

THE PLEIADES



ARTHUR COMTE DE GOBINEAU

BERSERKER

BOOKS



BOOK ONE

CHAPTER ONE

TRAVEL JOURNAL OF LOUIS DE LAUDON

It was around six o'clock in the evening, maybe half past six. The mail coach sped between the double line of cottages with renewed verve; we hopped over the unevenness of the pavement; the good people stood at the windows; those in the street turned up their noses with an expression of interest and curiosity.

At last, the rolling machine restrained its turbulent gaiety; the horses, covered in sweat and exhaling clouds of steam from their sturdy rumps, took up the trot, then the walk, and suddenly came to a halt in disarray in front of the stoop of the Hotel de la Poste. We were in Aïrolo, with some pretense of having a dinner party of some kind.

Conrad Lanze jumped to the ground, and I, laughing heartily at seeing him dust-dusted and white as a pierrot, certain of being all alike, flapped my handkerchief, stamped my feet, huffed and puffed and passionately expressed my desire to find a pool of water in which to plunge my head and hands. My companion joined in my dithyramb with more moderation, which didn't prevent him from questioning the children assembled around such interesting characters as travelers falling from the sky always are, and he would no doubt have obtained about these little creatures, their ideas, their intentions, their fathers and mothers, their ancestors, up to a degree of incredible antiquity, the most complete details, if the hotelier, Mr. Camossi himself, had not succeeded, by joining his efforts to mine, in making him understand that two ewers, napkins, a complete meal, everything was ready, that this good was only waiting for him, and, finally, that the mail trunk was staying in Aïrolo for half an hour, no more.

Struck by this truth and its serious implications, the sculptor decided to interrupt his communications with the Ticino youth, reached into his pocket, pulled out a handful of small change and threw it at the crowd.

across the street and, as the gang of young citizens of the canton rushed in heaps upon their prey, we made our entrance into the inn.

Conrad amused me, or rather, he pleased and intrigued me; for a fortnight, having met in Zurich, we had fallen in love with each other, and had temporarily united our destinies as travelers. I couldn't find a single side of him that was even remotely disagreeable to me.

He was an artist and didn't wear his hair long; he dressed like everyone else; he practiced the habits and customs of well-bred people, without any of the protestations of a bohemian or the eagerness of a neophyte. Although we were very much suited to each other, we didn't go into the territory of awkward or over-familiar questions. His reserve, in every respect, was perfect, with no mystery about it, and above all he didn't let his mind run on the slope of any ridiculous expansion. He had told me nothing of his family, nor of the rank he occupied in the world; yet it was easy to recognize, at first glance, that his genius had not sprung from a concierge's lodge, and that the distinction of his person must derive from something hereditary. He had yet to expound any transcendent theories on the arts, their progress, their decadence, nor for or against any illustrious master elevated to Olympus or plunged alive beneath the waves of the Phlegethon. If I knew him as an artist, it was because an incidental sentence had taught me so. We'd talked about literature, and I liked his ideas because I shared his preferences. He seemed accomplished.

Once at the table, Lanze suggested that I ask for some Asti wine - that little sparkling wine, he said, celebrated by *La Chartreuse de Parme*, and which I absolutely had to know.

At the first word, the inn's waiter had brought the desired bottle. Conrad filled my glass and his own, and, resting his elbow on the table and his head on his hand, raised the precious beverage to eye level.

— Admit it," he says, "as we both sit here, we're in one of life's happiest days, and perhaps at the happiest moment of such a day.

— I'd like to hear you develop this thesis," I replied, touching his glass to mine.

And I drank and refilled my glass again, for the pleasure of seeing the foam sparkle.

He took on the air of a man determined to make faith penetrate his interlocutor's soul, even with the help of four men and their corporal.

— Tell me, Laudon, in good faith, what have we done since that morning when our eyes were opened to the light of day? Haven't we climbed

the steamboat to Lucerne on a lovely, cool, damp morning, shivering enough to make us wish for the sun and its rays? I won't remind you of the rural beauties of the lake, of William Tell's chapel, or of William Tell himself, although we may owe a tribute of homage to the hospitable country whose inns have already given us so many notes. But, all things considered, let's face it, has a shadow of a care approached us in the time it has taken us to cross these picturesque waves where the four liberators of Switzerland have taken so much trouble, and where Schiller, in his drama, and Rossini, in his music, have succeeded in finding such beautiful things?

No! Laudon, don't be ungrateful, don't deny the obvious; your mind hasn't been covered by the slightest cloud, black or gray, during this happy crossing.

I hesitated to dip a cookie into my wine, to give my full assent to his words. But he gave me no time to develop my approval and continued with added gravity:

— From Fluelen to here, I'm not afraid to say, it's been a crescendo of bliss.

— Yes, undoubtedly, executed in an atmosphere where dust abounded more than vital air, and where swirls of flies indulged in the game of djerid on our persons.

— Ingrate!" cried Lanze, "go back to your life in Paris and don't profane your presence...

— Let's see," I say, "I was wrong, I admit it, and I'm being inappropriate. I think as you do. I'm delighted. Do I need to tell you about the slopes of the Gotthard, all covered in their meanders, on their crests, with the pinkish bushes of these rhododendrons in bloom?

