to be that. Tell me your reflections about your husband, and it may help me to be happy and courteous."

"That sounds Machiavellian, but it's too hot and I am too lazy to search why. I was thinking that Austen is the most perfect man I know, and I was wondering whether it's my husband who is that or the Englishman after whom he is fashioned. I mean, take an Englishman of the same class, send him to Oxford, then to the army, what will he be at forty?"

"Lord Bettany. He could not be anything else. Listen: I have never met your husband; but I think I could describe him very accurately, because I have met many Englishmen. You say they are good. Possibly. But they are not so much good as—deliberate. I don't know whether I explain myself well. There are things that one does because one does them quickly. For instance, one could break a pane of glass and snatch a jewel which glistens insolently, but if one has to forge a pass-key to open the safe in which the jewel is, one

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has time to think, and one does without the jewel. The Englishman does not err so much as, say, the French, but when he does he has far less excuse, for his instinct is not swift. His virtue is greatly a matter of obedience, more so than of disposition. He has a code and calls it conscience. He thinks in precepts. Submit to him a case which has not been foreseen by good form, religion, loyalism, and if there is no precedent he is almost incapable of creating one. To me Virtue has *élan*, spontaneity; she is stayless, and her raiments are all different and new—before all she is self-reliant. But what the cold, ponderous race call virtue is only vice at a slow trot. They may be virtuous, those who are mere amateurs in amatory matters. . . . Why do you laugh ? ”

“ Did you choose your words ? It sounds like a *jeu de mots*. You emphasise your opinion with the energy of a hammer.”

He bridles up at once. He is ridiculously quick to take offence. For a moment there is silence. We are sitting in canvas chairs—I perfectly still and almost somnolent, he in a semi-repose.

He possesses so much energy that one feels tired by mere contact with him. While he speaks to you, his eyes are counting the buttons on your coat, blaming the length of your hatpins, or criticising passers-by. There is a link missing in the meshes of my wrist bag. For two months I have intended having it repaired, but always forgot. I am shamefully aware of the internal hole as soon as I am with Blaise. It would be no exaggeration to say that as soon as his eyes catch sight of that unfortunate rent (and they invariably do) they

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assume a worried look. He must have the same look when passing his soldiers in review. He reminds me of father. Sometimes father also used unconsciously to bring his profession into his private life. I have watched him often, with much amusement, shift his position when talking to some fair friend or other, until he positively had the most favourable view of her, taking into account the light and the background, as if the friend had been a sitter and he in his studio.

I think that what in Blaise appeals to me most is his tremendous instinct. I can't imagine Austen doing or saying or even thinking anything spontaneous. He is too deliberate and self-controlled. It is impossible to think of him as plunging in swift anger a knife into somebody's thorax (yet I can very well imagine Blaise doing that), nor plunging into the sea to rescue somebody else (or that same body for all it matters) without first taking off his coat and folding it with ponderous neatness, as he does everything.

Compared to my husband, Blaise is astonishingly primitive. He has astuteness, but so has the savage. He lies, but so does the child. His nice manners are—manners. He can at will wear them, take them off, regulate their effectiveness, assume some of the very best or worst quality.

His manners depend on his moods, and on whom he wants to charm or to snub.

Austen has no manners and no moods. He has ways, and given the same circumstances they are the same ways. He has always the same voice. Blaise has a different one for almost every word, and, certainly, for every

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person. He is a natural man. You cannot expect a natural man to be a gentleman; but gentlemanliness can be learnt and practised by whomsoever chooses, while instinct is a thing strong and rare which, once lost, can never be found again.

There are very few people in England who have any instinct left at all. They don't even know exactly what it means. They would think the word has a wicked sound somehow. They are so busy trying to be like somebody else that they never have time to be themselves at all, and whenever instinct throbs in them they call it fever and take quinine. The regrettable thing about it is that they are in no way ashamed of their degeneracy. I have been told by people who wished to please me, or who had nothing else to say just then, "What jolly perfume you use! What is it? Violet, isn't it?"

Violet! and it has been white rose all the time—there's nothing more different than the perfumes of two flowers. I turn up my nose at blends—manufactured perfumes are too scientific for my taste. I despise and dislike science in sensuous emotions. Imagine mistaking white rose for violets! It is beneath contempt. It is almost as bad as not being able to tell a *berceuse* from a *bacchanal*. Why, even each rose breathes differently. I could tell in the dark which are the Jaqueminots, the tea roses, the Victor Hugos, the Marie Henriettes, and those little red roses, which look nothing at all individually, but are loud and riotous, sanguinary and over-spreading in a crowd (like a band of *sans culottes*)—rambler roses are they? I could tell all of them. And



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it is not only roses—each thing that grows in the good earth has a smell of its own. Even the moss, the spongy moss that's dark green and soft, does not exhale the same lovely, musty damp smell as the tall moss (that looks like thousands and thousands of green hairs that have been dyed with the wrong bottle), nor as the flat bluish-green moss that does not grow but spreads itself out on the trunks of trees and on very dry soil. When you see it on the bark the trees drop tears of gum, delicious to eat—at least, I love it. Perhaps that particular *vert de gris* kind of moss is not moss at all but a disease of the tree. If so, it's a very decorative one—pity we humans are never afflicted with beautifying ravages!

Some shameless people go even to the length of confessing that they can't smell at all. *Parbleu!* half my friends—no, not my friends (I don't grant my friendship to incomplete creatures) but half the people I know, they are hardly alive at all. For instance, they always seem to hustle about things which are not pleasurable, which are not even important; but though they hustle they never achieve that delicious fatigue which makes rest heavenly. I have not seen yet any human being rest beatifically, as panting dogs know how to—panting dogs and I. In town you can't tire yourself easily—no, I don't mean tire, I should say fatigue. It is not at all the same. To be tired means to be satisfied, which is very sad—to be fatigued means to be exhausted, which is great physical pleasure.

In town, if you fatigue yourself at the ball or the skating rink or paying calls, you can only sit down and

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smile and talk pleasantly ; you can't be transported at once to your room, collect all the cushions from all the chairs, throw them on the hearthrug, and throw yourself on top of all, and, when one side of you is quite roasted, wonder if you can gather sufficient volition to turn the other side to the fire.

I am, of course, thinking of winter rests. In summer there are the sand and the grass to receive you, inert, happy, and pulsating, and they are better than rug or cushions.

It is so good to be fatigued, so fatigued that you are nothing that you were, not a woman, but just a thing, a thing of the earth, and caring for nothing but the earth. If one does but think of it, there are many permitted volupties to the fully alive beings. Many women (some of the incomplete) grumble at being women because they haven't such a good time as men have. We women experience much more physical pain than the men, and many more torments of the brain—the first because the greatest of all tasks is given us, the rest because most of us are petty and mean and spoil our beauty and sweetness with small cares, humiliations, envies and contemptible worries.

But then, with all that against us, we have so much more power for sensations and joys, we are so much keener than men. At least, I suppose all women are like that. I only know two women thoroughly well, Vi and Gracieuse. My sister-in-law is so full of brilliance and vitality that it makes a dazzling barrier around her. You can't see her through it very clearly. As for Gracieuse, she has no sex, the poor old dear ! But I

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believe that the flesh and blood of the average woman, the women like me, are like wax and mercury—only more so. Everything leaves traces on her, every change hardens or softens her. Woman is a barometer and a weather-cock all in one.

I wonder men don't die at an early age through boredom, feeling as little as they do. Now, for instance, why does Austen go to a concert? It is not even to be close to me because, when I push my foot against him when the music gets particularly enervating, he says, "I beg your pardon, darling, did I hurt you?" He does not realise that I meant to be quite near. Then, when my teeth begin chattering, at the violoncello, I look at him and, as likely as not, he is adjusting the opera-glasses or reading the programme. I whisper, "Austen, give me your hand under my cloak, I can't listen to that without touching you." He smiles good-humouredly and gives me his hand. "Very nice indeed. Fine player that chap!" Very nice! Blasphemy! Why doesn't he call the sea "quite pretty"? Can't I infuse some—what shall I call it?—some life into him?

After hearing good music I feel as if I had been buffeted and banged about, as if I had been in a storm; I am cold and ill, and my husband says it's very nice!

In fact, music is a love test. If it makes you and the loved one pulsate of the same fever and with the same rhythm rejoice—your hearts are attuned.

I have been asking myself whether the insensibility of Englishmen is natural, or due to generations of self-restraint in the cause of "good form," until at last atrophy sets in and they can't feel any more, like the

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fate of the mole's eyes or the Englishwoman's breasts. As she will not feed the children any more there is no reason why her breasts should not in time disappear through unuse—and they do.

The older I grow, the more clearly I see how we let the trivial take the place of the essential. When I say *we* I exclude myself—I know the value of things from a bed in a haystack to the little pink radish that crackles under the teeth. I don't mean radishes as *hors-d'œuvres*, but those you happen to see in the garden as you pass by, and that tempt you by their pink disc under fresh thick green leaves—radishes that I pull myself from the good earth and wash at the pump with much gusto and no less splashing—when Gracieuse's back is turned.

I am not assuming an air of superiority because I appreciate natural pleasures. Why, the stupidest animal does! All the same, I would be dreadfully sorry to lose the power of enjoying simple things.

Suppose that when I get older I should become too refined or artificial—they are synonymous in this case—to care any more for anything that is not made and bought, for an person who is not somebody, for any beast that has not a pedigree, like most grown-ups around me!

All Englishwomen I know say they love dogs, but I have noticed it's never a mongrel dog they love. The more money they give for him, the more love they give to him. Dogs are appreciated in proportion to their expensiveness—like daughters of joy. Men are capable of caring for a mongrel because of the love that overflows

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through his eyes; woman never!—their soul is too full of vanity. But they don't understand their sumptuous pets in the least. They are unwise and often cruel. Aunt Barbara, who is a member of the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, has a cat who has never been out of the house for nine years. That cat has never run over walls and slippery roofs, she has never felt the rugosities of a tree trunk under her claws, she has never hunted for birds and mice, she has never had little lovely kittens to lick and paw about, she has never stretched herself into a small arch of happiness under the moon. Poor, valuable Persian cat! How she must loathe my aunt! They feed her on mysterious messes. She has the sly look and the *embonpoint* of a vicious monk, and perhaps she suffers from toothache. But then it's not only Aunt Barbara's cat—it's every beast and everybody that's degenerate. Vi's dog can't walk, he grovels—perhaps he's too fat? Vi herself never would have children, and the Major is a vegetarian. He tried to convert me. I showed him my canine teeth in a laugh of contempt:

“If life is a struggle I mean to fight it tooth and nail. I mean to use every bit of me to the full. I may lack something, but I am sure I have nothing too much. Not to eat meat! Why, if we were alone together on a desert island, with nothing to eat but shellfish and cocoanuts, I would strangle you with my hair while you slept, make a roaring fire by rubbing two little sticks together (it seems some people can), spit you through with my biggest hatpin, roast you, and eat you with some salt I'd find in the hollow of the rock—

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nyam-nyam." I squinted, as horribly as I know how. I opened my mouth its widest, made a bounce through the French window, leaving the poor Major looking somewhat afraid and very much sick. Perhaps he believed me—those army men are so very naïve!

Between myself and my fountain pen anthropophagy would have no charm for me at all. It is not so much a question of morals as of appetite. Why, one can't look at the majority of people without disgust. If it came to partake of them, ah, *non alors!*

XXIII

MY WOODCUTTER

Les Arbousiers.

DO people's tastes change as they grow up? My tastes have not changed at all since I was a little girl. I like the complicated and uncomfortable delights of a picnic as much now as if I were a five-year-old. We had such a charming day in the woods yesterday. *We* means quite a great many of us—Videar, and my aunt, and my cousin, and the Major, and Blaise and me. I could very well have dispensed with my aunt and her son, but Videar has taken a fancy to Jules of all men—why, he is not even a man yet, though he has outgrown Monsieur l'Abbé. Blaise drove us, Vi, Jules, and me. My aunt, the Major, and the provisions were in the other car. My aunt will not allow her son to drive her, "because," she says, "the *child* is so impetuous." Impetuous! My cousin! Why, I never knew a boy of nineteen who was so measured, cold, prudent, and altogether mummified.

Why had Vi invited the Major, unless it is by some refinement of cruelty? To him was given the uninteresting task of looking after my aunt and the hampers. Poor Major! I hope he was not at all gallant to his neighbour, whose great crime was to have given birth

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to that "damn little puppy with a ditto affectation of shyness." I have no doubt that was what the Major thought, and I quite agreed with him. Vi is a beast sometimes. I resolved to be extra nice to the poor old Major during the day—and I am ashamed to say I quite forgot subsequently. That's why I don't keep pets of any sort, because I forget to give them something to eat or to see that it is done.

We went very far for our picnic, to a little village of the Landes called Pyreherade. It is a delicious name to pronounce. The peasants here give it six syllables, and each is a diminutive drumroll.

It was hot, even for me. We had chosen—at least, the other women had chosen—a clearing in the pine forest. They thought it would be cooler. I might have told them that the pine registers the heat more than any other tree, but I thought it would do my aunt good, as she is getting much too fat. Vi complained of the heat, but she was really much too engaged to suffer from it. Her face cream did though. She looked like a wax statue melting away. She had little rivulets of skin food and rouge running down each side of her nose. But that did not prevent the Major and my cousin from gazing at her adoringly. Pooh, men don't see those things, or perhaps they like them. Man's altar is woman's dressing-table. There is no merit at all in subjugating men, it's so easy that it's almost cowardly. It's like telling lies to a child. It does not seem fair sport. Men are like those birds—what are they, penguins?—which neither fly nor run away, but just wait for the hunter to knock

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them over. There is no fun to be got out of an easy prey.

How men can make painters always surprised me, for their eyes are their least sensitive organs; they embrace an image without caressing its details. I am absolutely sure that if I were to send a curl of my hair to my husband he would never recognise it as mine. Sometimes he will exasperate me by saying suddenly and with a great show of observation, "Halloa, what a stunning new hat little Phrynette has got to-day; suits her A1!"

"But, *mon cher*, it's not particularly new. We went out in it together before."

My husband laughs and lifts up my chin until our eyes meet—he is going to make a joke and does not want it to be wasted.

"Did *we* really? Well, it becomes you better than it used to, that's all."

I laugh kindly, and he kisses me—to thank me, I suppose.

I have worn several new hats in Biarritz lately, and each was noticed, and I was not kissed. This, as Vidéar would say, is entirely my own fault.

My picnic hat was a *bonnichon* with a bow of *toile de Jouy* and two frills of valenciennes falling over my eyebrows and covering my ears. I wore a muslin fichu to go with it. Were it not for the scantiness of my skirt I might have stepped out of the Revolution.

When I cease to be able to sit on the grass gracefully I shall cease to go to picnics. When I was young I had a doll with a very tight skin of kid filled to bursting

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with sawdust. I felt particularly tender towards her because she had no joints, poor thing! and had to sit uncompromisingly, with stiff legs sticking out. My aunt reminds me of that doll. She presents a lamentable mass when the whole of her is on a level. One then wonders where the woman begins and where she stays end; and that wonderment about her person is not through "sinful curiosity" as when people are attractive, but merely through puzzled incredulity, as one thinks of the camel passing through the needle's eye. I don't wonder any more now—about the camel, I mean. It was only when I was young that I took things literally. Had I known she, my aunt, was to make such an inartistic exhibition of herself, I would not have taken away from her car, while she was not looking, the camp stool she had provided herself with. I took it and hid it behind the yucca when she called at the house for us—I merely wanted to make her so uncomfortable that she would never come with us any more. But when I saw she was going to spoil our enjoyment, through the sheer grotesqueness of her posture, I went and fetched all the cushions from the cars and brought them for her to sit upon. We had to raise her first—I'd rather be dead than disgraced. When a woman gets old she has no business to be fat and a bore, and ill-natured, and have an only son, and speak always of him, and always as "the child." I much prefer my Aunt Barbara. She is as ugly, but she is more wholesome; she is hard, but she is a character. My Aunt de Tréveret is just her son's mother, and that is not much of a recommendation. There are some very lovable old women. I am sure my

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paternal grandmother was a charmer and a wit. I never knew her, but *petit père* painted her, of course, again and again. She was thin and white-haired—you could not call her a dear old lady, she was not at all that sort. She had the face of a female Voltaire, with a malicious chin and a cruel nose, almost joining one another over thin caustic lips. The only womanly things about her were her eyes—they had the beauty of eyes that cried much—and her hands, which were both spiritual and soft. Father, of course, thought her altogether adorable—what nice man does not idealise his mother?—but she seemed to be the kind of mother who slaps readily. Perhaps that is why *petit père* was so gentle and caressing towards me. I know nothing of her history, but I always imagine she had two tragedies in her life (women had leisure for tragedies at that time)—an inconstant husband, and one of the ugliest periods in fashion.

The picnic was like every picnic—cold viands and dry champagne, and not half enough ice. I proposed to help the dogs first, instead of after, as one can't possibly eat without shame when an humble dog looks at you. He follows your fork from your plate to your lips with a tremulous intensity which makes one—me at least—feel like a selfish brute. Blaise laughed and my aunt protested. She is really the kind of woman to have a very fat dog ever on her lap, but Fate, under the form of her late husband, having given her a son, I suppose her heart could not very well contain a dog and a son. I'd rather she had had a dog. But Vidéar understands dogs, and she threw a whole chicken over her shoulder. We heard crunching and yapping from a

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distant bush where the dogs had retired to eat with genteel decency ; and everybody was satisfied ; but I meant to remember that Blaise had laughed.

After lunch, my aunt got into one of the cars under pretence to read the papers, but, in truth, to loosen her stays and get a nap—not, however, before having cried out to The Child, who was fast disappearing with Videar, “to be careful.” I did not think this was at all polite to my sister-in-law, when my aunt further added at the top of her voice, “There may be vipers about.” At two paces behind them went the Major, neither with them nor by himself, but pitifully like an unwanted dog.

“What an unsatisfactory thing a trio is,” I said, lying at full length on the pine-needles.

“Not at all,” Blaise said lazily, sitting on his heels on my right ; “only the men are uncomfortable, it’s the woman’s hour.” I swept off the pine-needles from the moss at the foot of the tree facing me, so as to bury my nose in its damp warmth.

“It’s not an amusing game really—no planned-out game ever is.”

“No ; I don’t think it would amuse you. You are too direct and normal to scatter your ammunition. You’d use balls, not shot.”

“Oh, I don’t understand. I don’t know the difference. No, don’t explain, let us smoke the cigarette of peace.”

“I am surprised that an intelligent woman like you should turn up her nose at information.”

“I forbid you to use such an appalling appellation. I am not intelligent—I am merely very clever.”

Blaise closed his narrow eyes and made enviable

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things with his cigarette smoke, things that women can't do.

"You have," he said between two cloudy rings, "the modesty of genius."

We smoked in silence for some time. It was very pleasant to hear the pine-cones opening their shutters above our heads, and the cigale rubbing her wings together exuberantly. Why, why, why, must English people call a cigale a grasshopper? It's no more like a grasshopper than I am an intelligent woman. Vidéar, who makes the same mistake, offered a most feminine explanation—"Well, you see, we haven't got cigales in England, but we have grasshoppers, and it's the nearest thing to it."

"Of course," I admitted. "How simple and expedient! We adopt the same system too, in many other cases. For instance, we haven't any altogether smart-looking men in France, but when we think we see one, we consecrate his spruceness by calling him a 'snob' in all good faith. We think it's some English quality."

"And isn't it?" said Vi.

She is a frivolous kid, is Vi.

But it is not much of a game she is playing now. I'd rather *do* the lizard, like this. Her men are not at all worth wasting her fatigue and her wit upon. "Poor Major," I say aloud. "I rather disliked him at first, he looks so majorly, doesn't he? But, do you know, he must have had a nice mother? He is full of odd, gentle, womanish ways, when you least expect them. He smells of lavender, and he looks for spills to light his pipe with—not really, of course, but you know the sort, don't

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you ? And his simplicity !—you have no idea ! At the play yesterday, he said there were two kinds of women—the good women and the bad women ! ”

“ And what did you say to him ? ”

“ Oh, nothing ; I had a chocolate in my mouth. It was not worth while hurrying over the chocolate to teach that babe ! ”

“ And what would you say to me ? ”

“ That the reiterated question, with a different complement, is impertinent conceit.”

“ That’s one answer. I have no doubt I shall learn also quite a lot by the other.”

“ Well, then—tell me how many women there are in the world, and I’ll tell you how many kinds of women there are.”

“ Men should thank God for so much variety. Tell me, wise lady, how would you classify men ? ”

“ Those that make us cry, and those we make fools of.”

We could not see any of the trio, but now and then we heard pretty, careful little shrieks from Vi.

“ What’s that ? ” Blaise asked.

“ A babe would know. She has caught her veil or her skirt in the thorns, of course. We shall hear her shriek again, because she is very impartial.”

“ Of course,” said Blaise, with a shrug of contempt, “ it’s elementary.”

“ Look here,” I said, and I stamped very ineffectually with my toes, “ Vi is a dear, and I won’t have you suggest she gets caught on purpose—in thorns, I mean.”

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Blaise made his face so innocent that I could not help laughing: "Of course," I went on, "the 'cute old 'child' would know how to handle the situation, but the poor Major!"

"You spoke of impartiality."

"Oh, she'll give him his chance, but he won't know how to use it. He'll use his pocket knife and just hack through. Men who have had very nice mothers are usually very dense."

"*Qu'elle est amusante cette gosse!*" said Blaise, staring hard at the car where my aunt was.

"What did I hear you say?" I asked wrathfully.

"That I disapprove of your aunt's hat," he answers, with the innocence of the confirmed liar.

"You must be hard to please. It's a very smart hat, and the best—the only best thing about her. One can't very well spoil a hat. You can detach a hat from its support. Now, a dress you can't very well separate from the woman in it. Oh, I do wish you would not laugh at everything I say—there is nothing more exasperating than to see people laugh at the wrong things."

"But not everything you say is wrong. Besides, you wouldn't have me laugh at what is right!" Pleadingly, "Don't be cross. I laugh merely to show my teeth—they are my only best point. And, seriously, I think that your aunt's hat is not at all so bad as I imagined. Come, let us look at it from a distance. All aunts' hats and some fellows' pictures look best from afar. Come, let's contemplate."

"No, I stay and meditate."

He sat down again, with a sigh.

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"If only we had a major, you would come, I believe."

"I am not preventing you from going farther a-wood."

"You know very well I can't leave you."

"Pooh, I am not afraid. If there are any vipers, I'll call Cavanagh."

"I meant 'can't' literally."

"Would you really like to go for a walk in the woods with me?"

He half raised himself expectantly, his eyes very bright, and his lips parted, showing his sharp, white teeth. It's strange how much like dogs interesting men are now and then in gestures and expression. I had also partly raised myself up on my palms. I looked with a nasty little smile at his eager tension—"Sha'n't," I said, and fell flat again. If it had not been for my aunt's hat and Cavanagh's mysterious presence, so aewhere not far from us, he would have bitten me, I think. I shrugged :

"I may be a little beast, but I like beasts, and you don't. That will teach you to laugh when I wanted to help the dogs first at lunch."

He laughed, his snarling mood had passed.

"Shall I tell you a little story?"

"Certainly, if it's not a parable."

"It was meant to be a parable. How I wish you were intelligent, and not merely very clever! You have spoilt it all. However did you guess?"

"Oh, there was an air of revengeful unrighteousness about you, like somebody who is going to gorge one

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with morals. But, never mind, forget my cleverness, and tell your parable. I can appreciate simple pleasures."

"Thank you. Once upon a time, in a prison yard, there was a beautiful woman promenading—hush, you can interrupt when I am finished—she was to be guillotined next day for the murder of her lover. She had poisoned him by putting arsenic in his camomile. As she was walking in the yard with the other prisoners, she stooped suddenly, 'Poor thing,' she cried in a liquorous voice, 'it might be trampled on,' and, with her naked pink, soft fingers, she picked up a loathsome worm, and carried it close to the wall out of harm's way—*voilà!* Well?"

"Well," I said, "hum, the idea is really very good."

"*But*——" he asked with *finesse*.

"*But*, if you will have it, why ill-treat it so? It's crude, inartistic, uneven—you spoil it at the very beginning. Instead of making her pick up the worm first to render her sympathetic, you make a fuss about the murder of the lover—and, worse, you render her ridiculous. The mistress of the man who drinks camomile is ridiculous. She is splashed all over with that camomile, don't you see? What was the matter with him? Indigestion? Then you should try and keep within probability. You say she was beautiful. I doubt it, myself—no woman can be beautiful in prison garb and with her hair cut. Still, let it pass. But then you go on to say she was to be guillotined the next day. Have you ever heard of a beautiful woman being guillotined in France? No, you should have said, following the worm episode, and, as an afterthought, that this tender-hearted,

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attractive woman, with the pink finger-tips, was serving her sentence of two months' confinement for the poisoning of her lover. Now, there is supposed, in parables anyhow, to be a moral to immorality, but in your tale I see neither immorality nor moral."

"Surely you do. She was full of pity for that repulsive worm, but that did not prevent her from being a monster. The moral of it is that one can be very fond of animals, and horribly callous to human creatures."

"But you are not logical. She may have quite good reasons for the arsenic—a man who drank camomile! Perhaps he wore a chest-protector; perhaps he sucked eucalyptus lozenges when he should have been kissing her lips. When she gave herself to him, perhaps she did not reckon on the apothecary atmosphere. She killed him, she may have been wrong to kill him, but why ever did he let himself be killed?"

"He trusted her."

"There you are, you see. He was a fool. That makes the murder at once more forgivable. And, if the poisoning does not show her up as a monster; neither does it prove that she had a kind heart because of picking up that worm. There is no fun in tramping over a worm."

"Look here," said Blaise, "you seem to have a knack of making ugly things sound pretty. Why don't you write fiction. Let's collaborate."

"Eleven," I shouted, with glee.

"Eleven what?"

"You are the eleventh person (male person) who has asked me to collaborate. We have counted them, Videar and I."

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"It shows many people think you have talent."

Blaise sulkily buried a cigarette end with his heel (he looks at his best when he sulks—his scowl is brigandish).

"No, it does not. It shows that eleven men have found me amusing; but they might have found me less amusing in print. My faith in myself goes up with each offer. When I have achieved twelve, I'll start a huge tome, with all of you in it."

"If you do, you will lose us all."

"Pooh, one only loses rare, precious things. Besides, you won't recognise yourselves. I'll roll the twelve into one lucky thirteenth—you, for instance, will be fair and good-tempered."

"Then it won't be true to life."

"On the contrary, composite characters are always the most natural. Nobody is made all of one piece. We are all patchwork and multi-coloured underneath. That's why civilised people wear clothes to hide these inconsistencies. Everyone has something of everybody else."

"What have I got that you have?"

"Latin blood, swiftness, lack of depth, impatience, humour, derisive resignation, clear-sightedness, callousness——"

"Oh, beg pardon."

"Yes, callousness—you to animals and people—I to certain people only."

"Well, I don't care how you libel me as long as I share all those defects with you."

"Ah, that's because you care nothing for mere moral qualities. Give me another cigarette, please. Do you know, if we happened to be English, or be overheard by

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English people, all our conversation would have to be labelled as personal and rude ? ”

“ Personal, but not rude, surely ? ”

“ The two are inseparable in English. I don't know why—the more personal a conversation, the more interesting. The most palpitating subject is oneself first, don't you think ? Then others in relation to oneself.”

His two hands were crossed behind his head, he was half-lying, half-sitting, with a pine-tree as a support to his back.

“ In relation to oneself,” he echoed softly. His languid tone made me look up. His eyes, half-closed and mysterious, were caressing me leisurely, from my hair to the upturned soles of my white, suède shoes. I knelt up brusquely.

“ Oh,” he complained, “ why did you do that ? It was like a final discording accord. I never knew you do anything so inharmonious. Will you go for a walk as a compensation for interrupting my dream ? ”

I carefully refrained from asking what his dream was. I could guess pretty well.

“ No ; I don't want to stir from here, in fact, I feel as if I could never leave it. To be near trees makes you grow roots. . . . I could be very happy living here always in a hut, with a verdant roof and an earthen floor. I would have sabots for my feet, and a woodcutter for a husband.”

“ You would not like a real woodcutter.”

“ Oh yes ; why not ? If he were physically beautiful and clean.”

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"But he wouldn't have a soul."

"I haven't a soul either. Does that prevent people liking me? We would live in a hut made by him out of the scraws of the earth, and some of the seeds in it would germinate and grow. I would have a joy of a window, small and square, with real panes; and I also would insist upon a real chimney, a little squat chimney on the roof. Do you think red roses would grow in this soil? Honeysuckle would, I know. . . . Oh, can you imagine the happiness of living in a house all to oneself, with a husband all to oneself, a husband who would have no club, no friends, no newspapers, no secretary, no correspondence, a simple mind, who would think politics a kind of disease?"

"Diogenes?"

"No, no, not a sour, useless, selfish crank, but a man ready to share his sunshine with all others—an elemental man, all soil, strength, toil, pleasure, a big, kind brute, a gentle savage—not too gentle, not too savage. And we would have many children, mine, mine to feed, to wash, to dress, to watch over. There is no true possession in civilised family life. But my husband, the wood-cutter, and my barefooted, bareheaded children would belong to me. Life would give them to me, and civilisation would not snatch them away from me. It would not find us in that big forest. I would close the door of my little mud house in its face. I would cook on the earth. . . . Oh, Blaise, I can smell the green wood burning, the sweet, acrid, smoky smell in the little hut. I can see him coming home framed by the door with all the glory of the evening behind him. I would sit waiting for him by

MY WOODCUTTER

the window. The setting sun would make a flame of my hair, and of him a thick statue of sombre, burnished gold. He would come in smelling of the forest, of the resin, of the already falling dew. He would put his axe, his axe so swift and clear, on the floor in a corner of the room. I would get up reverently and go to him, for he would be the brave, the strong, the master, and he would take me in his arms—those arms that had done useful things—and it would be as if all the strength of the good earth embraced me.”

I sighed, and Blaise sighed. We looked instinctively towards each other. If a flame could reflect a soul, a face, a form, a temperament, he was that flame, and reflected me. He attracted and repelled me. Our liking was a pleasure mixed with a little disgust. I felt that a man had no right to be so like me. There was also a sort of shame in the instinct that pushed me towards him. My being married had, indeed, nothing to do with that sensation at all. I felt that even if I had been free, or even if I had been his wife, we would have considered each other as—oh, how can I express this?—as accomplices.

I dropped my eyes, and blushed, both against my wish. He spoke—to help me out, I think :

“ I always knew you were a pagan and a rebel.”

“ No, no, you mustn't use those two words. I loathe them. Paganism and rebellion are almost as fashionable as the Tange, though not as new. I am, on the contrary, reverent and obedient.”

“ Reverent of what ? ”

“ Nature.”

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"Obedient to what?"

"Instinct."

Blaise jumped to his feet fiercely.

"Where is your husband?" he cried. "Of all the conceited fools——" And he strode off.

I looked at him disappearing behind the tree trunks—just a trifle too elegant in his white flannels—very swift, very sure, and full of grace. I was a little angry with him, but far more with my husband. I knew Blaise would come back in a few seconds, and plead to be forgiven—and art does not consist in never offending, but in being forgiven every time. Austen also will come back, but he won't even suspect he has something to be forgiven for.

The pine-needles broke softly behind me.

"You will think that I am a little mad," said Blaise's voice. "Please, pardon me, but"—he came and knelt opposite me, half earnest, half frivolous—"you see, I get indignant thinking that the one man to whom was offered the sweetest [I raise my chin], the loveliest [I frowned], the rarest [I opened fierce lips] little mud house," completed Blaise, in triumph, "was not present, ready and eager for immediate possession. What does your husband say to your idyllic forest life?"

"I never tell him those things," I cried. And then shame invaded me. I had been telling Blaise those things. I looked aimlessly round. My aunt's hat was the only straw to clutch at. I went on precipitously:

"Shall I ever prefer to sit in a stagnant car rather than on the good earth?"

MY WOODCUTTER

"Never," said Blaise, with kind assurance.

"But one gets stiff as one gets old."

"Ah, but people get old only when Life passes by and cuts. The others—the favourites—she plays with, and breaks very soon, as you do your favourite dolls."

"Did," I corrected gravely.

"Did, of course. Pardon, madame—you'll never get old. Life won't give you time. You need not fear. You'll die young, like those rare, blessed people, who 'revere nature' and 'obey' their 'instinct.'"

"But these are not mortal diseases."

"No; you'll die suddenly and magnificently. How? Ah, I cannot tell—playing with matches, skating on thin ice, putting tantalising little fingers through tigers' cages. Something tells me that one fine day the tiger will drag you in and gobble you up."

"Five o'clock," shrieked an alarmed voice from under my aunt's hat. "*Mon Dieu*, but where is The Child?"

XXIV

MY MAD RIDE

Les Arbousiers.

THIS has been the most perfect morning of my life, but I do not know whether to write it down or not. I may feel a little ashamed of myself when I read all about it afterwards, with a cold puiſe, when the excitement will be over. The facts frankly expressed in my usual shameless manner may make me feel uncomfortable, but then—what a she-turkey I am!—I can tear it up. It would be good just now to go through it all once more.

Well, then, this morning I awoke very early. What awoke me was a ti-u from some bird in the arbutus-tree. I woke up regretfully. I was having a charming Watteau dream in a blue *clairière*. I was dancing in pink satin shoes on well-combed grass amid a basket of fruits, fans and mandolines. Léandre, gallant and redoubtable in azure satin and powdered hair, was playing the flute. The ti-u accounted for the flute, my imagination for the Pastoral. I am a painter's daughter, I have sucked pigments with my nurse's milk, and cut my teeth on a paint-brush handle.

Ti-u! I sat up and sighed for Léandre; but the window was wide open, and the blue of my dream hung every-

MY MAD RIDE

where. My right pyjamaed leg stretched itself out of bed and felt for a *babouche*, my left pyjamaed leg remained in the warmth and waited luxuriously for the command of my good pleasure. It is blue, I debated, but it must be chilly. Ti-u, called the bird. My two feet were in the two *babouches*, and I was on the balcony breathing the newness of morning and dancing to the tune Léandre had been playing.

It must have been very early, for no one was to be seen or heard, no noise but the bird, and the sea, and my laugh. I bathed my head and hands in fresh water, put a bath robe over my pyjamas, climbed over the balcony and dropped into the blue. The garden looked incredibly innocent and sweet. Had anyone told me it was the property of a pork butcher, even if no longer in the exercise of his ignoble functions, I would have shrugged at him vehemently. The slugs were all over the paths, sleek and modest and leisurely, like some *bourgeoises* of Bruges going to early Mass. Why of Bruges? I don't know—perhaps because everything was calm, sleepy, saintly, and indifferent, and the slugs were really as smooth, slow and round as placid Walloons in brown mantles.

The angels had wept over the treachery of spiders and their tears still hung in the webs.

The smells of the flowers were like a honeyed harmony. It filled me with a sort of frenzy of joy. I jumped in the very midst of a flower-bed, and began dancing furiously to the tune of the azure shepherd.

"*Léandre, beau Léandre, où donc te caches-tu ?*"

Ti-u, ti-u, sings the bird. Karakaksopoulos, who has

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accompanied me, has prudently put the height of an acacia between him and that wild strange creature who likes to dance with her bare paws in the wet. Karakak-sopoulos is really too prudent to be wise.

“*Léandre, beau Léandre*——”

“Hello,” gasps a voice from the road. “Eh, *mon bonhomme*, what are you doing in that garden? *Hein.*”

I turn round and laugh at the sallow face of Blaise, pushed as far as it can go between two iron bars of the gate. He is on horseback, and his horse is also pushing his muzzle into my garden. It looks very comical—their *groupe equestre*.

“*Eh, là bas,*” I answer, with as big a voice as I can manage. “Eh, my good, if inquisitive, old lady, what are you doing prying like that into people’s gardens? *Hein.*”

“Name of a little good man,” he says, “is that really and truly you?”

“Who?”

“Oh, you, of course. Approach here!”

I drape myself in bath gown and advance demurely, dragging my *babouches* on the gravel path.

“*Eh bien!*” he says, as I come near.

“*Eh bien?*” I ask, blinking under my hood.

“I thought you were a mad monk tramping on Icons when I first saw you. What’s up?”

“Nothing—I am down, that’s all. And what are you doing scouring the country lanes like a brainless horse-man at six o’clock in the morning?”

“Six—it’s only half-past four, my dear lady. I could not sleep——”

MY MAD RIDE

"And I awoke——"

"Yes; but that does not explain what you were doing in that flower-bed."

"Dancing the *pavane*—they are only dahlias. If I had had a horse, I might have ridden him instead of frolicking between four walls."

"I say, oh, I say——"

"Well, say it then."

"Come for a ride with me!"

"Not in these pyjamas!"

"Who will see you?"

"You!"

"No, you'll be behind me. Come on, before anyone is up. We'll go exactly where you wish, as far as you wish, and turn back when you wish. I swear on my horse's mane that we'll be dumb brutes, entirely at your command."

"But it won't be *convenable*!"

"My dear lady, you are the image of propriety—you look like a sugar saint. Besides, did I not see you at the casino last night dancing the one-step with an impossibly fat German? After that——"

"Oh, Blaise, it was like dancing with an eider-down—a sophisticated eider-down!"

"Pooh, madame, do not give me such realistic details! Why did you ever dance with him? And a one-step of all things! A Lancers, now, or a Polonaise——"

"I said yes to him while I was thinking about something else."

"Well, but it is a good precedent. Think of some-

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thing else and say 'yes' to me. However, if those clothes trouble you—I distinctly said *you*—there is no if in my case—why not go quickly and change, and then for our ride?"

"Can't; it's all locked inside. I dropped from the balcony."

He swallowed a smile and whistled.

"Is this gate locked also?"

"Yes; but the key is under one of the flower-pots."

"Well, then—do you know your French history? 'If it is possible, madame, it is already done.'"

I ran the key along the bars tantalisingly.

"Admirably quoted; suppose we consider it then as already done. Good-bye."

"White monk, if you do not open the door with the obedience and humility worthy of your habit, I will shout 'fire' and assemble the whole of Biarritz at your portal."

I opened the door, and he prepared to descend.

"No, stay where you are, I'll climb alone."

"But let me help you——"

"Stay there, I say, or I sha'n't come at all."

He emptied the left stirrup, offered me his right hand, and, houp! I was astride behind him with my two arms around his waist.

"Suppose we meet people?"

"We can only meet natives. The visitors are in bed."

"Well, but even the natives, what would they think?"

"That you are an English boy going for an early bathe. English people, as the whole world knows, are blessedly eccentric. If we do meet anyone, shout some-

MY MAD RIDE

thing in English in that tenor voice you addressed me in this morning."

"Tenor! It was bass, sir!"

"All right? Now steady, we are off!" And we went off as fast as the best horse could go—so fast that my interlaced fingers, wet with the dew from the flowers, were stiff and blue from the wind. My hair was still dripping from my immersion, and, at each jolt, drops of water fell upon my bare feet.

"Dear little nails!" said Blaise, as the horse took a hill at a slow pace.

"What nails?"

"Your finger nails, of course, since you persist in keeping those uninteresting *babouches* on. Steady now! How irritatingly illogical you are! I have seen you polish away at your nails in and out of season when you were supposed to be talking to me, sitting by the sea, reading in the garden; in fact, that polisher is to you what the rosary was to another generation—something you can use quite well while thinking about everything else, a sort of seventh letter of Julius Cæsar. You take an enormous pride in your nails. They reflect it; and yet when I give them the masculine praise they have striven for with leather, files, scissors, sponge, paste, brush and powder (to mention only a few) you run the risk of tumbling off rather than let me contemplate them—is not that foolish? All the more so that I have known those nails for almost eternities of time!"

"Many thanks—your flattery stops at my age evidently!"

"Dear nails! I was not speaking of your human

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babyhood, when you were almost as pretty, but not at all so glazingly clean. You, thumb ! I remember you well like a little pink fig, wrinkled and spotless from constant sucking. You, index by name but beckoner by natural bent, I have never been able to forget your curve. You, medium ! you may well be called happy, for the pink of perfection is yours. You *annulaire* ! are, alas, spoilt for me because of that gaudy waistband which you affect. And you, Benjamin ! little finger that would not grow up, are you aware that your stature is ridiculously short and that, by the laws laid down by that cold-blooded species—painters and sculptors—you should reach the first phalanx of your neighbour ? ”

“ You need not look at it then.”

“ Dear lady, I hope you are angry. It helps me to remember those nails of yours as I saw them first. It was in Rome was it not ? In the year—let me see—in the year of beauty 222 B.C. Those nails were not quite as terrible then as they are now, but harder and sharper, for they belonged to Ra-ha-rouh.”