— Do you remember," he exclaimed, "this Devil's Bridge, the Reuss, in a panic, scattering, dissipating its foam at such great heights, while the dark masses of its waters, compact as steel blades, plunged curvaceously into the falls of the river's sonorous bed, and rose again, running far and wide, disheveled in long ribbons of silver?

— And these gorges of immense, dismantled rock, black and fierce, leading to valleys of such cheerful, calm green?

— And those feudal towers, which force had erected and which violence had half-toppled?

— Deep down," concludes Lanze, "we find ourselves honestly excited by what we've seen and felt; we've been charmed, moved, dazzled, touched, transported, happy, in a word; but, as we're of our time, we'd be failing ourselves if we weren't the first to make fun of it. So many people have written almanac verses about the Gotthard that..,

Well, we're secretly embarrassed to agree that there was enough here to make good ones. Would you like me to tell you how I feel, Laudon?

— I put no obstacles in the way.

— The people of our generation are sad fools.

— Amen," I replied.

Such a clear-cut submission disarmed him, and he seemed inclined to fall into a sort of reverie, when the driver reappeared and asked us to return to our box. We hastily lit our cigars and set off down the street.

The children awaited Lanze's return. A host of pretty attitudes and sparkling glances paid generous tribute to his generosity. He went and stood in the midst of this little world, patted a few curly heads in friendship, offered a few more pennies, accompanied by serious recommendations to behave; then we climbed into the carriage.

There was a delightful contrast: our postillion, a big, vigorous, axe-sharp Helvetian with a square, red face, used his big paws to accommodate his horses' harness before climbing onto his seat; A peddler was watching him, a Lombard, tall, svelte, slender, with a broad chest, a tight waist, a handsome figure, ivory teeth, curly hair, wavy, magnificent, a Bacchus, an Apollo, a Mercury. He stood proudly on one hip, one leg forward, the perfect image of virile grace. Lanze gazed at him quietly, but said nothing, and the horses galloped off.

It's one of the most delightful hours of the journey, the one after dinner, when you let yourself go, all comforted and cheered up by rest and food, to the motion of a good car. I'm wrong to proclaim such a banal truth, because I think every traveler must have noticed it. We had become very quiet. He remained in his corner, I in mine, both smoking, looking out of the car door and, probably, he, like me, was mixing with the sensation given by the landscape all sorts of pictures from elsewhere and further afield. Certainly, in the dark chamber of my mind, everything was painted in charming colors.

I'd spent the previous evening with Lucie at the Hotel du Cygne in Lucerne, and hadn't left that lovely creature until midnight. Never, no, never had she shown me such kindness.

This person so accomplished, this true gazelle, so pretty in her slender waist, so proud in her every feature, so adorable in the least of her movements, so mischievous in her whole spirit, so formidable in her looks charged alternately with irony or divination, had been for me filled with the most serious kindness. I told her so, and she seemed grateful. At the time of the

separation, I shook her hand. I kissed her husband... Dear boy! He'd been affectionate too! And we had made an appointment to see her in Paris that winter.

In good faith, I have never loved anyone but Lucie. I'm not going to say that this feeling is a major disturbance in my life, nor that it stops me in many things, nor that it has a notable influence on my resolutions or my conduct; yet I find it in every corner of my soul, where it carries an extreme freshness. He's an amiable companion, but not a tyrant.

Oh, my God! Madame de Genneville isn't making herself very unhappy for me. I know it, and I don't blame her in the least for what anyone else would probably call indifference or coldness; that would be unfair. She's neither indifferent nor cold towards me; on the contrary, she understands me without me ever having explained myself, and sees the inside of my soul which, thank God, has never been revealed to her! We are two sympathetic natures, because, being alike, we have nothing to fear from each other's demands. As long as she feels loved, she's content; as long as I love with a certain degree of return, and above all nothing exaggerated, nothing false, nothing hypocritical in what is returned to me, in what is offered to me, in what is given to me, I have no inclination to ask for extravagances, not being myself suited to them, and I'm content, and happy with what, for another, would certainly not be enough.

Nothing is made estimable except by duration; and these boisterous loves, which throw themselves through the life of a woman and a man, like the Reuss through a forest of fir trees, what do they do? They ravage everything, they wreck, break, destroy, disperse, and their rapid course is too fast for us to fall in love with its ardor; we are left only bent over cold, unfortunate debris. I'm not saying that I reason in the manner of great men, or even of those illustrious enthusiasts whose follies we quote with the promise of not risking imitation. I reason like the poor devil that I am, happy to be in the world, eager not to spoil anything good I have around me, and, for that, deft enough to distinguish between the heart and the senses, between inclination and impulse, between affection and rage, between reasonable devotion and the abjection of all will; in short, as the wise have said, between fidelity and constancy. I'd be in despair if I did any harm to Genneville. Lucie would die, or if she didn't, I'd pay such a price for it that I don't want to put her there. I'm arranging my life to love her always, to give her neither grief nor shame, and to keep intact the sweetness and charm of what I receive from her.