“ It sounds like a purr.”

“ I am gratified at your perspicacity, for Ra-ha-rouh was the favourite tigress of the magnificent Helio-gabalus.”

“ You have a genius for making up names ! Helio—how say you ? ”

“ Gabalus ; but this I take no credit for. Helio-gabalus was the Emperor.”

“ What did they call him when they were in a hurry ? ”

“ They never were in a hurry. I told you it was the age of beauty ? ”

MY MAD RIDE

" Ah, and Helio—you know, was that you ? "

" Madame, you insult my reputation ! Know then that I was brought up at the holy College of St. Louis ! "

" I beg your pardon. I did not know Helio—something—was so bad. I am vague on mythology. "

" It is not mythology, but history. "

" Is it not the same ? "

" Truth will come even from the lips of women. However, Heliogabalus was not bad, or good, but—different. Gutenberg had not invented printing, so that there was no free press. England did not yet exist, so that vices went without cloaks. "

" Yes, yes, but come to the interesting part of it. Who were you ? "

" Thank you, I was a slave. I came from Egypt, my name was Remedy-of-God. In Hebrew it's rather pretty, and much shorter. "

" Say it in Hebrew. "

" Raphael. "

" Oh, does it mean that ? How learned you are ! "

" No, I'm not. It is you who are so delightfully and flatteringly ignorant. "

" Am I really ? I'm so glad. "

" Yes ; it's a becoming and unusual accomplishment. Where was I ? "

" When God sent you to remedy things—— "

" Yes ; but, alas, that was a long time ago now—never mind ! Well, my mission was to feed you and take care of you and of the other wild beasts for the arena. "

" Was I for the arena ? Did I eat any Christians ? "

" No ; wait a little, don't be so greedy. You were not

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for the arena, you had been brought from Africa as a cub, and were almost tame. Look at me well, don't you remember me? My hair was plaited into many precise little plaits, my belt was yellow with red stripes, and my yellow bare back was often striped red from the whip."

"And then?"

"My misfortunes don't interest you—and then—I was very fond of you, and when I had given you a particularly tender piece of raw——"

"Don't."

"When you were graciously pleased with me you would purr and fix large, inflexible, inexorable eyes that had drunk all the gold out of the desert, on my humble and foolish human eyes, and you would curve your spine and yawn. You yawned then with almost the same graceful insolence as now."

"How dare you! You never saw me yawn."

"Tut, tut! I have made you yawn on purpose."

"Pooh! hypnotism, perhaps?"

"No, dry details. If I were to tell you when Biarritz was built, at what cost, by what people, and the number of visitors that are staying at my hotel, you would yawn. But as I can't see you, I'll keep all this information for a more propitious time. You were yawning the first time I saw you."

"The first time!"

"Well, the first time I saw you since the studio days. In the Park, you remember, the sun was in your eyes and you yawned slowly. Then I thought of Ra-ha-rouh, and that you were a motherless, badly brought-up girl."

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"Oh, why? Because I yawned?"

"Your hand was not on your mouth, madame! You yawned shamelessly, as if to proclaim you had thirty-two sound teeth, and that it was an English Sabbath."

"To yawn is rude only when you are with someone. You are talking nonsense. Teach me some more history."

"One day the Emperor had me beaten within an inch of death."

"Why?"

"A little stone had lodged itself between his sandal and his sole, and I happened to be near in the gardens. I was too ill to be able to get up and feed you for two days—and the next time I entered your cage you brushed me down with one of your paws, crouched on my heart, and dug your fangs in my throat."

"It is not true!"

"Think well, Ra-ha-rouh: when they came to take me from you, the hair of your head was like the sand where the late sun had spilt itself. The colour of your hair is rather unusual—and to this day you put carmine on your finger-tips."

"But I was hungry and you had neglected me."

"Was I reproaching you? It was an exquisite death—but to see you afterwards at the feet of the Emperor made my soul sad."

"Not the bad Heliogabalus?"

"The same, dear lady. How could you have resisted? He wore a rose behind his ear, on his wrists were beads of cornelians and bracelets of cowries; on his fingers were amethysts shaped like scarabs. His hair was soaked with perfumed oils, his depilated skin exuded

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the languid scents of a whole garden at noon. His walk had a rhythm and his robes a feminine witchery. You crouched at his feet and breathed over his lovely hands, until one day a lovely boy asked him for your skin, and—both you and I had lived ! ”

“ I do not believe,” I said, “ that Ra-ha-rouh was me.”

“ No, you were Ra-ha-rouh. You have progressed since.”

“ I do not believe in metempsychosis.”

“ That’s because you are very young : as you live on you will admit that everything is possible. In ten years you will tell me that you remember Raphael, his soft brown eyes, his little plaits, regular and decorative like the fringe of a tablecover, his docile back, and the humble way he had of sitting on his heels in front of your cage munching a straw and staring at the smooth, calm, yellow desert in your eyes—his country and yours. When you are lazy, warm, and without thought in the park, on the beach, or in your garden, I remember Ra-ha-rouh in her tawny sleekness, and I look at your nails and at your teeth.”

“ *Fa, sal, la, la, si, si la sol ja !* ” Before we can see him we hear the pipe of the goatherd, sad and yet shrill, and at a turning of the road appears the blue form of a man in the midst of a bouncing herd of Satanic beasts. They seem many, though there are only half-a-dozen of them ; but goats, like children, multiply themselves visually by their incessant motions. As we pass the group at a trot the goatherd stops, one *espadrilled* foot suspended in front of the other (as in a photograph), his

MY MAD RIDE

stick swings suspended from his wrist by a leather strap ; his pipe remains suspended at his lips, its call remains suspended on the ascending *la bemol*—the whole form of the man is a suspension point.

I remember Blaise's advice and shout in English at the top of my voice—"Britannia rules the waves—Three times four are fourteen—God save the King—A stitch in time saves nine," and so we trot by, Blaise bent in two by laughter over the horse's head, I declaiming my ready-made English with the seriousness of a drunken man. One of the goats perched on a stone-heap shakes her head sadly. Blaise looks at her, and her gravity sends him into a fresh attack of laughter.

"Did you see her face ?" he shrieks. "Don Juan in his dotage would have looked like her."

"You, who believe in metempsychosis, can you not suppose she remembers the days of frolics, the bacchanales, the fawns in the leafy dells and the garlands of vine leaves ? We must turn back now, please, it must be late, and I want to get in before anyone at the villa is up. You won't say anything of this escapade, will you ?"

"*Chère madame* ! what a question ! But if I did no one would believe me."

"Why, is it then so awful as all that ?"

"Not for us unmoral people, but——"

"What did you say ? How dare you say that ? Speak of yourself. I, unmoral ! Why, I have quite clearly defined moral views. I am the most moral woman of my acquaintance, except my maid—she, of course, is exceptional."

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"I have noticed nothing exceptional about her, except her moustache."

"Bah, many women grow moustaches in the South, but she has a conscience. As for me, it offends me that you should compare my morality with yours."

"Thank you."

"Wait, I don't mean to be impolite, but morality is like a fit in gloves—to every person his size. If you were to tell me you think I wear sevens I would be very angry. Everybody's rectitude is *en rapport* with his temperament. To abstain from alcohol would not be meritorious in me at all because merely to smell alcohol makes me sick, but it might be the one sublime abnegation that would open the doors of heaven to a London cabby. Unmoral ! Me ! Why, I never flirt with a married man unless I know personally his wife's lovers. I never wear feathers in my hat, I never had an astrachan coat, I never eat eels, or lobsters, or crayfish. I never stare at ugly, nor ill-dressed, nor painted, nor eccentric, nor small-poxed, nor deformed persons. I never ill-treat animals, I never nag Austen, I never eat too much. I never eat without hunger, I never kiss my husband in a tepid moment through mere habit or because he expects me to. I never whisper audibly, I never nudge ostensibly, I never laugh unless I am alone or with other intelligent people. I never had a spinach-green dress, I never cheat at cards, I never keep tradesmen waiting for their money, I never ask questions, I never had my ears pierced, I——"

"Take breath, you are a wonderful negation. Are all those things that you never do sins ?"

MY MAD RIDE

“ Undoubtedly. You see, you can't say I am unmoral, for I have thought a great deal about morality. Most people are immoral because they undertake too much. They imagine morality like some dreadful sea monster, elusive, and with all-grabbing tentacles. One must work out the science of right and wrong all by oneself; everyone I suppose has his own system; as for me, I find elimination is the best method. They talk so much of the simple life, but what is wanted is the simple moral. People's consciences ape at the superhuman instead of trying honestly to go one better than the brute. Instead of saying let us try not to hate our neighbour without cause, they repeat after Christ—Let us love our neighbour better than ourselves. Have you seen ambitious bathers who pretend they can swim and lift up one heel above the sea for the benefit of those on the sand, instead of staying in the shallow water or bobbing up and down with the waves? Well, the usual moral people are like that, they spend their lives trying to discover the fourth kind of equilibrium. To let them know of a beautiful religion like Christianity is like giving clothes to a monkey—it only hampers them. Why, people don't even understand modern poetry! If you ask a Christian what he most admires in Christ's life, he will say his death. Now, though very few could live like him, hundreds and thousands could die like him. You said that I was unmoral, but, Blaise, truly, truly, between ourselves, I would jolly well accept crucifixion this very moment, if I thought I could save the world from its fiendish fate in so doing. You believe me, don't you? ”

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"Yes, I believe you; but I am rather sorry to believe you. I never suspected you of being earnest—please laugh at once. It feels rather uncomfortable, having a nondescript creature, half philosopher, half panther, behind one's back. Now that you have preached, laugh, please."

"Poor Blaise! Faster, faster, man, it's six o'clock at least. What if Dominique is up? Did I bore you very much? It is this ride that is responsible for so much earnestness. I forgot the time, my sex, and your frivolity. You must stop before you come to the gate; someone might be up and see you. There, hola, gee-gee! Good-bye. Please stay in the saddle—I can manage—good-bye—don't look at me. Yes, eleven o'clock at the Vieux Port. I would enjoy a bathe now, but one can't do what one likes *always*. Good-bye, trot away! Yes, perfect morning, *plus que par/ait!*"

Yesterday we, Vidéar, my aunt, the Major, Jules, Blaise and I, went to Hendaye by train. The railway follows the coast. The view is enchanting. Unfortunately my aunt initiated us during the whole journey into the deterioration of modern servants, the dearness of everything in Biarritz and the ridiculousness of present-day skirts—subjects which can be made bearable only when treated with Attic salt. I was sitting between Blaise and the window, and he—abused of the fact. I could not protest because of the others, but a ticket entitles one to a reasonable amount of space. Also his interest in the landscape was that of a myope—and somewhat too persistent.

MY MAD RIDE

Once in Bayonne we asked the way to a certain hotel from a small-footed Basque, who was dexterously making soles for *espadrilles* in a dark, malodorous, and unclean alley. He had evidently a strong dose of indolent Spanish blood in his veins, for he answered us, full of commiseration—"The Hotel Royal? Eh, but it is quite at the other end of the town."

To reach that other end took us exactly five minutes.

This afternoon Vi and I had tea on board Blaise's yacht *M'Amie*. Pretty name, pretty boat! She is not large, but delightfully elegant and spruce. She looks like a white racehorse, keen and slim-flanked.

She was lying in Royan until last week when she was brought to Bayonne. The weather is now so perfect that she lays in the Bay of Biarritz. We were taken to her in a small sailing boat called somewhat unfortunately *Pas-de-Chance*. Vidéar felt nervous; she does not belong to this fearless generation.

She is also a bad sailor, so we refused Blaise's invitation to go to-morrow to San Sebastian in *M'Amie*. I would have liked to go. The boat smells sweet and looks trustworthy. It is an ideal place for a honeymoon. The crew looks impudent, and clean in spite of themselves. They are all from Marseilles—that explains all!

XXV

MY HETEROGENEOUS FEELINGS ON AN UNCERTAIN
SUBJECT

Les Arbousiers.

I WISH he wouldn't smile so often. His is not a good smile, for all the charm of it. A smile is the quickest and most effective form of communion. I love a smile. I smiled all my life—at all times and people—instinctively as I sing; but Blaise's smile is a defiance thrown at life—by merely showing his teeth, he shows his depreciation of things and creatures. A gleam of painted fang under the black moustache, and it says, "nothing is worth more than a laugh." His under lip has a healed crack in it. I often look at it when speaking to him, it teases me and fascinates me—that little white seam on the very red lips. When I see them about to part for that ever-ready joyless smile of his, I have an incomprehensible but terribly strong temptation to crush that parody of mirth with my own lips. I would give my soul to kiss him, I would—may Ste Phrynnette help me! And yet I swear by my *patronne* that if he were to break his neck to-morrow at the Concours Hippique I would feel no sorrow, but, on the contrary, a sort of deliverance. Temptation would be taken away from me without an effort which I feel incapable of

MY HETEROGENEOUS FEELINGS

making. I'd feel like an alcoholic, weak-willed, but ashamed of his vice, who would learn suddenly that no spirit would ever be allowed to be distilled any more. Blaise, may you break your neck, but oh, just to kiss your lips before!

In my love for Austen a great tenderness enters. No harm that could fall on Blaise would hurt me.

I despise him and all my countrymen because they are petty, fussy, full of nerves, and for ever feeling their pulse, physically and sentimentally. Their life is smothered and bound in the flannel of their own mollycoddling, and hampered by the silken frills of an unhealthy imagination.

This sounds terribly like an impressionist picture, but it expresses exactly my meaning, and as long as I understand myself. Alas! why do I understand Blaise so well? Why can't I love him, if only to justify myself in my own judgment for thinking so much of him? I cannot explain why it is that though I have no respect for and certainly no trust in him, yet he has prestige in my eyes. He has all the qualities of his race and all the vices. He is alert and perspicacious. It's not he, who, like Austen, would leave for three months the woman he loves. He might not love her for so long a time as three months, but while he cared there would be no parting.

To begin with, he would not trust her out of his sight. He is not an unsophisticated Englishman. The fact that he has of me a knowledge which I dare not even concede to myself sometimes exasperates me. He smiles and waits—he knows! He knows women. He

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knows me. He is young, he is handsome, more handsome than most men, he is nearer to me than all men.

The wife of a tiger-hunting husband is an easy prey. He watches me and smiles. I smile and watch him, and I do not know whether I dislike him or desire him most.

And so effeminate in all is he, except his beautiful physique, that I sometimes am ashamed of my longing for him, as if I had longed for a woman. His socks are as transparent as my stockings—his perfume is more exquisite. I am sure his pyjamas are of pale blue silk like mine.

The other day he asked me where he could buy side-combs!

"At Roberts'," I said; "but better let her choose them herself."

"Her?" he said interrogatively.

"Well," sarcastically, "unless you want them for yourself!"

"But they are for myself. You see I trod on one of mine. I always fix my hair up with side-combs while I do my toilet—it keeps the wave in."

Isn't it grotesque? Yet he is not even ridiculous. He smiles and carries off his effeminacy with an irresistible nonchalant grace. Young Romans of the decadence, with depilated arms and a rose behind the ear, must have looked and smiled as Blaise does.

His nails are as polished as my own. Those well-kept hands—they can handle a sword so dexterously as to have had blood on them. He killed one man in a duel and wounded another. Those things happen even in

MY HETEROGENEOUS FEELINGS

Paris. Those long, thin, well-kept hands, let them not touch the fringe of my dress for fear—for fear——

I am sure he cries when he is tired. Do I not know Frenchmen? How contemptible! And how I would like to taste the salt of those absurd tears, to drink them as they roll down on the sallow cheeks, to kiss the closed eyelids and the black hair, so carefully perfumed, and with the combs in it—pshaw!—but how I would!

XXVI

MY HARD HOURS

Les Arbousiers.

I AM afraid, not of Blaise, but of my emotions, of the beauty of the night, of the scents from the garden, especially of my youth.

The palms of my hands are hot and dry. The window is wide open and the curtains are not drawn yet; the atmosphere of the room is not a restful one.

I have had roses on the table all day, and, although Gracieuse was very careful to remove them before she left me, their sweetness remains. Perhaps, also, I have too much perfume on my person. Austen used to complain of my scent passion. (Oh, I have written "Austen used to," as though he were dead or just a memory.)

I try not to judge Austen as, when I was intensely religious, I tried not to discuss my faith, with the most lucid and most logical *me* at the back of my brain. I thought it was a sin against faith, as now I think it would be a disloyal thing to think of my husband with my intelligence when my heart has sufficed until now.

It is not that I have grown tired of Austen—why, hang it all, he never gave me the chance! He wants me to take for granted that he loves me. I can't do that. No one can take for granted the big fact of life. We shall

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all die, but none of us quite realises it—more, I don't believe it, anyway.

I love him, I still love him ; but I am beginning to judge him, and this is what my judgment says : He ought not to have married me. He is much older than I am, more than double my age. He is just forty-one. Twice eighteen is only thirty-six, I believe. But age counts for nothing at all in the matter. *Petit père*, for instance, was very, very old—at least fifty—but he always made me believe he was the same age as I was. And, however abnegative he was, I don't think there was any effort at all in that.

He never condescended ; he never talked down to me.

Austen plays *with* me. *Petit père* and I played *together*.

This, to me, typifies the two men more clearly than any comparison I could think of.

I had a great respect for my father ; he was so charming and witty. He had an enormous prestige in my eyes, as most men have with a brilliant conversation, a slim waist, and exquisite hands ; but my respect was humanised by an immense tenderness, a real and delightful camaraderie. We felt with each other and for each other, like two eyes. I would be ashamed if Austen knew everything I feel, but there is little fear of that !

Austen is not my *camarade*, he is only my husband, and not very much that. There was no diffidence at all in my respect for *petit père*. I am a little afraid of Austen. *Petit père* was, like all fathers, short-sighted and indulgent—I do not know which was the cause and

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which was the effect. Perhaps he was both naturally, perhaps deliberately.

When I knock at Austen's door I always say, "May I come in?" Before entering my father's studio, I merely sang out, "*C'est moi, petit père!*" Austen answers, "Come in, dear," or, "I am sorry I am engaged, dearest." My father said, and I could hear laughter in his voice, "Come quick, my treasure, that I kiss you!" And if he were engaged he would ask the sitter if he or she (more often she) did not mind his little girl being there. They were all too well-bred to object, and I believe they were all more or less under the charm of my father.

The women used to talk about my hair, and the men brought me sweets. But whereas all the women were beautiful and young, the few men were old and fat, with decorations in their button-holes, because, as father explained to me, for a woman to be beautiful is sufficient justification for having her portrait painted, but men need to be "arrived."

I was trained not to make myself a nuisance.

In the corner of the studio there was a little stool in tapestry, where I used to sit and nurse my knees, and look admiringly at the beautiful ladies and hope I might be like them when I grew up. I can see that little stool now.

The tapestry represented, with infinite taste and stitches, a pink and blue shepherdess on top of a ladder, a tree exuberant with cherries, and which looked miles distant, but in reality supported the ladder in spite of all laws of perspective. I used to wonder by what miracle

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her ridiculous little basket of a hat could hold on her powdered hair, and how her ridiculous pretty little bodice could hold at all the shepherdess.

She had on one arm a velvet bracelet, and, on the other, an absurd little hat of a basket very obviously full of cherries.

At the foot of the ladder was a powdered young shepherd with apple-green breeches, and an expectant expression of contemplation which I, being then young and innocent, attributed to the aforesaid and appetising cherries. It was altogether a naughty but exquisite little work of art in the manner of Fragonard. I wonder who bought that stool? I wish, however big father's debts, that it had never been sold, or that I could buy it back—that, and the big bureau in the drawers of which I used to put my dolls to sleep.

What a perfectly happy little girl I have been! And to think I just swallowed my happiness without tasting it! I thought everybody was as happy as I. Someone ought to have tugged at my sleeve and said, "Child, you are being happy, realise it, realise it!"

Austen ought not to have married me if he was not to always, for ever, and unquestionably want me. I know this is a very split infinitive. What of that. I like split infinitives as I like side issues, the unexpected twists of a lane, little audacious curls springing from a smooth chignon, and a sudden laugh in a serious conversation. I can no more resist splitting my verbs or opening a parenthesis than a goat can resist nibbling *en passant* at honeysuckle that offers itself, even knowing that a fat bundle of hay is awaiting her in the stable.

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A split infinitive has the grace of most things irregular. I am not saying that because of my nose.

Where was I? Oh yes, it is certain I am not indispensable to my husband. I have been grafted on to his life, but I am afraid the graft did not "take" well. He goes to meetings, I don't know where; he has friends, I don't know whom. I knew every one of my father's friends—all the men anyway.

My husband often says, "Don't expect me for dinner, dear, I've asked a man to dine with me at the club—business, you know."

What is the good of being a baronet if you have to be busy? What is the good of having a passable young wife if you do not make the most of her passableness and her youth?

It is not good for woman to be alone. I wish Austen would not trust me so much; it's positively humiliating. I don't think I would enjoy having a eunuch attached to my person; but, at the same time, some husbands' too perfect confidence in their wives amounts to impertinence. Some men, especially Englishmen and Irishmen, seem to consider a marriage certificate as an insurance policy—covering all risk. Englishmen, because they lack imagination; Irishmen, because of their own native chastity. If I were a man I would be much more jealous of my wife than of my *fiancée*. A *fiancée* is yours because it pleases her; you can never be sure that to be yours has not long ceased to please your wife.

To-night my nerves are all a-twitching. I dare not even look at myself in the glass, I am afraid and

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ashamed of the great self-pity that invades me then. For whom this youth and this freshness, this rutilant hair and those long, supple, caressing limbs that seem made to curl of themselves in a grasp of love? For whom, God? I press hot lips against the cool surface of the mirror. It feels like a kiss from the dead—desolate, dispassionate.

Is it because I am not beautiful enough that I am standing loveless and alone in front of a mirror crying over the waste of me? Yet—I write this clearly conscious of everything that is me, without self-favour and silly vanity—I am full enough of beauty to be desired and rejoiced in. I may be horrible when I am old, for not a single charm of mine is of the sort that endures, but to-night, just now, I am lovable. I know it, I feel it, I see it. I am warm and pulsating and young. I am young—I want my youth fulfilled.

Even if I were mistaken, if I did not see myself as I really am, what about others' judgment? If Austen had not found me lovable, why should he have married me?—not for my *dot* anyway—nor for my cleverness—I am so simple-minded and childish! What for, then? Perhaps it was mere curiosity, perhaps I had for him the puzzling value of foreign coins.

But there are others, just to mention only one—Blaise. It was no later than yesterday that I asked him:

“Look at me well. Forget you are a gentleman and speak the truth. Do you think I am beautiful? No, don't close your eyes, I don't want you to think, I want you to stare and deliver a verdict.”

“But I can see you better with my eyes closed. No,

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on my honour as an ungallant man, you are not beautiful—you are worse—and far more dangerous.”

“How dangerous? You see, I am tragically serious about it and you mock me.”

“In all seriousness I maintain—dangerous. A thing beautiful is susceptible of definition, analysis. If I were to describe you to somebody who had never seen you, I do not think they would enthuse much, even a photograph would fail to render you adequately. A photograph does not laugh and does not say unexpected things, and does not undulate with her arms as if she were going to dive. You see I observe with my eyes closed. We prefer a perfume the elements of which we can't quite recognise—it charms and eludes—and don't run away with the idea that I admire or love you at all, which I should certainly do if you were beautiful. For instance, if you were to ask me to kiss you, I don't know whether I would not bite you first.”

“In that case I'm not afraid of hydrophobia. Why? Well, because I can't imagine myself asking you to kiss me. Oh, la la!”

The habit of talking nonsense enables one to recognise earnestness in chaff as easily as a *dégustateur* differentiates between different *crus* without swallowing a drop of the wine. I understood all Blaise said, and guessed all that he meant, and forgot the personality of his remarks for the reassurance they gave me; besides, I had asked for a brutal compliment with the greedy outspokenness of a farm handmaid.

So I am desirable and disturbing. Bah, I knew before asking Blaise! A tumult of bad feelings against my

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husband boils in me, swelling my veins, tightening my jaws. I press my hands together as if to smother something vicious which oppresses me. Why did he marry me if it were to leave me so alone with my youth, my fever, and these troubling summer nights ?

Why cannot one love oneself ? Why cannot one suffice unto oneself ? Why cannot one love one's own body, and that love satisfy ? Like Adonis, I find myself fair and I kiss my hands, long, helpless, artist's hands, and it's not enough.

He came. I knew he would come. I willed it.

I believe I heard the gravel being crunched under his boots before he had entered the garden. You hear so well during the nights of solitude both inside yourself and in the world without. I heard every mad shout of my brain, though I pretended not to know what it was clamouring for, and I heard the *arbouses* fall on the moss as he brushed the tree and the sharp leaves of the yucca pricking his clothes. I heard him in the stillness. I saw him in the blackness of the garden. I felt his presence as if he had been in the room.

There was no light—he could not possibly know I was on the balcony, burning in spite of the coolest of wrappers, clutching at the balcony rail, and so acutely alive that I was conscious at the same time of important and futile things. Conscious of a tragedy, without a name, of a woman who is not resigned to her fate of woman—to be taken and left at man's pleasure ; conscious of the bitter smell of broken ivy, and of the unpleasant feeling of the iron rust off the rail on my fingers.

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He could not see me, but he felt me up there panting in the dark, and looking down into his eyes no doubt, but I could not even see his form though I could hear him breathe.

His whisper came up, "It is I."

I wonder what he would have done if I had not answered. After all, he could not be sure I was there, or that I was alone, but I spoke as one does most things because one cannot decide clearly and at once.

"Who?" I asked very stupidly. I felt him shrug his shoulders.

"You knew I would come."

"Indeed, I did not. This is too much audacity!"

He laughed and his feet scratched the wall. I felt a branch of ivy being tugged at, some insects touched my hair as they flew, he was a little nearer to me.

"You were waiting for me?"

I licked my lips and closed my eyes.

"It is not true," I lied. "You were mad to come at this hour, like a bat, and just as blind. If I—you must not think because—perhaps, I have been coquettish with you (perhaps!); I did not really mean to be—oh, do not believe that I wanted you to come. I am ashamed! Go—do go—I pray you, at once!"

He laughed again. "Coquette to the end! Bend down a little lower and say, if you dare, 'I did not wish you to come. I do not want you.'"

I knew I could not say it (even in the dark) well enough to convince him. I took refuge in the truth. It vibrated through the silence, although I spoke low, almost to his face.

MY HARD HOURS

" I love my husband ! "

It was a prayer, an incantation, a proclamation of faith, a cry for help, and just then Austen was snoring, lying on his tiger-skins a continent away, dreaming of to-morrow's hunt.

" I love him with all my heart ! "

Under the balcony Blaise was very still. He had heard the truth, he knew it for the truth, and it hurt him. The sea was in my ears. I clutched the rail very tight and waited. Then he said what made me hot with shame and angry with myself for having been so transparent to him :

" Perhaps, as you say, it is your husband you love, but it is I who loves you most, and you want me to love you, and you like me to want you."

" Go ! "

" You have done all that a woman—a woman like you—could decently do—dared do—to—intoxicate me—and now, now that you have brought me to that point, now your vanity is appeased—I am to go ! "

" Go ! "

I knew that if his hand touched the hem of my *peignoir* I could not say it again, and he was terribly near.

He reasoned no more. He accused me no more. He made his voice very soft, and prayed :

" Phrynette, oh, my little friend of long ago, my love of to-day, of to-morrow, of always, until I can love no more, it makes me—it makes me indignant to hear you speak of love, you who know nothing about love. Oh no, you don't ! Believe me, one can see on a

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woman's face whether she has warmed herself at the great fire. You poor, chilly, little girl, let me come to you, let me chafe those little pink fingers, let me close your hungry eyes with my lips. My little weak and white Phrynette ! On my soul I can make you happy, if you will give yourself to me. I promise you that I can make you forget that you even thought you loved. Oh, Phrynette, I can see you in the dark. Is your hair a flame over your shoulders, or have you those two ridiculous little plaits rolled over your darling little ears like Queen Victoria ? Let me come up, I only want to breathe through your hair, and to kiss your pointed chin—a chin has no business to be both naughty and weak ! ”

“ Blaise, I'm angry and afraid—will you go ? ”

“ No ; not while you speak to me so callously. Believe in me, believe in my love, or in love simply, but real love, and it will be like a revelation. Your life will be like an Italian sky after a London fog. Believe me, Phrynette.”

He called my name with that supple, caressing, Latin voice of his, and I felt as if all the nerves in me were pulled in a knot inside my ribs.

“ Phrynette, I can't believe that you really care for that wooden soldier ! ”

At that I laugh. That very morning my sister-in-law—I forget apropos of what—had called him (the Captain) a cardboard tiger. A cardboard tiger ! A wooden soldier ! I suppose it is true enough, neither of them is quite the man for me, but when does the woman ever meet the man for her ? The cardboard tiger ! the wooden

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soldier ! and, I suppose, the Paris doll !—it sounds like a tale from Hans Andersen !

He heard me laugh, and, manlike, attributes my laugh to what he has just said.

“ You see,” he exclaims triumphantly, “ you do not care so very much or you could not laugh. Real love is too agonising for a light laugh like yours was.”

“ It is too sacred for me even to discuss it with you. Now, listen ! If you will not go I will call Vi and the servants, and say I believe there is a burglar in the garden. I'd rather give the alarm myself than be caught, as we shall inevitably be. Oh, *mon Dieu* ! ”

“ Very well,” he says sullenly, “ at least open the garden gate for me. In my frenzy to see you I forgot all about those devilish broken bottles on your walls. My hands are like a hash. I believe I am bleeding to death.”

“ Bleeding ! Oh, Blaise ! But then there will be marks on the gravel. People will see that——”

He laughs mockingly.

“ How callous you are, you think of the marks first and only ! Whether I suffer or not does not seem to touch you in the least ! You are so cruelly feminine ! I believe my pain is incense to your vanity.”

“ Blaise, stop your sarcasm. I'll come down and I'll bandage your hands, and I'll open the door for you. Of course I am touched, but you do deserve the pain, you know. Wait, I'll bring a candle down and a basin. Ah, but I can't come now ! ”

“ Why can't you ? Don't you trust me ? I swear on my honour as an officer I won't touch you, nor even look

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at you, for if I do I must touch—only your little hands, your little, cold hands.”

“No, I can’t go down. It’s not because I don’t trust you, but I—I can’t go down dressed as I am. I am sorry. I wish I could bathe your hands; but Gracieuse sleeps in my dressing-room and all my wraps are there. You’ll find the key under a flower-pot on the right of the door as you go—throw it over the wall once you are out.”

I hear nothing but a groan, then, between clenched teeth, and in a voice full of rage, Blaise says:

“I believe it’s on purpose you tell me that, to torment me, to—to lash my imagination—don’t I know women?—the pretty little fiends! It amuses them to make a man half mad with passion—it——”

“You are not half mad, you are quite mad. Whatever do you mean? What did I tell you ‘on purpose’?”

“Oh, you know very well—about your dress—it was coquetry—you wanted to add fuel to the fire—as if it was not fierce enough already!”

“Oh, how hateful you are! How can you even think such things? Go away, I shall never see you again, never.”

There is a low moan from under the balcony.

“Phrynette, I am afraid I am going to faint—I am bleeding terribly—have you any brandy? Oh, be quick, I can hardly stand. Quick!”

I rush down to the dining-room in my silent slippers, seize a flagon of brandy, and run down the stairs into the garden. It is so intensely dark that I almost stumble over Blaise. He is sitting on the last step of the stairs.

“Drink at once,” I say. “I did not take time to look

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for a glass. Drink from the bottle. I'll go upstairs again to fetch some water and some handkerchiefs to wash and dress your poor hands."

"Don't leave me," he begs, "everything is turning round. Where are you? Come nearer; hold me!"

I stretch my hand towards him and all at once his two arms are around me—I am lifted, dazed and suffocating, pressed and bruised against him, and, with a strength and an agility—amazing in a fainting man—he carries me, running, towards the garden gate.

An absurd fear seizes me. I dare not cry for help, but I wriggle in his arms with bent head so that he should not kiss me, and my feet beat frantically against his knees. Neither of us speaks. I struggle as if my life was in danger; and yet I had only to call out for the whole household to come to my rescue.

Now and then he says, "Oh!—Oh!" in a sort of drowning voice which stops my heart from beating. His hands burn me through my muslin wrapper. He seems to be all arms and hands like those Indian idols. My teeth begin chattering, I feel my strength going, and I want madly to laugh and shriek and stop struggling. I am very strong and supple, yet I cannot loosen his arms except when he tries to lift my face towards his; then I undulate desperately, and gain breathing space. Suddenly he bends his head and plants his teeth in my bare shoulder sharply. I give a gasp and stay still, just one second, just time to think. Then my hand groped for his scarf-pin, and I drove it into his arm with a cruel courage. He gave an agonised "Oh, Phrynette!" and I was free! I did not run, I bounded, and though

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he ran after me, I knew the garden better than he, and was in my room behind bolted doors before he had reached the stairs. He stays at the foot of the stairs for a moment, then comes again under the balcony. He calls softly, "Phrynette," but I am too indignant and frightened to answer. He gives a mocking laugh and says suavely "*Au revoir.*"

The gravel creaks under his heels as he turns to go. I am on the balcony panting and dishevelled, listening to his footsteps. He is going, he has stooped near the gate and fumbled for the key under the flower-pot. I hear the door being closed. He is gone. Then I slip on my knees on the cold stone of the balcony and clutch the rail with desperate hands that tremble.

"Oh, Blaise, come back," I sob, and, shaking the rail in a sort of mad fury, I bite the iron.

I must have swooned and gone to sleep, for, when I came to myself again, stiff and wet with dew, the hour is blue and clear. I can see well enough without lighting the lamp. I look at myself in the glass and stand ashamed before a haggard female with eyes lost in violet-shadow circles that stare big and tragic in a white, drawn face. My hair is tumbled, there is blood on it and on my blue *peignoir*. I plunge my head in cold water, snatch off my *peignoir* and burn it in the fire-place. Then I go to bed and sleep, with twitching limbs and active mind as after a ball.

XXVII

MY LAST WALTZ

Les Arbousiers.

ANOTHER letter from Austen came this morning. He has postponed his return for another fortnight. A great rage fills me. I would I could hurt him physically, mentally, anyhow, as long as he was much hurt. I have read of passionate women, fearless and powerful, who have taken a red revenge of the men they love, and who spurned them. Since that last letter I can understand them so well. I could have Austen thrown into the pit to the tigers—he loves them well—to the tigers then!

It is two o'clock in the morning. Are there people asleep this morning? Are there people at peace, do they know the morrow that stands on the threshold? I feel cold. I have not had energy enough to slip off my evening dress and put on something warmer—my teeth are chattering. It may not be the cold. I am not certain about anything except that I am bodily and mentally uncomfortable. We came back from the casino an hour ago—and in another hour I may be gone! I may—I am trying to think sanely and I can't. I can only feel, and even that not distinctly, but as the body

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does after an anæsthetic. My bones ache. An hour I was dancing the last waltz on my programme. I was dancing it with Blaise. It is a waltz I particularly like—"Dreaming." The ballroom was full. He and I were lost and tossed in the sea of other couples. What have I to say for myself? After last night I ought not to have danced with him.

Things are not as they were. I let him know that not only had I forgiven him but that I accepted he should desire me. I cannot explain it. I told him nothing. I knew or he guessed that now was the hour of readiness of acceptance. I was tired, and yet my vitality was at high pitch. He said "Look up." I looked up—the music moaned. His eyes descended in my eyes, and I felt that my lips were blanching. His own face was white, and his sharp features much sharper. I remember noticing, even at that moment of moral *débâcle*, that his nose was like a dead man's nose, with pinched-in nostrils, and the bridge showing a white sally. I said "Let us stop," but he still dragged me round. My feet were soft, useless things. I was only dancing because of his volition. "Don't let go," I begged, "I cannot stand I am giddy."

"I shall not let go—we shall dance thus through eternity."

He held me so fiercely that I could feel the softness of my breasts against his breast. He was looking at me, and I was gasping for breath, for space, for will-power.

"Take me to my seat and put me down, but hold me till I am there. Please, Blaise, take me to my seat; please."

MY LAST WALTZ

He shook his head and waltzed on, crushing me still harder, and then he spoke at hazard, without care for his words, knowing well that I would understand. He spoke in a passion, as if he would have broken me!

"If you think this is right, you are wrong—it's much worse—anyway, I can't any more—I can't, I tell you—I don't know how long you think I can endure this—I can't, I won't, it's fiendish—it's an insult to my manhood—come now!"

"No."

"Yes; we can get away now if we are quick—before the end—we can reach *M'Amie* in ten minutes if we can get a boat; come now."

He bent his head until his face was so close that I had to shut my eyes.

"There is more wisdom in instinct than in prudence—come now—oh, come—now—now."

He stopped a little between each word as if his throat was too tight to let them pass.

"No, not now, it's the last waltz, see, it's finished." As I said "not now" I knew that it was all over, that I had yielded, that unless something from the outside happened to prevent it, I was going to surrender, because he was stronger than I—or weaker.

"In two hours at the portal," he said, bowing me to my seat, and he remained there, bowed before me, with his eyes on my lips until my lips shaped "yes."

He and the Major accompanied us, Videar and me, to the door. We spoke no more together, but, as he went, his hand slipped under my loose cloak, took my bare arm and shook it as if to order me to remember.

PHRYNETTE MARRIED

Only half-an-hour ! Shall I go ? If I go I am not coming back here. Shall I go ? Who cares if I do ? He has peculiar eyes, long and very dark, where sleep numberless sins. He was beautiful during that waltz, he had the face of a tortured fanatic. What did I look like, I wonder ? I must not have had my usual expression or he would not have dared. Shall I go ? It is cold in this room—I think I will change my clothes. Oh, it is ten minutes to two. Perhaps he is already at the portal. There, that is he whistling for me. *Mon Dieu*. Shall I go ? If I——

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Dieu.

XXVIII

MY UNSENTIMENTAL JOURNEY

On Board M'Amie.

I BELIEVE, and it is a sorry belief, that I possess a more or less copious dose of every vice. Vice is perhaps a strong word, but I mean it as opposite to virtue. But, in revenge, I am afflicted with a most uncomfortable quality. I am honest with myself. I would like to be able to persuade myself that, if I am not Blaise's mistress, it is because of my innate goodness, but if I dared say that to my conscience it would answer, "What a rotter you are! Now that's what comes of living in a hypocritical atmosphere!"

I am not Blaise's mistress simply because I did not like the feel of his lips. That's all! There is no merit in the fact, and there is an intense disappointment. To be ridiculous is more painful than being wicked, and I am and shall be ridiculous with a vengeance. I have no remorse. I only feel very humiliated and sorry for myself.

What shall I say to Blaise? What have I done, and what shall I do? I cannot stay in my cabin for ever! I suppose there will be a terrific scene when I tell Blaise that I was mistaken, that I overestimated the attraction he had for me, and that I want to part in

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good comradeship, and as soon as convenient. Just now he is divided by hope as to the future and anxiety as to my health.

Twenty times a day he asks of Yvonne if I am better, and if I can receive him. She invariably answers that "Poor madame has much fever, and very ache at the head." Her drawn face and careworn look lend credence to my feigned illness.

It seemed folly then to take Yvonne with me, and now I bless my instinct that yielded to hers.

As I went through the garden on that night I almost knocked against Yvonne in the dark. We both cried aloud in fear. "Madame!" she said, hearing my voice.

"Yvonne! what are you doing here?" I asked.

"I felt sick, I wanted fresh air. Oh, madame has a bag. Is madame going away then?"

"Only for a little while—let me pass—go to bed—let me pass, Yvonne."

"Oh, madame, take me with you—oh, do not leave me all alone here—oh, take me, and may the Virgin bless you!" She clutched at my long cloak and began to sob.

"I have no one, nowhere to go to. Madame has always been so good to me, she will not leave me now. Oh, don't abandon me!"

"Hush, don't cry so loud. Follow me if you will—run back and fetch some warm clothes—be careful not to awake anyone or I go without you, you understand?"

Blaise made a grimace when he saw her with me; but here she is. Thank God—here she is.

MY UNSENTIMENTAL JOURNEY

We walked to the Vieux Port, where a rowing boat from *M'Amie* was waiting to take us to the yacht.

And this is how the stupidest thing I ever did came to be done—how very easily! How well everything went!—no hitch, no fuss, it was done, as things are done in a dream, with magical swiftness and simplicity. Only I have not awakened with a sigh of relief and a happy stretch of cramped limbs. God, how cramped I am—and I can't stretch.

Poor Yvonne! she herself is really ill, and, instead of nursing me, it is I who nurses her. She is no sailor at all. Physically and mentally she is a wreck. She is abjectly afraid of everything, of the sea, of the future, of the trial before her, for I have no doubt now that my sister-in-law was right as regards Yvonne's condition. I am waiting for her confidence. I am certain that her secret is too much for her cowardly intelligence, and that she would feel comforted and altogether happier if she had the courage to tell me. But I am afraid of hurting her sensitiveness and of alienating her affection. I dare not make the first step. If I were to use any tactless word, any commiserating tone!—just now her soul is raw all over, I dare not touch it. I am beginning to lose my self-confidence just when I need it so badly. I have made such a muddle of things and people that I dare not interfere in other people's fate. What an idiot I have been! Why did I do it? Ah, why? Now that it is over, I shall never be able to understand it. Why do people commit suicide? Because they are tired and it is a solution; often also I imagine in order to spite somebody or other. But if the suicide is rescued

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he'll never be able to conceive how he could ever have done it.

How could I? Why? Why? I have spited Austen. Yes—granted—and then? What a beautiful consolation, isn't it?

Have I not spited myself far more? And Blaise? What am I to do with the man at all? He has become a nightmare. I don't sleep much because of Yvonne, who moans in her sleep, but when I do I invariably dream of him. I am explaining to him—always explaining. In my dream I explain beautifully, I am eloquent and persuasive, and I make him cry. When I have made everything clear and forgivable in his indulgent nature (in my dream), I come strangely very near loving him, and it is quite disconcerting to find that Blaise and Austen are one and the same person. Then I awake furious against them, and full of self-pity.

Yvonne complains aloud in *patois*; she also has her bad dreams. I do not understand what she says, but to my tired nerves it has a tragic sound. Shall I awake her and stop that agony of hers? She turns on her narrow mattress and sighs quite distinctly this time, "Oh, *ma Doué!*" Why does she call on God?

A sob shakes me. It is too horrible. I purposely drop my smelling bottle—"there, near the washstand, thank you, Yvonne." Fortunately it is not broken. It is one I bought in Paris last year—in Paris—and I talk to her of Paris—her Mecca and her purpose—I tell her that I shall certainly take her to Paris some day if she is a good girl. I have no more idea of how I can

MY UNSENTIMENTAL JOURNEY

go back to Paris than of taking tea with Aunt Barbara ; but there is that big, inferior child to be made happy with splendid lies.

It is strange that this girl of the country—who should be hard and brave from the rough and primitive life of the peasants—it is strange that she should bear so badly not only pain but discomfort. She has no *amour propre*, no pluck, no sense of humour to shame her into a smiling acceptance of disagreeable things.

It is my firm conviction Andersen gave quite a wrong character to the princess who slept over a pea and complained so loudly. I believe it was the princess's maid all the time.

How long does it take to go from Biarritz to Algiers ? If it takes much longer I'll be dead before we get there—but no, no such luck. It would be the easiest way out of this—scrape. Oh, I am a fool, a wicked fool, a duffer—duffer—duffer !

Austen—there now, I have said his name, and I had forbidden myself even to think it. He does not love me—he does not know how to love—I want to forget—to forget—let us think of something else. Where does the Seine rise ? The Seine rises—rises—let me see— Oh, I don't know—perhaps, I never knew it.

You fool ! You should think while you have time, this ruse has sheltered you behind your locked door. But soon you'll have to leave your cabin, and when we reach Algiers—then, what ? What will you do ?—think. Oh, it's terrible. I don't seem to be able to think. Suppose the ship were to founder—suppose I threw myself overboard ? I can't—I dare not—I am too much of a

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coward—I am bad all through, evidently—and yet, if Austen had been different, if he had condescended to become young again so as to be nearer to me—if he had been less perfect—if he had not put me on a pedestal too high for a poor, frail, little woman like me—no, no self-pity—I ought to have climbed up to that pedestal and kept there—his love could have helped me if it had been strong enough—but I don't believe it was—Austen—no, I won't—oh, I feel so weak—I have had nothing to eat since this morning—or is it remorse?—remorse—hunger—hunger—remorse. How absurd! Am I not ridiculous, simply because I am sincere? Is this life—the poignant and the grotesque cheek by jowl? Two days without anything to do but to write down my wretchedness and to study alternatively the state of my soul and that of my stomach!

Think! Think! Soon Algiers and then Blaise! Why did I suggest Algiers? We would have still less chance of meeting anyone in Zanzibar than in Algiers, and it would have given me more time to make plans—at least, it sounds very far, doesn't it? Think—think—Algiers—Blaise—my two nightmares—they are getting so near—but I can't think except about silly things that don't matter. I was just trying, sub-consciously, to locate Zanzibar. I hope I am not going mad. One thing is certain—it's all over between Blaise and myself. I'll tell him I thought I could love him—and I don't—I have made a mistake, that's all. If he is a gentleman, he will let me go—is he, and will he?—and will I dare tell him?—and how will he take it after such a scandal?

MY UNSENTIMENTAL JOURNEY

It must be all over Biarritz and London by now—and his career broken for a mere caprice on my part, as it will seem to him ! We were both mad, I think. We shall part—but what shall I do ?—where shall I go ? And, good heavens, I have no money !—and hardly any jewels—I left them all behind me—they were presents from Aus—from him. I can live for a few weeks or months on what my watch and dressing-bag will fetch—and afterwards ?—I shall have to work. What do people do for a living who haven't been trained to anything in particular ? I can't be a governess—I don't know Latin or Algebra—or even geography properly, if it comes to that—I am well up in history, though—and drawing—and German. That is not enough, is it ? What about dancing ?—I could teach that—but perhaps I would look rather young, and I am not fat enough—all dancing teachers are fat. There is no pride in me at all. I'd be a charwoman, like a shot, if it did not seem such a difficult profession—and it is too—I know, I have watched the cleaning of grates—it is really a most complicated affair. All household rites, I should think, require great intelligence and long practice, even the simplest. Wiping a tea-knife seems easy enough—no one would believe what constant presence of mind is required to think of wiping it on the back, so as not to cut the cloth or one's fingers. I have tried it—it is a fascinating accomplishment, but difficult, very ! I think I'll strike off charing then. If I had capital I would start a hat shop in Algiers—perhaps the French consul would advance the funds—consuls do these things, I believe—they are under legal obligations

PHRYNETTE MARRIED

to help their country people abroad—it's part of the duties of their profession.

To elope seems such a simple thing to do—one cannot imagine in what inconvenient situations it may drag one. However, the degree of inconvenience does not affect the moral aspect of the case.

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XXIX

MY DEAR OLD MÉDOR

Algiers.

FOR months and months before Gracieuse spoke of Dr Candé the other afternoon, I had not thought of him. He was not forgotten, but simply and sweetly laying in lavender, overlooked—and to-day I am actually in his house, here in Algiers! And poor little Héléne is dead!

When we arrived in Algiers my plan was made. I knew that if I were to escape from Blaise, it would be by trickery—and I tricked. To rid me of Blaise I wanted the help and complicity of another man, and a doctor is easier to get than a consul or an ambassador. So I moaned and Yvonne lamented, and Blaise—all anxiety, poor devil—yielding to my prayers, sent for a doctor. And it's Médor who came. I call, and always have called him Médor because, however much I love him, I cannot call him Hippolyte, which is his name. Médor is a name for a good doggie, and it suits him.

He came on board and saw me alive. I could have wept for joy when I saw his big bearded face again. I knew I was saved—saved without further exertion of wit—I had simply to lay my burden on his arms and breathe. I told him everything and begged of him, if

PHRYNETTE MARRIED

he loved me, to continue using ruse until I was out of this yacht—after that the deluge! The dear man, he lied well! though on the half-truth principle which—sex *oblige*—would have scorned to use. He represented to Blaise that I was in danger (!), that it would be better for me to be transported to a nursing home where he could keep an eye on me. These were hardly lies, were they? But they were as successful as if they had been—and here I am with Yvonne—in Médor's house—in a big sunny room, with two windows opening on a garden, a bust of Pasteur facing me on a console-table—and I shall never see Blaise again—and Médor says I must not worry—that he will do that for me, as he has dealt with my dismissed and recalcitrant lover.

I have been ill during this last week, very ill. As soon as the worst was over I, with my usual illogicalness, broke down, and Médor is nursing me with a love paternal, and—and almost otherwise.

Poor Médor, he came here two winters ago for the sake of little Hélène, but she died in April last, and is buried in Algiers. Poor little Hélène, with the ugly face and gentle voice!

Médor is very much changed. His hair and beard are almost white, and he has nice big lines starting from his nostrils and hiding themselves in his moustache. He still has that dear, silly mannerism of always gnashing his teeth, as if for ever chewing. Dear Médor, I must sew some buttons on his coat, and advise him to buy new shoelaces. I will tie a knot in the corner of my sheet not to forget.

MY DEAR OLD MÉDOR

My only pleasure is talking with Médor, and then writing down our talks afterwards. However futile they are, and unworthy of being preserved, it helps to kill time and to cure my impatience.

An hour ago Médor came into my room with the draft of a letter he means to write to Austen. He read it aloud to me. It's well written. It would appeal to me, but I don't think it will touch Austen. Nothing written touches him much. I prefer to read a play rather than to see it acted, especially in England. My husband struggles against tears at the most obviously strung-up drama, but never reads a book of fiction. Médor's letter won't get to his heart.

"Will it do like that, *mon petit*?"

"Oh yes, dear Médor; besides, it does not matter. Nothing is anything to me, and everything is as nothing. Nirvana, Médor, Nirvana—and I am nineteen! Hello, what is that delicious smell from the kitchen?"

Médor laughs. He has a most impolite habit of laughing when I am talking serious thoughts to him.

"Médor, how unsympathetic of you! Why do you laugh?"

"Not at your sudden fall from Nirvana at the whiff of roast chicken, my child, I assure you. I laugh, oh, because sad thoughts were passing through my mind. One should defy them by laughter."

"What was it you thought?"

"That here I am a strong man, who has worked hard, liked much, studied long, who has done some good, I hope, and here are you a small, feminine thing, who has never done a useful thing in your nineteen years, who

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has never taken the trouble to adjust two thoughts together—and of the two it's you have the power. People's destinies depend on where a pair of small feet, pinched at the toes, choose to go. You can do immense, intense harm. Can any action of mine grieve anyone ? ”

“ You can kill a patient ! ”

“ How humiliating to be merely a strong man ! ”

“ Oh, Médor, what are you talking about ? Why do you say I have power ? And, if it is true, why have I more power than you ? ”

“ Because the devil has a sense of humour ! ”

“ One year at the Salon I saw a remarkable group, a man full of strength and armour running, or, rather, making to run forward, and, on the ground, clutching him by the leg, was a woman. ”

“ Oh, Médor, I saw it. I remember it. It was called *Le Boulet*. Oh, I see it all again. ”

“ Are you sure—how is that ? But it is several years ago, you must have been quite a child then. How can you remember ? ”

“ I do though. Yes, I was quite small, father took me. I think the reason why I remember it so well is that *petit père* seemed fascinated by it, in fact, he even made a pun about it. ‘ Here you have, ’ he said, ‘ the whole history of humanity *en bloc*, ’ and he shook his head and sighed—at his pun perhaps—and gently pinched my ear, as if I had anything to do with the history of humanity. ”

“ He foresaw you would. ”

“ How ? What do you mean ? I am not a bullet ; in fact, I have sinned in the opposite direction, my grip on my husband has proved none too close ! ”

MY DEAR OLD MEDOR

"You have a charmingly egotistical way of concentrating humanity on you and your husband! The runner and the weight-woman may not have been man and wife, my sweet child, and if you think well, you might, perhaps, without much trouble, find some of the men with the running of which you have interfered not a little. There is that unfortunate Captain, for instance, who, instead of serving his country sanely, will actually, if they have caught him, be in prison for desertion."

"Desertion! Do you mean deserting me? How odd! It is I deserted him."

"Here you are again, you, *you*, *you*! Not you, but his flag, through you. His leave had expired—he forgot all about it. He told me himself, with tears of rage. Oh, he told me many things and"—Médor half closed his eyes and smiled grimly—"and retracted many! I made him. He has a temper, our brave friend, and, I should think, quite a record of good fortunes judging by his surprise, his disbelief at this sudden defeat. I never saw such a case of mental suffocation as when he read your letter. Poor fellow!—much must be forgiven to him who has loved much."

"You think he did love me then?"

"No, I do not. Besides, you are quite vain enough."

"But I cannot see how you can compare me to the *Boulet* woman. I did not clutch at Blaise, I can assure you. On the contrary, I actually avoided him, especially at first."

"Exactly. It's the same thing, but too subtle to be expressed in marble."

"I am sure I did not want Blaise to ruin his career

PHRYNETTE MARRIED

for me; in fact, I never gave the matter a thought. He is the man—it is for him to guide himself wisely—and if he has come to any harm through me, as you said so unkindly, anyhow, he is the only one. I have never hampered anyone else in my life, I assure you.”

“No; not hampered perhaps, let us say rather absorbed, cornered a great deal of time, thoughts energy, which, perhaps, might have been more usefully spent in some other direction.”

“Whose time, thoughts, energy, pray? I don’t understand you.”

“Whose, but everybody’s, everybody’s who comes in contact with you. Your father, for instance, don’t you think he would have done three times as much work if it had not been for your—what shall I say—‘bringing up’?”

“He liked it—time you enjoy wasting is not wasted time.”

“Oh, but it was in his case—wasted for him and for many lovers of art.”

“Tut, tut, and anyway what have *you* to reproach me with? I did not waste your time when I was little. I only had chicken-pox and pains in the legs when I grew up.”

“No, not when you were little, but are you aware that since a certain cargo entered Algiers I haven’t written half-a-dozen pages?—and, if my patients are not all dead, Allah is indeed great.”

“What are you writing?”

“Nothing, I tell you.”

“Well, what ought you to be writing, then?”

MY DEAR OLD MÉDOR

"A treatise on Myasthenia gravis."

"Pooh, is that all? My poor Médor, I don't want to hurt your feelings, but no one ever reads those things, I assure you; for instance, I read much, do I not? Well, I did not even know there was such a disease as myas—what is it? And about your other patients? Is it true you have dropped them altogether?"

"Not altogether, but I am afraid I have rather neglected them. What makes you smile?"

"Did I smile? I was thinking it's really nice of you."

"What is nice?"

"Neglecting your other patients for me. Médor, I give you this rose. Why do you smile now?"

"Because it's perfectly useless discussing moral questions with you. Duty you refuse to recognise."

"But no, big silly, only duty is like the light of day—it is for ever changing with the hour. You seem to imagine duty like a big, round, ugly electric lamp on top of a big post, immovable and altogether exasperating. A month ago, I admit, your duty was to prevent as many as possible of your patients from dying, but now it is changed, your duty is altogether to me. Don't suck at your pipe when it's empty: it sounds like somebody with a weak heart gasping for breath."

"Why is my whole duty to you, *chère enfant*?"

"For numberless reasons—because I am all alone in a savage land—because of father—because you love me a little—because I love you much—because of my children, the two that are, and those that shall be—because there are other doctors in Algiers who need patients more than the patients need them—because

PHRYNETTE MARRIED

I am *me*—because I don't think your other patients are as charming as I am—and because I am here—the right of the invaders. Is that true, yes or no ? ”

“ Some of it is true enough, and some——”

“ What ? ”

“ Too true.”

“ What is too true ? ”

“ Oh, go to sleep. You talk too much, and it's bad for you.”

“ No, it's not. If I don't talk I think of my husband, and it upsets my cardiac balance ; and I think of the children too. I have been wondering whether you would buy something for me when you go to town.”

“ With pleasure, if it is not to 'match' anything. I can't match by memory, and if you give me patterns I shall drop them when I pull out my handkerchief.”

“ No, it's quite simple. Do they sell dolls at the bazaars ?—not ordinary stupid dolls. I want those natural babies, you know, with double chins, and fat necks, and ugly faces like ordinary babies, and pleats of flesh over their wrists. You might get one, a fair one, or, if they are alike, take two to pretend it is the twins ; or perhaps you had better bring an assortment and I'll choose. And they must have joints, you know, at their knees and elbows. You, a doctor, you should know all about it. Never mind about their clothes—besides, dolls' clothes are never quite right when you buy them dressed. I'll make them some myself.”

I waited for these dolls with great eagerness. When one is in bed with nothing to do, nothing to read, and only one person to cheer you up, one's desire for the

MY DEAR OLD MÉDOR

most unimportant things becomes so intensified. I longed for those dolls as some repulsive spinster may long for a marriage proposal.

But Médor did not bring any dolls. They had not any "natural babies" at the bazaar, nor indeed in any shop, only the ordinary kind of dolls with a mouth too small and eyes too wide, pink cheeks, straw-coloured hair, all of one type, like English chorus girls.

He did not bring the babies, but he came laden with, instead, an assortment of things I did not want. I thanked him, of course, all the more in proportion to my disappointment. He spread his offerings over my bed with a sweating brow and an air of anxious propitiation—propitiation?—anxious propitiation? My words! As my knowledge of English increases, I perceive that the most elegant part of it is its slang.

"Hello, Médor, you look like a summer number of Father Christmas!"

"Do you mean impossible, or, rather, late in the day?"

"Oh, don't be witty when I am dying to cut all those strings."

Poor Médor! There were three boxes of dates. I loathe them. I like things to have the courage of their sweetness, but dates and bananas and melons, pooh! they are the vegetable sheep! And there were dozens of little plaster figures in *burnous* and turbans, with hands and faces painted in ochre, some bending, others standing, others prostrating themselves, and all rendering graces to Allah and his prophet. Then there were yards and yards of a pretty and rather coarse white

PHRYNETTE MARRIED

cotton stuff, unlike anything I had seen in France ; it's very much like crepon, except for smooth stripes running through it. Médor says the natives call it haïk. Then there were two bottles of perfumes, different but alike.

I dislike Oriental perfume ; it smells of humanity, not of flowers.

" Médor, you are spoiling me."

He makes a very trite answer in quite a level tone.

" No one could do that—now. As your English proverbs say, one can't paint the lily, one can't gild the gold, one certainly cannot spoil Phrynette ! "

" How unkind of you ! Tell me was it for me or for a harem you bought that haïk ? "

" If your husband were here, he would answer for a harem in one."

" Tut, tut, how little you know of him ! My dear man, there are at least twelve yards of that. It's surely to sail a ship, not to clothe a woman."

" Exactly fourteen. I want you to make a fine dress out of that. I remember my mother telling me that her wedding dress took fourteen yards of taffeta."

" But, simple heart, it was in the time of the crinoline ! I do not aspire to so much amplitude. One yard and a half is precisely the nether measure of my freedom. When I am tempted to kick over the traces, my skirt hems me brusquely with a ' thus far but no farther.' However tyrannical the narrow skirt, it has done a lot for the Englishwoman—it has cured her of her stride. *Che va minuto va sano.*"

I had thought so much about the dolls and the pretty

MY DEAR OLD MEDOR

baby clothes I was going to make for them that it was all I could do not to cry of disappointment.

"Oh, Médor, I so much regret my twins !"

Médor, his big, red, hirsute face looking hot and puzzled :

"You regret, you regret, but, my dear child, is it not rather late in the day ?"

"How could I regret them before losing them, big silly ? How did I know they counted for so much ? What happiness is there in breathing, I ask you, until you have asthma ?"

Médor pushes his hat at the very back of his head and chews. His beard goes up and down like that of a goat feeding.

"What did you mean this morning when you spoke of the children that will come ?"

"What I said. My other children—don't look so professional—they are merely the children of my imagination, as yet—but, of course, I'll have other children."

] "I hope so, *mon petit*; but you must not be too sanguine about a reconciliation. Men like your husband, who put clouds under the feet of women, whereas the worldly put cushions, are inexorable when women play football with their offering. Don't be too sanguine, my child; it may be years before we can convince him, if we ever can."

"Oh, I was not thinking of Austen—nor of anyone else ! I was not thinking at all, in fact, not reasoning anyway. It was just instinct. I want other little babies, and, of course, I don't feel that my life is over at nineteen

PHRYNETTE MARRIED

just because I have been stupid. Why, I have been far more wicked hundreds of times and nothing happened ! ”

“ Phrynette, unfortunate child, what are you saying ? ”

“ Yes, much more wicked, I repeat, and I felt much more ashamed about it. How often have I not mocked mentally at Aunt Barbara, who was kind to me, after all, in her own disagreeable way, simply because she was without grace, and like one of the ugly sisters in pantomime ; how often have I not despised Austen, you despised—I repent of it now, I do—because he never guessed anything by any chance, and had to read every joke in *Punch* several times before he began to smile. And how often did I not sit next to the plainest girl I could find just to throw myself into more relief ! You see how wicked I have been without ever being punished, and now for a fault which is really more my husband's fault than mine, I am being treated as a leper.”

“ By whom, pray ? ”

“ Eh, by you, as well as by Austen—you seem to approve of his pigheadedness. Yes, you do. Don't you argue. I am humble enough and sorry enough. I admit that I have been ridiculous. There, isn't that a handsome admission ? ”

Médor is looking out into the garden. I can only see an unsympathetic back. His shoulders shake gently, and I bet the wretch is laughing.

“ Médor, turn round. If you dare laugh——”

He shakes his head from right to left several times but does not turn round. I wail, “ Is it my fault that

MY DEAR OLD MÉDOR

life is so ill-fitting ? I have need to be prudent because I am young, but being young, I am imprudent. When I am old and ugly, prudence will come to me as naturally, as easily, as wrinkles, but then I shall have no more need of prudence than of a skipping rope. It is not at ninety but at nineteen one risks being compromised."

Médor laughs now frankly and noisily. "Forgive me, it's the skipping rope at ninety that makes me smile. My dear child, it is my firm conviction that you are one of those incorrigible young persons quite capable of gambolling at ninety, and eloping at a hundred with some gallant Methuselah, ah, ah," and he clutches at his beard and chews contentedly while, in chokeful indignation, I stare at him from under stern eyebrows.

Algiers.

“**P**HRYNETTE, my child, have you ever considered the possibility of my intercession failing? There ought to be an answer by now.”

“Oh, Médor, do not say that. It's true Austen is like a mule—a mule that has been well brought up—but you won't fail, you can't fail; or else what is the good of being so clever and strong and kind? Tell me that, then. You won't fail, Médor, will you? If—if you—did—I don't know—I suppose I would die—or stay with you here.”

“Phrynette, do you realise how cruel you are often?”

“Cruel! I! Why?”

“Oh, in a thousand ways. ‘Die, or stay with me here’! You say that as if the two alternatives were equally terrible.”

“*Mais non!*”

“*Mais si!* You are a little egoist. Oh yes, you are, and I am an old fool—there, don't cry. I am an old beast as well. There, there, little Phry-phry, little Phrynette. Let me dry those dear little eyes. There. . . .”

“Lend me your handkerchief. I have been dusting your old, rotten, silly books with mine, and sniffing the

MY BEARDED MAID

dust all the morning to give you a surprise—and then you come and say I am an egoist. If you don't want me to stay with you, say so. Eh, look at me, Médor, do you hear? Look at me—you have had enough of me? Ah, is that it?"

"Enough of you, child! Has one ever enough of spring?"

"Well, then, if Austen does not want me any more, will you want me to stay?"

"Want you? Yes, I want you—I want you—to stay. You'll be my little girl."

He jumped up with clenched fists and set jaws.

"God!" he cried.

"What is up now?"

"A twinge of a very old complaint of mine."

"Gout?"

"No—not gout. We pedants call it *erotica*."

"Poor Médor! Does it hurt?"

"Awfully."

"What is it like—toothache?"

"No; it is a sort of fever."

"Oh, do you often get it?"

"Very often lately."

"Why did you never tell me?"

"What for? You can do nothing."

"And you, can you do nothing? What is the good of being a doctor if you have to grin and suffer like other people? Why don't you take things to cure you?"

"I can't get the things that would cure me."

"Why?"

"Oh, because—because they are very rare."

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"Is it radium?"

"No—yes, it's radium. . . . Now go to sleep."

"Ah, you see, I guessed right. And why can't you get radium? Can't you buy it?"

"No, it's too expensive."

"Is it? Oh, poor Médor! Look here, I have money in a bank in London, a lot of money, thousands and thousands of shillings or pounds—I don't know. Let me lend you some, and you go and get radium at your chemist's and get cured. It makes me so sad that you should suffer. You know I love you well, Médor—and you—you love me well? Say."

"Yes, I love you well. Now go to sleep."

"You say that as if you were cross. You are not cross or hurt? If you must be one or the other, better be hurt than cross. If you are hurt you are the only one who suffers, if you are cross then all your entourage suffers."

"No, I am not cross—never with Phrynette—but I am not well."

"Is that what prevents you from sleeping at night?"

"How do you know I don't sleep?"

"Oh, I hear you—on the gravel. Do you suffer much when you walk like that?"

"How is it that you hear me? Are you not sleeping well either?"

"No, not well."

"Why?"

"Oh, I don't know. I am anxious and sad and lonely. I miss my husband and the warm, soft twins, and Gracieuse, and—oh, I can't explain. Ever since I was a little girl I could never sleep well if I were not tucked

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in and kissed the last thing at night. Now I feel as if no one cared. I expect I'll never be tucked in any more."

A pause—Médor is looking into the garden with his back to me. I sigh.

"I say, Médor!"

"*Eh bien?*"

"Oh, don't say *eh bien* like that; it sounds impolite."

"I am so sorry. What is it, *mon petit?*"

"Won't you come and tuck me in and kiss me at night before you go to bed?"

"No."

"Oh, why won't you? You are not pol——"

"Damn!" Bang!

I heard it—I was not delirious. Damn, said the doctor, and bang said the door. It was most impolite of both of them. I turned on my left and sniffed in my pillow.

At intervals, sobs in the room, the drones of bees in the garden. Then a shock of grey hair appears behind the iron spirals of the balcony.

"Phrynette."

"*Eh bien?*" I quote in my wrath.

"'Twas the twinge. Forgive."

"It was not to me then you said, 'Damn'?"

"Hush—no, *mon petit*. God forbid. 'Twas to the twinge."

"And did you hear what I had said?"

"N-no."

"Will you come back and tuck me in and kiss me at night?"

"Really, Phrynette?"

"Oh, don't say that"—sob—"it reminds me of

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Austen"—sniff—"when he was shocked. You are not my husband to be shocked."

"That's just it."

"What's just it?"

"I am not your husband."

"Well?"

"Well, hang it all, do you realise that you are asking me—a man—to—to fulfil offices which only your husband or your maid——"

"Offices! Gracious! and a man! Why, you are not a man, I mean you are my Médor. Besides, no one need know. Oh, I'm so unhappy. No one cares for me. I wish I were dead!"

"I wish we were all dead, *sacré nom de nom de nom*"—eclipse of the shock of hair.

I eat dates and try to hit Pasteur's nose with the stones. One can't always cry—steps on the gravel! I drop the dates and sob with audible energy.

"Phrynette"—sob—"Phry—Phry—*mon petit*, look here, I don't care. Why should I count anyway? Don't cry, I'll tuck you in. I'll give you the feeding bottle if you like, only don't cry. I'll be your maid, what can it matter? You are right—an old grey donkey like me! I'll be Gracieuse."

I laugh from under the sheets.

"I was just thinking—you would look funny with a muslin cap."

"I'll wear the cap, I'll do anything just to hear your happy laugh."

And now I am tucked in every night.

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"How goes your erotica this morning, Médor?"

"Just the same, thank you, *mon petit*."

"Poor Médor," I said, with my head on one side.

He smiled.

"Do you like me to say 'poor Médor'?"

"Yes," he assented, with his pipe in his mouth.

"Ah, you see, I spoil you!"

This time he removed his pipe so as to laugh better.

"I believe," he said, "that is why I love you so—for your serene impertinence. Of course, I know you did mean it as a joke—partly—but *au fond* you do think that by calling me 'poor Médor' you do flatter me, and spoil me, and reward me beyond my deserts."

"Médor, you are very stupid!"

"Yes, yes, no doubt; but you should have seen how you smiled when you said 'poor Médor.' A beauteous princess of fifteen springs, looking down on a leprous, beggar man, noseless, hunchback, and sore-eyed, could not have looked more benignly insolent. I know, dear, you are all that is kind and sweet, yes, yes, but I am old, and ugly, and 'poor Médor'—and you spoil me" (in a new, tense voice), "and, on my soul, you do spoil me! You are here, actually here, for me to look at, and hear, and watch over! We are like people in a fable, we two—the old cobbler and the starling. Cheer up, don't make such big eyes. How goes the appetite this morning?"

"Much better, Médor, thank you. But I want a letter."

"That's on the menu, *mon petit*. We'll have it for dessert to-morrow perhaps, if we are very good and eat

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our *œuf à la coque*. Shall I cut that bread into fingers for you ? ”

“ Dear Médor ! ”

“ That’s better. I much prefer ‘ dear Médor ’ to ‘ poor Médor. ’ ”

Médor has moods. He used to be far more cheerful when I first came than he is now. Sometimes when I see him distant in mind I take a teasing joy in calling him back to where I am, and where he must be—hospitality *oblige*.

“ Médo-o-or ! ”

His eyelids beat quickly as the eyelids of one who awakes.

“ My child ! ”

“ Still writing mentally that perfectly useless book of yours which no one will read ? ”

“ N-no. I don’t know what I was thinking about—exactly. I was wondering in a sort of vague way (don’t think me too personal, will you ?) why is it that your eyebrows should be dark when your hair is so rutilant and your eyes so light ? It’s curious.”

“ I dye them.”

“ Nonsense ! ”

“ I do, I assure you, with henna. My lashes are dark, God be thanked ; but have you seen the portrait of the Duchess of Milan at the Wallace Collection ? She has two faint lines above her eyes ; they look almost pink. Mine were just the same before I treated them.”

“ This is folly. When did you come by such a brilliant idea ? ”

“ Some time after my marriage I thought that Austen

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would be less likely to regard me as a child if my face had more character. People speak of the strength of a jaw, but definite eyebrows do for your face what a broad nib does for your handwriting."

"What did your husband say? Did he not protest?"

"Austen! Poor innocent! He never noticed it; that's just what irritates me so much. Médor, I assure you that, if I had my front teeth knocked out at a bargain sale, I don't think he would notice the difference. Don't shiver, it's not likely to happen. Oh, I am not above the delights of the bargain counter, *mon cher*, but I dread, I loathe, being hemmed in and pressed around by many women. I dislike women, Médor. I like some particular women, but only for something they possess—beauty, tact, or the intelligence of clothes—but, as a sex, I don't like them. Even if I had been a man, I don't think I would have liked women. I would alternately have enjoyed and avoided them. Why do you look cross?"

"Naturally, I look cross. I had always conceived you as a sensible girl, and you tell me nonchalantly that you paint your eyebrows!"

"But how narrowminded of you? Does it show? No! Has it or has it not a pleasing effect? Yes, very well then. You said they looked charming."

"I said no such thing."

"Well, your voice did then. Pleasing things are their own justification. I could understand you being shocked if I used a pencil or a burnt cork, but my touch has been so gradual and natural that no one has noticed it. These are not smudges crudely drawn, and up and down

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like ill-balanced scales. I defy anyone to say that that beautiful dark line is not my birthright. Look at it close Médor; what say you?"

And I thrust my face close to his for his inspection. He closed his eyes and turned his head away. He had become rather pale. I stared at him indignantly.

"Well, it may be against your principles and all that, but I don't think it is polite of you to look as if you were going to faint with disgust."

"Oh! my dear child! don't—don't imagine such a thing—disgust! This is indeed irony! I closed my eyes merely because I was in pain—my heart, you know, that twitching here—I'll go in the garden for a little air."

And out he went a little bent, and looking a little more gloomy than ever.

"Tell me, Médor, suppose Austen forgives me—takes me back, I mean—couldn't you come and live with us, or, at least, near us, quite near?"

"And my patients?"

"You'd get others, plenty. It's not only in Algiers and Paris people are ill. I would so love to see you often, to have you within reach—I have no one like you in my entourage. Do try to manage it."

Médor knocked his pipe on the window-sill and sighed:

"I suppose," he said, "you treat everybody like that."

"How do you mean, Médor?"

"Like cushions. . . . You have no one like me in your entourage—no. Am I a particularly comfortable cushion?"

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You dispose us all around you—one for your feet, one for your elbow, one at the nape of your neck.”

“Oh, Médor, why do you say that? You pretend to love me, and then you find fault with me. I—I don’t mind you finding fault, but why do you say it? It’s the same with all the people who love me—they flaunt my defects in my face. If I have so many or such big defects, why do people love me then?”

“You are right. We should not love you—or we should accept your faults and be grateful—I beg your pardon, Phrynette—and as to the matter of cushions, all pretty women have the same ideas of comfort. I should not worry that dear little *cabouche* about that, if I were you. Why, what do you think men are for, if not for women’s use? The very word husband shows you what man’s purpose is. Woman is the great treasure that has to be guarded—like the good earth she must be tended, cared for, studied, preserved—husbanded! She is weak that she may be the better taken care of. All precious things are fragile. My dear child, your instinct is right. Use men, abuse them, as you will and please—it’s not your privilege, it’s your duty to the race—and, after all, a cushion life is a most enviable one.”

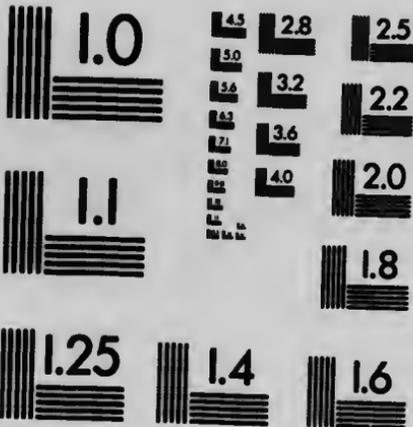
“Médor, I do not like what you say, it sounds sarcastic. You know, one should not be sarcastic with children, nor women, because they do not understand irony. I do not know whether you mean a single word of all you have said. I understand men much better when they do not talk.”

“My dear little girl, I swear to you that I mean every



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word I have said. You are right, you have always been right. Your instinct guides you. I am wrong to blame you—you are unusually, abnormally normal. You were right in choosing your husband. You have and shall have beautiful, healthy children. You were right again in that great wrong you did him. He needed a shake-up—it will do him an immense amount of good. You were right in discarding that poor young Captain What-his-name—no possible use for him. He has the eyes of a madman—I would not be surprised if there is lunacy in his family; besides, too fine altogether—too race-horse—too decadent—your children with him might be geniuses—or idiots—or criminals—you were right. You turned to me and took me into your confidence. You told me without shame—instinctively—things that women hide. Right again—use me—use us. I had a great mind to spank you at first when you told me those whamsy-whimsy Odysseys of yours—this shows how wrong I was. What are my reasons and my prejudices against your instinct, child-woman?

“Little Phrynette-Eve, why do you cry?”

“You speak as if I did it all on purpose, as if I were a tyrant or—or—a schemer. You say things—not nice things—not even decent things—I did not choose Austen—and, if I chose him, I did not think of the children. How can you say that?”

“My dear, does a husband ever choose his wife? Then, boys would marry at eighteen their first love. Tell me, was your husband the only man who asked you?”

“No, there were two others—and some old ones.”

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"I suppose you would have been really happier with any of these—but the little, healthy animal mother in you knew best. I don't see why you should frown, it's a beautiful thing, instinct—and, my dear, of course, you are a schemer. Yes, and a tyrant. I can just imagine that big, powerful husband of yours trying to escape."

"He did not. I did not lure him. I was only seventeen. How could I have known how to attract men?"

"Listen to that! Seventeen! But, child, all the mothers that ever lived were behind you when you chose him. It was they made you laugh and flutter your hands, show your dimple, shake your curls, and bite your lips to make them redder—in fact, it was they made you display all your armoury. Seventeen! Why, it's the most dangerous age. How is a man to defend himself where he has to protect and respect? Seventeen! You blush. Do you know your mythology, Phrynette? Do you remember that Minerva was born fully equipped from Jupiter's brain? Why, it was not a myth, child. Woman is born armed and all-wise, like Minerva. Women and children, and people who will not or cannot reason well, have a sort of unerring, river-like sense of direction. Poor Don Juan! How humiliated he would be if he knew there never was a male seducer! In affairs of sex a schoolgirl is more wily than a veteran *roué*. She may believe babies are found under a cabbage, but all the time motherhood is prompting, guiding, teaching her how to spin her web. I know I am speaking of unacknowledged things, but, as you said yourself, *petite*, I am not a man, I am a father, and I knew my daughter as only fathers can who have lost

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one. Acute pain is the beginning of consciousness. I knew my girl posthumously. I knew her in my sorrow as I had never known her when she was my joy."

"Poor Médor; poor Hélène!"

"No, *petite*, poor Médor! but not poor Hélène. She would have been unhappy as the time came when my love was not all-sufficient. Hélène was plain, and women have no right to be plain. She died just when she would have awakened to humiliation and emptiness. She had sixteen years of as much happiness as any beautiful child can have, for, while I loved her ugliness, Phrynette not a day passed that I did not tell her that she was beautiful. I did not send her to school that other girls should not teach her what she died without knowing—that she was ugly!"

"You dear soul!"

Médor is a dear, he is full of qualities. I don't know whether to admire him more for his gentleness or his courage. For it must require prodigious courage to live on bravely when one is——

"How old are you, Médor?"

"Fifty-two, *mon petit*."

He does not ask "why?" which is very characteristic of him. He seems to have done his questioning even so long ago. Fifty-two—old, alone, without wife, child, friend, youth, expectancy, to know that the best of one's life is all behind one and that each new day is colder, emptier, longer, sadder—what courage!

"Médor, it is a pleasure to be ill to be nursed by you; you are so very gentle. How did you come by so much sweetness? You are as gentle as a woman."

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"If I have come by any gentleness, I am glad. Then I have not lived in vain! My dear girl, to nurse a dying daughter would make any man gentle—but to say that I am as gentle as a woman is indeed a poor compliment. Women's arms are more fleshy and their voice more soothing, but women have very little pity, Phrynette, and gentleness is nothing but pity expressed. In hospitals men students are always so much more considerate, patient and soft-hearted in the treatment of cases than the female probationers. It is chiefly in the maternity wards you can judge of the difference—students of the same stage bear themselves so contrastingly. It takes a long time for men to get used to it. Many have the sweat running down their temples but to hear the patients shriek. They set their jaw and look furious, which is their way to hide their sentimental funk, but the women students and the nurses, why, my child, I have heard them discuss crochet-work and other inanities at the bedside of a poor wretch in travail. Gentleness in women? Bah! Have you ever heard of a certain uncertain (or too prudent) Lycidas, and of what the women of Athens did to his wife? No. Well, I won't tell you to-day; your temperature is rather higher than I like!"

"But, Médor, could anyone be more gentle than Gracieuse, for instance?"

"I don't know that I would call Gracieuse a gentle woman, she is more of the decent fellow. She is the stuff of whom partisans and followers are made, she has no sex, she is merely some of the holocaustical portion of humanity—*de la chair à sacrifice*. She is an admirable

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creature, no doubt, my child, but she is no woman ! ”

“ Oh, but, Médor, I am sure you are wrong. Women are not so hard-hearted as you say. I don't like you to say that. No, I mean, it does not offend me, but I think I am sure, that you are mistaken about them or—you're bitter ! ”

“ No, *mon petit*, truly, truly, I am not bitter. I accept all things humbly without understanding. I have seen the worst of life, and yet I dare not say conscientiously that it is wrong. The most I admit is that to my human reason it does not seem right—but bitter little Phrynettekin, surely no ! Bitter people can be just, and I have always tried my clearest to be just.”

“ Yet, because you have met some horrid, callous, maternity nurses you think that all women are like them. Take me, for instance, could you say the same of me ? Oh, Médor ? Say.”

Médor knocked the ashes from his pipe on the corner of the mantelpiece, and felt vaguely in his pocket for his pouch.

“ Well, then, since you ask me, I will be very frank and fatherly, and very likely pay for it afterwards. I would say of you exactly what I would say of the majority of women—you have nerves and a quick but superficial sensibility, and very little real piety. You would cry and hide your eyes if Karakaksopoulos were to gobble up a mouse in front of you, but——”

“ But ? ”

“ But you would give, and, in fact, have given, to your

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husband the greatest pain he has ever felt because—what was it?—his trust in you grated on your nerves. *N'est ce pas ?* No, no, don't look at me like that, I didn't say you were wrong, nor is Karakaksopoulos wrong when he does what he pleases with his mouse. Mice are made for cats to eat, most decidedly. Woman has one gentle side of her, and that is her love of her children, but of her children only. Man may love the young for their beauty, their freshness, for their hope and their daring, but woman loves only the young she has borne. And whereas many a stepfather has loved and protected the children of the woman he marries as if they had been his own children, a widower who gives his children to the keeping of a stepmother would be kinder to send them to a foundling hospital.

“Bitter, Phrynette ! How could you misunderstand me so ? I love woman for her grace and for her beauty. I revere her for her mission, but it seems to me very absurd to hear her called an angel of mercy, as absurd as to hear the wonderful organisation of the universe called Mother Nature—a mother who sacrifices every one of her children that she may reach some goal which we know nothing of. But Nature is full of beauty, and full of passion, and to most this is enough. It is enough to me. I would not choose not to have been born, but then I am a tough old man who can bear pain and whose profession has stilled the sensibilities ; at the same time, I save life more by instinct than by conviction, and, if I were a younger man and could again embrace Life and not merely follow her, I do not think that I would arrogate to myself the right to create other

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beings. Nature has given me the right to, but my human conscience, my pity, recoils.

"That is why, though the death of little H el ene has made an old sad man of me, I am glad for her sake she died. She only knew the beauty of life, guessed at its passion, and went undeceived, with all her joys and all her illusions. Why are you crying, *mon petit* ?"

"I am thinking, then, ought I to have had the twins, if you who are so wise are not sure that life is good. Oh, oh !"

"Hush, *mignonne*, don't cry. Life will be good to your children, very good, I am sure."

"Why for them specially ?"

"Oh, because they will have some of that healthy animal selfishness without which one finds life cruel."

"And why, if you please, should my twins be healthy, selfish animals ?"

"My dear little girl, you see that as soon as I treat you seriously, as grown-up to grown-up, the lady-idol in you resents it. I did not say the twins would be animals—that is the feminine version of my warning. How long shall we admit feminine witnesses in the court of justice, I wonder ? What I said and meant is that your children will be, as far as one can bind Heredity to her task, perfectly constructed to meet life as it is. They will have bodily appetites and enough vitality to satisfy them. They will not be hampered by too much spirituality, and what they might have been afflicted with from the artistic vein on your and your father's side will be counterbalanced not only by the excessive sanity of your husband's, but will merely add to their

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capacity for appreciation. Thus, instead of merely tasting a peach with their palate as any donkey can, their sense of colour will also enjoy, and their pagan intellect will love the sun that has ripened it. Also, the blending of two races produces, as a rule, very satisfactory subjects."

"Subjects? Why not say cases?"

"And, after all," went on Médor, squashing blonde tobacco in his pipe with a square, thick, capable index, "it's only ugly people with ideals and ideas who find life cruel, and your *gosses* won't be ugly—that is certain."

"Ah, but the boy's nose is most irregular."

"He'll be all the more conceited, which is still better than being an Adonis."

On this an Arab "buttons," all teeth and eyes, entered with a letter and a parcel for me. I read half of it, said "Ah," and fainted gently with my nose in Médor's left whisker.

As I was floating upwards, coming up to the surface of life and understanding, I called Austen twice, and then opened my eyes and felt very sick.

"There, there, *voyons*," Médor was saying as I became quite conscious again, "better now? Austen is not here, but poor old Médor is. Give him a pretty smile. That is it; now drink this, there; now close your eyes, and don't think for a while."

I was smiling. I knew something had happened, and that I would be sorry as soon as I remembered, but I felt too lazy to try and remember.

Médor put his large hand on my left hand and I

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covered his in turn with my right ; then we looked at each other, he still anxious, I rather ashamed of myself for having fainted, and we smiled at each other. The moment leaving his gaze, my eyes fell on the black-edged letter lying on the coverlet, and I remembered. I did not cry at first, because I did not believe that letter—was too new, too unexpected, too horrible. It took some time to credit the impossible. I showed the letter to Médor, with a motion of the head : “ Read it, Médor, it can't be true ; tell me ? ”

Here is the letter exactly as Gracieuse wrote it :

“ MY POOR DEAR LITTLE MADemoisELLE, LADY, I mean this is to tell you of a great trouble as you see by the black edge, which I bought on purpose so as to prepare you for what was in the present letter, let the will of the good God be done but Madame your poor sister-in-law she is dead. I have wired to Monsieur to London and to Mount Hazel, as I could not remember the name of that other country where he is now. I have also wired to Madame your Aunt Barbara and she wired back this very moment that she was coming. I have done my best for my Angel, be tranquil. The doctor was called, and also the priest, but it was too late for both, as poor Madame your sister-in-law, she must have died in the night. She was poisoned, my poor angel, have courage, she did not suffer, she just fell asleep, the doctor says, and never awoke. It is those diabolical little tablets she used to take at night to make her sleep, those veronal things. The doctor says she must have taken too strong a dose without meaning to. I said nothing to the con-

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trary, and I shall go on holding my tongue ; it is better that it should be thought an accident, but I feel sure at bottom, that she did it on purpose, *ma mie*. Monsieur your cousin, that good-for-nothing (with many excuses), my angel, he had had something to do with it, and the good God will find him out, I do hope. I don't mean he poisoned her himself, but he had been making up to her, ever since you went, that it was shocking. They were always together, and his mamma knew it, but said never a word, as she always was an avaricious person, and she thought, no doubt, just as well my boy should have to do with a lady than with those expensive creatures ; but I am not going to talk scandal, *ma mie*, it's only to explain to thee how went the things. Well, two days ago there was a luncheon-party, Madame your aunt, her son, and the Major. Lady Dare was looking very happy and very pretty, I must say, and then Madame your Aunt, she announced like that all of a sudden, that Monsieur your cousin was just engaged to be married to a very rich *jeune fille*, and that she was very pleased about it, and that she was sure Lady Dare also would be pleased to hear of her boy friend's happiness. My idea, *ma mie*, is that your blackguard of a cousin (excuse) he got his mamma to come to that luncheon on purpose to tell of his engagement, as he was afraid to say it himself, and he chose the moment when they were at table all together, so that there would be no scene. Well, my angel, Lady Dare, she had her heart placed right, I assure you. She laughed, and trusted him and his *fiancée*, as gay and proud as could be, but when they were all gone she went to her room

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and pulled the blinds down, because she had a headache she said. And she had no dinner, and the next I saw of her, she was a corpse.

"I did not wire to you, *ma mie*, because in any case you would have come too late, and as I know that you are ill, it would not be right to come at all.

"Take care of yourself and don't fret, *mon petit chou*. Lady Dare, she is in Paradise now, poor soul, for she was a good Lady at bottom, generous and always in a good temper.

"The angels they are prettier every day. They talk almost like you and me, they say *shoe* and *biscuit* now quite distinct, and I await further orders. Receive dear Lady and honoured Mistress all my respects. Your humble devoted servant,

"GRACIEUSE ROSENTHAL.

"I kiss thee very tenderly, my poor little pigeon. Don't fret and keep your window closed at night. Again your devoted servant,

"GRACIEUSE ROSENTHAL."

"Poor soul," said Médor gravely; "and you, poor little girl, it must be a great shock to you. You loved her very much, *n'est ce pas ?*"

"Yes, indeed, I did, Médor. I liked her immensely; I liked her presence; she had great charm, and she was very beautiful. I can't really believe that she lives no more—she was life itself. I feel less sorrow than horror. There is something incredible and fearful about her death, as if one saw a beautiful statue shatter itself to pieces by its own will. It's horrible!"

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"But don't you think that what your maid says about suicide may be just the morbid fancy of an ignorant woman or the gossip of the kitchen?"

"Oh no, Gracieuse is a very discreet, sensible person. I believe her letter contains the true version of the tragedy."

"You know, of course, that people who take drugs are always inclined to augment them, as they get used to them, and Lady Dare might have taken a second dose, forgetting she had already had a previous one. Those things occur frequently. My suppositions are just as plausible as those of your maid."

"Yes; but, Médor, you don't know how Vi was gnawed at the heart by the fear of age. She had no children, no husband, no intimate friend except me, and there was a great difference of years between us. She had no aim, no work, no future, but just slow decrepitude, and that she feared more than death. It was not so much for my cousin Vi killed herself, as for her *last* lover."

"Poor soul," said the doctor again. "What a *triste chose*! not her death, child, but her brilliant life!"

We spoke no more. He sat by my side, holding my hand until the glorious crepuscule of Algerian night came through the open window. With the gentleness of the hour, my heart seemed to soften and become ready to receive sorrow. I felt an anguish creeping through my limbs, and my throat tightened. Médor, immobile, was looking at the violet sky. I lolled back on the pillow and closed my eyes, and, from under the pressed lids, my tears came.

When the lamps were lighted, Médor reminded me of

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the parcel that I had not opened. It was a book of the *morceaux choisis*, by Paul Verlaine. Inside was another letter from Gracieuse.

“DEAR MADAME AND MISTRESS,—I am sending” you a book the poor Madame your sister-in-law died with. At least, it was on her coverlet when she was found. I dare not keep it, as Madame your Aunt Barbara is coming and does not like yellow covers. Also there are pencil lines on the page. The book was open, and I thought, perhaps, you might like it as a souvenir. No more, *ma mie*, as I have to look for my mourning clothes. Everything will be well done. Be tranquil. Believe me, Madame and dear mistress, Your humble and devoted servant,
GRACIEUSE ROSENTHAL.

“Shall I take my orders from Madame your Aunt Barbara, shall I go back to London with her and the funeral, or shall I wait for you in Biarritz ? The sea air has done the angels such a lot of good. They look like ripe apples, one would like to eat them. Your humble and devoted servant again,

“GRACIEUSE ROSENTHAL.”

I searched the book for the pencil marks. This is what poor Videar had underlined before she fell asleep :

“ Qu’as-tu fait, Ô toi que voilà
Pleurant sans cesse,
Dis, qu’as-tu fait, toi que voilà,
De ta jeunesse ? ”

XXXI

MY GOD-DAUGHTER

Algiers.

I AM feverish with excitement. Médor came to my room an hour ago rubbing his hands with a sort of professional satisfaction.

"How do you feel, *mon petit* ?"

"Very empty-handed, Médor, but otherwise quite better."

"Good ! Strong enough to receive a little shock ? Don't be frightened. Do you remember you wanted me to bring you a baby from town the other day, do you still wish for one ? Yes ? Wait a minute, then."

Médor disappears with the promising, all-important air of a fairy godfather who is going to fetch his wand, and comes back with—a baby—a real one, with a little white button of a nose in a purple face, and lank hair quite wet and stuck on a throbbing cranium—something appallingly new, prodigious, hideous and adorable. It is wrapped up in a man's flannel vest, and a resplendent tablecloth with a red border.

Médor holds it tightly but reverently.

"In the manner of a shopkeeper, a baby, did you say, madame ? A baby for madame ! This is the very

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latest we have just now. Nothing else to-day—no puppies, kittens, chickens, or guinea pigs? No?”

“Médor, give it to me. Is it Yvonne’s? Oh, the dear little rose monkey, how small? How is she? I never heard anything. Look, he is moving his fist. What is it a boy?”

“A girl. So you knew about Yvonne? She told me you did not. You never heard anything because I had her removed to the pavilion at the back of the garden. You are not strong enough yet for all these emotions. She is not as well as she should be—she is fretting.”

“Fretting! Isn’t the baby all right?”

“Oh yes, it is a fine baby, you say it’s small, but it is not—I weighed it. When I say fretting, the truth is she feels ashamed.”

“Ashamed! The silly one! I think it will be a beautiful child—it does not look very appetising now, of course, but she should have seen the twins when they were born! Yet I was not ashamed.”

“It is not quite that—you don’t understand—she feels she had no right to have that baby because she has no husband. She thinks, perhaps, you’ll be shocked and you’ll send her away.”

“Isn’t the woman a fool! She has no right to think such things about me. Husband indeed! It is the other way about. Every woman has the right to have babies but I am not sure she has the right to have a husband. Wifehood is a vocation. Conjugal life, like convent life, would be the better for a novice. I, for instance, do not know that I had the right to marry Austen if I cannot bear patiently his marital ineptitude. Pass me

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my dressing-gown. I am going to pull that girl's ears, and to ask her if she will have me as the godmother to the new Phrynnette."

Médor protests that I am not well enough to get up. I insist that I am, put on a wrapper, get out of bed, and find myself lying full length on the floor before Médor could clutch at me.

"You see, villain! Serve you right for an obstinate little mule. Are you hurt, pet?"

"Yes, my knees. It reminds me of my young age—my knees were for ever raw then. Well, Médor, if I can't walk you'll have to carry me, that's all. Put down that *gosse* in my warm place. What an idea to wrap it up in a tablecloth! I shall never be able to put my bread down on a tablecloth now. Well, it is an angel, of course, but an angel in the guise of an uncooked rabbit. What are you waiting for? *Houp la* with me, take me up—I will make myself very light."

Médor lifts me up without a word, and carries me gravely towards the pavilion.

"Am I heavy, Médor?" He shakes his head. "Is it better now if I hold you by the neck?"

"Don't do that," he cries snappily, "you smother me."

"Oh, la la, what a cross old man! One would think you were carrying my Aunt de Tréveret by your expression. If I am too much for you, put me down."

"Ah! for the strength ever to do that!" says Médor, depositing me at the foot of Yvonne's bed. "Now you cannot stay long, you know."

Before the stupid girl has time to burst into tears, the

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malignant intention of which was quite visible, I clap my hands and shout at the top of my voice, "Bravo, Yvonne ! *pour de la belle ouvrage c'est de la belle ouvrage*, as they say in the country of Gracieuse. She is in my bed, your little darling. We are going to call her Phrynette—that is, if you like the name—and we'll make her lovely frocks. The doctor is going to town this very minute to buy pink ribbons—are you not, Médor ?—and lawn and lace. I'll make a list. And, Yvonne, I'll send you a dressing-jacket and books, and the Arabs in prayer to play with. I hope she'll have green eyes like yours. I'll come back again to-morrow."

I kissed her, and Médor carried me back to my own room, from which I sent him forth to buy a layette.

I hope Yvonne won't lose her looks. I wish it were I that had that new baby. She does not deserve it, if she is ashamed of it.

Médor came back looking somewhat harassed. He spent the afternoon between Yvonne's room and mine, carrying the baby from her mother to me and from me to her mother alternately. Towards evening, as Yvonne lay asleep, Médor settled himself in an arm-chair near my window and lit his pipe. The little Phrynette was lying flat on my breast, happy, I hope, but very still and undemonstrative. I hardly dared to breathe for fear that the motion of my heaving chest might disturb her.

"Médor," I call softly, "did you notice how very beautiful Yvonne is with her hair down ? I hope the father of this child realised that Yvonne was so beautiful. Imagine what a waste if he did not !"

"I don't suppose for a moment he did," Médor says,

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between little puffs at his pipe. "She is very beautiful, of course, but not of the beauty that pleases men. She has not a human beauty—there is nothing warm or pulsating about her. She is so long, and almost slippery, like an eel, or—or a seaweed—there are no bones in her at all."

"Well, Médor, she gave me almost the same impression the first time I saw her. She is a sea-bred creature, you know, and I suppose it shows after many generations. But is she not perfectly enchanting?"

"I can tell a beautiful woman when I see one. Your maid is beautiful, yes—but she is not attractive to the ordinary man. She may appeal to the artist, and even then, I should say, chiefly to the decorative artist. But the ordinary man does not make note, or appreciate the difference between beauty or a merely pleasing exterior. Symmetry and quality do not count; details of colour, of purity escape him. A man may find a woman's eyes beautiful and never know the exact colour of them. It used to annoy your father when people called your hair golden—because it is not golden, it's mahogany—and his artistic precision was shocked. Beauty counts, but only with the minority. Women are very susceptible to it, so are artists and the dispassionate man, but the crowd does not know nor the average full-blooded individual. What sways what holds a man is sex, an ethereal beautiful woman will not attract him, spiritual loveliness will leave him cold. He likes the obvious kind of good looks, the fleshy, blatant, loud, buxom sort of good looks. A man always misses the finer points about a woman, so that to be

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really appreciated a woman must be a little coarse, not necessarily in her soul or manners, but in her beauty. It must not be of the elusive, too refined sort, or it will be overlooked. Man's taste will be satisfied by the mannequin, three parts stays and the fourth dress, whose every curve is exaggerated or crushed out of existence altogether according to date; but the most divine form of the artist's model, if he passes her in the street, will not reveal itself to him, for two reasons—because it is too fine, and because it is ill-dressed. A woman may love ascetic beauty, the haggard, the lined, thin face, the face of one who has suffered—a man never will. Ugliness may appeal to him, but only if it is piquant or perverse."

XXXII

MY HUSBAND'S LETTER

Algiers.

IT has come; it came this morning. It wasn't addressed to me but to Médor. I knew at once, of course, by the handwriting. I was the first in the dining-room, and it was the only letter. I was not impatient for Médor to come and to open it. I was far too frightened. And now that I have read it so often that the meaning of it is almost lost like that of a daily prayer, I really don't know whether I should let myself hope or just commit suicide like poor Videar. Anyhow, he does not cast me off. Médor says he wants to take care of that letter himself for fear I may use it for curl papers in my careless ways, but that I may copy. Of course he was joking about the curl papers—to cheer me up, I suppose. He knows I haven't got that on my conscience anyway.

Letters are always unsatisfactory, but some men's letters (men like my husband, university men) are not letters—they are communications! The orthography is indifferent, the style absent—they lack both humanity and art. I have heard of couples falling in love by correspondence. I wonder what sort of letters Blaise writes. All I can say about Austen's letters is that,

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although I read them, I did not cease to love him. Here is his letter to Médor :

“DEAR SIR,—I am exceedingly grateful to you for your letter, and for the great kindness you showed my wife. Will you be so good as to inform her that my roof, my name and my protection, are hers as in the past. Your letter informed me that, should I wish for a divorce, my wife would not put any obstacle in my way. This has greatly surprised me, as my wife must know that no consideration whatsoever could induce me to tarnish my name by that infamous scandal called a divorce. I received a letter from my sister, which reached me after yours, telling me of my wife's flight from Biarritz, and also that she, Lady Dare, had, in order to prevent an *éclat*, pretended to be aware of my wife's journey, and gave some plausible feminine reason or other for it.

“The servants and her acquaintances in Biarritz know nothing. Gracieuse suspects but is trustworthy. There remains the maid whom my wife took with her ; she must be bought. I trust to your wisdom and kindness to advise me on the matter, as I do not know the woman, nor how much she knows. I enter into those details so that my wife should be able to know the conditions on which she will return. I shall render that return as easy as is in my power. I expect her, as soon as she is able to travel, to come straight to Mount Hazel. I shall myself stay there for some time after her return, for the benefit of neighbours and servants, after which I intend to travel a great deal. Will you

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be so good as to use all your influence with my wife to make her realise the absolute necessity of behaving in all things with the propriety and *décorum* which alone can render these arrangements for her future of any use ?

“ If necessary, I am ready to go to Algiers and fetch her. I would prefer, however, for reasons which you will understand, that our meeting should not take place so soon after the shock of your letter, which only reached me this morning. As I do not think it advisable that she should travel alone with her maid, would you be so kind as to engage a reliable companion to accompany her back ? If no suitable person can be found, will you wire me to Mount Hazel where I am going to-night to see to some alterations and preparations for my wife's return ? I cannot thank you enough for your tact, your kindness, your care, and your hospitality to my wife. I am very much ashamed that any member of my family should have placed you in such a difficult and delicate situation. I must ask you yet another favour—to communicate the tenor of this letter to my wife. I would rather not write directly to her yet. Believe me, yours most gratefully.”

There ! It might be a business letter ! If I had just been told my husband had run off with some horrid woman, why, I'd be half demented, and fierce enough to scratch somebody or other's eyes out. It sounds wrong, somehow—not the intention but the wording. Never mind. What does my husband do ? He writes a letter as cool and sane as if he did not care. What is the good of

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my running away if he does not care ? Isn't it too bad of him ? Isn't it hateful ? All this trouble I have gone through wasted, my illness wasted, everything just for nothing—for the fun of the thing, as it were ! I am furious. I regret very much I have been ill. It does not make him ill. He has not got palpitation of the heart like me, he has not got headaches. He does not hate me, he does not scold me, he does not even take any interest in my illness, he might have asked, at least, how I looked after a fortnight's fever. No, everything rolls off him. He does not feel anything. I feel sure that when we meet he will say, "Did you have fine weather for the journey ?"—not a word about Blaise. Oh ! it's too disappointing. My husband is not a man, he is a mummy !

XXXIII

MY HOME-COMING

Mount Hazel.

WHAT did I say?—didn't I say that the first words of Austen would be of the weather? I guessed it. I always know in advance what he is going to say, but, alas! that's about all I know. Here I am at Mount Hazel, but, as they say in English, "the devil if I know where I am!" I am trying to joke, but there is not much jocosity left in me. And I am beginning at the wrong end. Oh, I am sorry I have the "wrong end" down—it seems like an ill omen. I'll start back from Algiers.

Médor and I discussed Austen's letter until the very commas no longer looked like commas, but like minute tears. Its very matter-of-factness seemed fantastic to me. Médor said lugubriously:

"This letter does him credit. I augur well of this. I rejoice exceedingly for your sake."

"Oh, you say that to encourage me, but if you rejoice so exceedingly, why do you look like a mute? Oh, Médor, do be funny, do make me laugh, do console me! This cold-blooded letter has depressed me so that I want to cry—and what about that horrid, 'suitable' person I'll have to put up with all the way back? I

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loathes her already, Médor. She will be a widow, I am sure, and she'll speak of the defunct all the time. My dear man, I foresee it all."

"No, you don't. I'll be the horrid, 'suitable' person you'll have to put up with all the way back. Of course I'll go with you, *mon petit*. Did you think I would let my blessed, miraculous child go alone towards uncertainty?"

I throw my arms around Médor's neck, and cry joyfully on the collar of his coat. It is an old shabby coat, it smells of tobacco and iodoform.

Yvonne cried when we went. We could not take her with us. She was still too weak to travel, but she is to come to Mount Hazel as soon as she can. Meanwhile, there is a doctor friend of Médor's, who will nurse her, and Médor's servants, who will look after her.

Médor was so determinedly and laboriously cheerful during the journey that I felt as if I were being taken to the dentist's. He joked incessantly. He told me all the stories of his student days—they must have been considerably diluted for my benefit, so diluted, in fact, that all the salt in them had melted. He inundated me with silly English magazines, full of summer girls and advertisements. He gorged me with chocolates, encumbered me with flowers—my cabin was almost uninhabitable for the scent of them. He pursued me with rugs, smothered me in cushions, and bullied me into playing dominoes on our knees, and all with such an anxious, enveloping, belaboured, and altogether suffocating solicitude that I began to feel very sorry for myself, and wanted to tell him, "She who is going to

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die thanks thee." The people on board took us for father and daughter. Old ladies looked at me with compassionate eyes ; they were thinking, " Poor girl, consumptive, no doubt ; what a blow it will be for that fond old father of hers ! "

Médor wanted to stop a day or two in Marseilles, but I insisted on going on with the Calvary. I felt that if it were to last much longer I might be capable in sheer funk of asking Médor to take me back to Algiers. It was not so much what Austen would do or say to me that stopped my heart with fear ; it was the thought that our eyes would meet, that he would look at me—that he would look at me with those clear, serious, reflective, humourless, kind blue eyes. What will become of me when he looks at me like that ?

I came to Paris, *and I left it without realising that I was there !* That shows what state of mind I must have been in. I would not stop in London—we spent only a couple of hours at the house, to take a bath, food, and change clothes. We wired from there to Mount Hazel.

What is there so sinister in a station ? To me it is the hall of hell. It is ugly, it is precise, it is utilitarian, it is inexorable. One comes to a station with a purpose—that in itself is depressing. It is in a station where, excepting at a freshly filled grave, the greatest number of people with red eyelids can be seen. It is colder than anywhere else. Porters are the saddest of men ; they look like harassed cab horses, with sore feet. And then there are time-tables !

At first we had other people in our compartment, so

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that I had a moment's respite from Médor's kindness. I looked at some actresses' photographs in the *Vad Mecum Magazine*, and wondered who wrote the paragraphs under the portraits, and, also, how good tempered the ladies were to keep on smiling, instead of gnashing their teeth at so much inanity!

At the last station but one, Médor and I were left quite alone.

"Is your magazine amusing?" he began at once. I crossed, sat by him, and gave him my hand to hold.

"Médor, hold my hand hard and don't talk or I shall faint right away!"

"Nonsense, *mon petit*. It is your own husband, after all!"

"That's just it. Don't rub it in. I'd rather deal with legions of other women's husbands for the next quarter of an hour. They are ridiculously easy to knock over."

Médor keeps silent for some time. We are getting near, we have passed Robinson's Nursery Gardens. In three minutes we'll be at the station. I lick my lips, try to swallow and can't. My ears begin to hear little bells very far away, and surely a big hand is pressing hard on my chest, the compartment is beginning to sway like a ship, and I cry "Médor" desperately, as I feel myself falling.

He shouts back, "You have a big spot of soot on your nose, your hat is all crooked—a strand of hair is falling from your chignon—and two buttons are missing on your left boot!"

I sit up. Those awful statements appal me. Soot! Hat! Hair! Buttons! and we are almost there! And

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as my brain begins to clear a little—"Buttons?" I say, with amazement, "but I have laced boots."

However, Médor's diplomacy had succeeded, for, as I realised, he had tricked me out of a fainting fit. The train stops and here is Austen on the platform. Médor carries me bodily out of the compartment, while I say mentally in agonised earnestness, "Holy Virgin! don't let him look at me. Will that I fall under the train and be decapitated. I promise you a *chapelet* every day if something extraordinary happens now, at once."

And nothing happens! Austen takes the tip of my glove and kisses it. I never knew him to do that—I suppose he must have planned it as compromise. He shakes hands with Médor and waves the porter in the direction of our luggage.

"It's most unfortunate you should have had such atrocious weather for coming down. Was it any better for your crossing? You must be very hungry and tired. I have ordered dinner earlier than usual."

We had arrived at the car.

"I'll sit next to Cavanagh," he says, "I want to get out at the post office, and at the tobacconist's. Are you all right?—good," and off we go.

I grip Médor's hand under the rug, he gives me an encouraging squeeze.

"So far so good," he says, "you can't expect him to relish such a joke, you know. In fact, he would be perfectly justified in spanking you."

"Oh, Médor, if he only would! You will never go away again, will you? Oh, Médor, say you will never leave me alone in that big house, with that big, still

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reproach—kissing my finger-tips! I'd die, I swear I would."

We stopped at the post office, and we stopped at the tobacconist. Austen was evidently determined to be perfectly correct even in his pretexts. And then a jolting lane under weeping trees, and then the lodge, with the two lodge children pressing little noses crushed white against the wet panes of their windows, and then the house, the hall, the servants, a smell of dinner, Gracieuse's arms, and the nursery!

Be it here recorded without vain-glory, but merely as the statement of an unprecedented occurrence—Gracieuse, after kissing me, taking off my hat, my cloak, and my boots, Gracieuse, for the first time in my life, lost her nerve! She laughed big sobs, and rocked herself, and called on all the saints not to mind her tears, but to take it as thankfulness for giving her back her little cabbage.

She lifted my loosened hair with the tips of her fingers, as one takes holy water, and kissed it. "Ah," she said, "but the good God is good, *ma mie!*!"

"He has that reputation," I said. "I wish the twins were not asleep. I see they still have that unamiable habit of being sleepy when I want to play with them"—a trait they got from their father!

They are very sweet creatures nevertheless. May has a pugilistic little closed fist shooting out from beneath the coverlet, and Reggie has fallen asleep, it would seem, during the delectable occupation of sucking his right big toe.

They both have little pearls of perspiration on their

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forehead and their upper lip. May, the naughty girl, has again been scratching an ancient mosquito bite, and she has blood on her round cheek. Bless you, little warm angels !

I did not go down for dinner. Gracieuse put me to bed, brought me nice things on a tray, and stood over me fiercely until I ate them, which I did, and with gusto, in spite of the bitterness of my false position. It is good all the same to be back home, and cared for by the people who are used to do it. Gracieuse does it well.

After dinner Médor came up to my room to feel my pulse, inoculate me with some courage, and wish me good-night. He was glad to see Gracieuse again, and she was glad to see him. He shook her hand up and down like a pump handle.

“ Well, my brave girl, so we see each other again, eh ? You have not changed a bit since all that time—exactly the same—word of honour—not changed a bit.”

I thought that was a cruel thing to say, but Gracieuse is actually pleased at not having changed a bit !

I did not see Austen again that night. And that was how I came home !

XXXIV

MY LAST KICK

“ **W**ELL, Médor, you have been exactly two hours closeted with him. Well—Médor—well ? ”

“ Yes, but you see, it’s only genius that will accept truth humbly—the genius of youth—of perfect comprehension—or else the ready acceptance of very old age. People speak of the credulity of ignorance—the ignorant are never credulous. Tell a peasant of some remote little village about wireless telegraphy, and he will not believe you. Of course, *mon petit*, I do not mean to compare your husband to a savage *en sabots*, but, unless he is extraordinarily intelligent he won’t accept our version of your elopement. To do that he would have to know you well and to guess at the circumstances—no,” and Médor chewed melancholically, “ I don’t think he will believe us, my poor child—fortunately there is your maid. She will be a useful witness; but your husband knows that your servants are devoted to you, and he may well believe them capable of perjury for your sake. Gracieuse is, that is certain.”

“ But, Médor, you don’t suppose that I intend using that girl to convince Austen. To stoop to ask a servant

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to intercede in some way or other ! I'll be d—divorced first ! Let him believe or disbelieve just as he likes—I am certainly not going ever to broach the subject to him. If he asks me I'll tell him the truth. Besides, I have no merit in not being actually—er—guilty. Morally, I am. I knew perfectly well what I was doing when I ran away. If Austen were really great—or really in love, which is the same thing—he would take me back, guilty or not. My God, but one does not love a woman because she is virtuous or—as many men do—because she is vicious. A woman is a human being, neither a relic nor a—relish. Do I love my husband because I think he is virtuous ? Nonsense ! I'd love him if he were the most dissolute man in Europe—and Asia thrown in. I think it's a mean heart that bargains itself out. If the man I love came and said to me, ' I have just committed murder,' I'd say, ' Here is a basin of water and a clean towel.' It would not come into my head to say to him, ' Go away, I don't love you any more ! ' He would be just the same man I loved before. I am the same Phrynette I was before I ran away. Well then ? If I had small-pox now, that would be another thing ! I tell you, Médor, it's only woman who can love as unconsciously as one breathes, generously as one gives one's beauty to passers-by. And when I say woman I should have said the mother. She does not love her child because he is beautiful and good, but because he is her own. Well, I was Austen's own. What has he done with me ? Austen is careful not to leave his umbrella behind him, he looks back when he leaves a railway carriage to see that he forgets

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nothing, but a young wife!—one can leave her without care, without a backward glance. Lost, stolen, or astray cannot apply to young wives, of course—only to umbrellas or dogs! Médor, in truth, I tell you, the most modest man, from the day he gets married, becomes a conceited fool. And I am not sorry if I have shaken his conceit somewhat. No, I am not regretting, I am simply in an ebullition of revenge, anger, indignation, and naughtiness. Of course, God made man stupid so as to give us muscleless women an equality of power, but he did not foresee how it would exasperate us sometimes to have to deal with those great simpletons.”

Médor and I are in the summer-house at Mount Hazel. Médor is sad; I am exasperated. I cannot endure this life any longer. I could put a bomb in the cellars and blow up the whole lot of us. I mean this literally. If Austen had planned this life for a punishment for my bad thoughts and my bad acts, he would be punishing me too cruelly. But, of course, he did not. He thinks he is treating me magnanimously. We never see each other but in the presence of somebody or other. Austen has his breakfast at purposely unearthly hours; then he goes out or works in his study. Médor and I prop each other up as well as we can, but we are both acutely miserable. We speak low, as in a church, and only breathe properly outside the house. Austen has luncheon with us, unless he is hunting or staying with other people. We all three dine together. The meals are ghastly. Médor, who is of rather a taciturn nature, assumes abnegatively the responsibility of the conversation

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He talks with a furious absence of full stops. He is always hungry for tea—which we both take alone on the lawn when it is fine, or in my sitting-room when it is not—because he has not time to eat at meal-times.

Science has its use after all : one can talk about it ! Austen seems to understand what Médor talks about ; he even answers coherently. Suppose Médor had been an artist, or a *littérateur*, instead of a scientist, where would we all be ? What could Austen and he talk about ?

I need not have been afraid of Austen's eyes, they never look at me ; at least I never catch him looking at me. Several times I look up brusquely hoping to meet his eyes on mine, but I never can. Sometimes, with an obvious effort, he looks at my hands and at my body while he speaks to me—he tries to be natural, and he knows that this is not achieved by surveying the carpet—but, whenever he looks at any part of me, I have the horrible feeling that his imagination is working slowly, painfully over this dreadfully new past. In his eyes I am a thing soiled and though, in the goodness of his heart, he will never willingly express that estimation, I feel it in every one of his tones and of his movements. And it is dreadful ! If this life lasts a little longer I shall begin to consider myself as an unclean thing, something to be wept over, pitied. His mental attitude influences me.

Blaise has kissed me and I have let him. That is quite true. Nothing can efface that, nor that waltz. Perhaps it is much more wrong than I imagined at first. Curiously enough, it is of that kiss that I do not feel guilty. It seemed to have ended my delirium of the

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spring. Then, no doubt, I was wrong. If I am guilty it is not of having run away with Blaise but of those nights on the balcony when I was alone. I see now with a wonderment at my own blindness that it was not of Blaise I loved to think but of—love, and not I alone but every woman who is derelict at twenty.

It is not so much the man the woman loves but—love. Not that big, maladroit, stupid, stubborn creature, who thinks he is strong because he has biceps—but a small, round, pink, elf-like creature, crowned with roses and armed with a quiver. She loves him for his smile, sweet and sly, so like hers ; she loves him for the blue ribbon on his nudity, so like her own modesty. She loves him for the gold of his curls and the iron of his arrows, but principally for his wings, swift and cruel, that fan ardour. And when the woman has children they are made after his image.

Every day I ask Médor to take me back to Algiers with my children and Gracieuse. He says only "patience," and chews the air melancholically. Patience ! That is just what I have not. Besides, I know it is all so useless and so humiliating, this waiting on a man's forgiveness. It is he who ought to ask me for forgiveness ; indeed, it is. I have entrusted myself to his guidance. What do I know of life, after all, except what I have read and what Vi told me ? My husband's folly seems far less excusable than my own folly. When I am his age I shall be as quick to suspect as to forgive—in a word, I shall know the weakness of my fellow-humans.

I suffer. I know that all happiness is over. I love my

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husband. I have that *fidélité du cœur*, which is the true, the only faithfulness.

Oh, God, oh, my God, deliver me from this shame ! The blood has left my heart and swells my face. I feel as if I had been caught naked by a stranger. God, I burn—I cannot bear it. Austen has my journal—all that I have written since the birth of the twins till we left Algiers. I gave it to Médor to keep because I have lost the key of my *attaché case*. I knew Médor would not read it, but I never imagined he would dare—dare—oh, I am suffocating—dare give it to Austen. Oh, the fiend ! oh, the traitor ! I could kill him ! What did I care that Austen should be convinced—better he should believe I was Blaise's mistress than know all my thoughts. God ! all that I thought of him, all my desires, my little ugly thoughts, my small contempts of him. I wrote of things that I would never have said aloud to my own self. Oh, Médor, Médor, what have you done ? The humiliation will eat into me all my life.

When Médor told me, I could not believe him at first. I thought it was a sort of a joke, and then he said :

“ It was your last chance. I knew you wrote down truthfully almost everything that happened to you—you read me some pages yourself, you remember, and I thought if anything can convince him this can. Forgive me if I had to trick you in your own interest. I can't stand by and see you being racked every day by his contempt. I told him, ‘ You won't believe me—you think I am shielding her—lying for her sake.

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Well, read that. Whatever is in it is true—and she does not know I am giving it to you.' ”

“ Médor, is this true ? It is ! Oh ! ”

I ran past him, he caught me and I bit him in the hand, in my rage, till the blood came. God, how I ran, how I searched every room to tear my copybook from Austen ! I hunted every nook and corner of house, garden, and park, everywhere, and Austen was not there. He has taken my journal with him to read, I suppose, in peace. Oh, God, why did I not burn it ? Such revelations hot from one's heart ought to be annihilated as soon as written—and I can't even remember now what I have written—how frank I have been, how shameless ! Those men, those beasts of men, what right have they ? I loathe them all, all, Blaise, Médor, Austen ! How dare they touch my life ?

Oh, *petit père*—oh, *petit père cheri*, they are hard to me. It is not good to live. I am unhappy !

Dearest Médor, oh, why did you go away ? Oh, Médor, forgive me. Does your hand that I bit hurt ? Couldn't you see I was not Phrynette, but just a little wild female at bay ? When you tried to prevent me from passing, I could have killed you ; but, dear Médor, I love you most dearly for all that. Thank you for the kind little note you left, and thank you for giving my journal to Austen. As you saw him before leaving you know already, of course, that it is the wisest *élan* you ever had. Thank you, dear Médor, though I can't quite forgive you yet. A hundred times a day when Austen looks at me I ask of myself, What is

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he remembering now ? That he must see me now as I see myself is disconcerting and—humiliating. Is it not, dear Médor ?

What you do not know is what happened after Austen saw you off at the station. He did not come straight to me. I suppose he wanted to plan how to handle that difficult, capricious girl-wife, whom he had just discovered. After hunting for him everywhere I ran for the wood as one runs for a mother's lap. You, Médor, a sensible male, full of years and wisdom, you cannot imagine the agony I went through on that day you went away. I had the fury of an animal and the sensibility of a woman—and there was no varnish of civilisation about me then, I assure you, except for my clothes. I had no self-control, no self-respect, no patience, no power of thought even, except that of wishing to hurt my body so that my mind should suffer less. I groaned, and I kicked, and beat the tree trunks with my fists, and rolled myself on the earth and bit the grass, and dug my toes in the ground and my teeth in the flesh of my arms. Médor, I was a real mad dog ! I thought of suicide, but I wanted to hurt others also—you, dear Médor, and Austen and Blaise (though he is the least to blame in all this, poor fellow !). And then, when I had exhausted my rage, my rebellion, my force, I went to sleep with my lips on the good earth as if to suck peace and strength and resignation from her.

Austen found me there. I heard his steps shuffling the leaves the heat had vanquished, and it woke me ; but I did not change my position. I pressed my body closer to the earth and prayed I might become one with

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her and feel no more. He stopped quite close, but he did not touch me. I determined not to say a word, not to move, but to let things happen to me, to let the will of a man be done and accept it. I had no hope, I had no fear, I had no wish—I was only very tired, and liked the sun on my back. I was one of those scorched leaves among which I lay.

He came one step nearer. I felt him towering over me. I remembered he was wearing a greenish-brownish suit that should go well with the wood and with the hour, but I did not look up. The leaves swished around his feet, and then, Médor, he said a very charming thing. I had dreaded dully his next words, and, as the leaves swished, he said softly, as one speaks of something precious and fragile, "It is like the swish of your skirts on the stairs!"

Médor, the wood had truly inspired him. I smiled up at him through my dishevelled hair full of leaves, of earth, and of grass. But, Médor; he was not smiling, he was standing with his back against a tree, looking not at me but at the past, at some terribly sweet things that had happened to the sound of silken swish when we were man and wife—and slow tears were rolling down his strong face. Don't you think, Médor, that my husband is very handsome? Crying, he was immense and beautiful. I wriggled nearer to him, embraced both the man and the tree, and kissed his feet. I think it shocked him that I should kiss his feet. He picked me up and kissed me and pressed me against him, and put back carefully my hair behind my ears, making me look a fright.

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Then—inspiration does not last, Médor—that perfectly beautiful man, among those great trees, at an hour when our two hearts were melting into one from so much peace, so much beauty, so much sorrow, that man said—don't laugh, Médor—"Phrynette, I have been a silly ass!"

It is not his fault, you know, that they have not taught him to speak in his country.

Médor, I have forgiven him, and everything will be just as it was before, but much better, for I am less exacting and he is a little less sure of me. Our faith is shaken and it is well, for love and faith never go together except in the catechism. When you have perfect faith in somebody it means you don't care a grain of sand whether it gets broken or not.

Austen is quite happy. I?—oh, I also, Médor—happier than most wives anyway, I assure you. Besides, I will take good care he shall never know that he is offered so much more than he asks for, and then—perhaps the twins will grab at some of the surplus.

I smile more gently and I handle peace more tenderly. Tell me, Médor, does it show that I am learning?

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