Again, it's not heroism, I know; but why would I go

to burden myself with labors that neither the needs of my heart, nor the will of any Eurystheus impose upon me? Why play a dangerous comedy with myself, just to lure me to crowns I could well miss, and which, in the end, I do without?

Since I'm made that way, why lie? Personal sincerity is a rarer virtue than amorous intemperance, and certainly more virile and masculine, and this one, I do myself justice, I possess! Well then, it's true! Nature has endowed me with an essentially passive force. I'm contemplative by nature, and my abilities are limited to the examination of things. Faced with the vanities of this world, I'm a kind of magazine inspector. I don't mingle with the squadron of passions, nor with the infantry of tastes, nor with the artillery of fantasies, to lead the charges of some, the attacks of others, the evolutions of the third. No, I stand there to watch everything, to see what exists, what works, and, although I wear the army uniform, as soon as the fuss starts, I'm no longer part of it, and my state is to stand aside, to distinguish what falls from what remains standing and to keep a record of it. Without vanity, I can hardly see anything but the bees to which I can rightly compare myself. I forage on surfaces.

As I let myself drift off into these reveries, I felt the delicious impression of a sweet confession, where the confessed facts don't abuse you, and this must be no mean voluptuousness for holy girls whom monastic enclosure has freed from the thorns of the world. What's more, I could see the prospects of life stretching out indefinitely before my expectations like a broad green carpet from Versailles, always fresh, always united, always calm, with nothing to disturb the feet of my hopes, nor force them to bow their heads with the chance of being suddenly dishevelled. No! I must admit that I was born happy.

What an incomparable night! The horses trotted and shook their bells in cadence; from time to time, a word of encouragement from the postilion made them double their pace. The sides of the road passed swiftly; a stone, a tuft of grass, a bush quickly detached itself and came to caress my eyes with some strange shape just now imprinted in my memory; the deep valleys accompanied us with their turns, the mountains escorted us in throngs, the cloudy peaks, or white or grey, sometimes blended with the night sky, sometimes made as if an effort to detach themselves from it. I was plunged into the sweetest ecstasy.

Lanze lit a new cigar and, as silent as I, continued to smoke, half leaning towards his car door; the rays of the moon falling full on his face showed him to me for a moment and I was struck by his physiognomy; this

was not the one I always saw in him: no longer cheerful, no longer carefree, a serious melancholy and certainly a tinge of pain replaced his pleasant composure.

- What can he have? I thought; he'll have lost his money in Baden, or his latest statue has been abused by Munich journalists.

I couldn't help smiling at my insight.

In today's society, there's hardly any room in the depths of the soul for anything other than precise, definite and closely related grievances.

I had fun embroidering on this theme, and as I embroidered, I fell asleep with my nose on my canvas, still thinking about Lucie and my dear Gennevilliers.

When I awoke, it was broad daylight and Conrad Lanze, smoking his eternal cigar, said to me:

— Congratulations on your address!

— Which address?

— You open your eyes at just the right moment to experience the sensation of a visual change.

That's right, I'd lost my sense of reality in the midst of a nocturnal scene depicting the picturesque violence of a tormented nature, and now, wild mountains, craggy and split peaks, retreating and threatening valleys, this scenery had disappeared. The road passed through slopes that sloped appreciably and complacently towards a goal that was still hidden but that we sensed would be charming; on all sides mulberry trees, and among the mulberry trees, vines, and among the vines, corn plantations, tightly packed, thick, vigorous, flourishing, waving their plumes under the finger of a tepid little wind, the true *Favorius*, the friend of ancient Italy. We were already in Italy, not because of politics and state conventions, but because of nature. It was the very tip of Italy's toe that could be seen beneath this diaphanous coat of greenery, full of flowers, full of life, elegant, seductive... Italy, at last! This little toe-tip heralded the other countless perfections of the great and sublime Madonna. I prostrated myself in thought before what I was seeing and before what had been promised to me.

— To hell with praiseworthy cantons!

— No exclusion!" muttered Lanze dogmatically, and with that we began a rather subtle dissertation on the forms of the picturesque, which took us all the way to Magadino.

The merits of Lake Maggiore, of which we had just spoken before seeing it, seemed mediocre. Once we'd boarded the Arona boat, we were even more astonished...

than charmed by these blackened waters, thickened by the enormous shadows of two mountainous shores, whose fir-treed flanks are nothing but monotonous and even dreary.

As we mourned our disappointment, a tall, slim, blond young man with a distinguished bearing stood next to us; he joined in the conversation in a discreet way, but at the same time indicated a desire to establish a relationship.

It wasn't hard to see that all three of us were fish of the same species, or thereabouts. The temptation to acquire travelling companions, a desire which obviously painted the unknown, also took hold of me, and I saw that Lanze was not averse to it; I therefore engaged in closer conversation, and I'm delighted to have done so, for our new acquaintance helped us spend some good hours today. Like us, he had been anxious to see, contemplate and admire Lake Maggiore, and despaired of not finding what he had expected.

— It seems to me," he says, "that a pilgrimage to this famous lake is a kind of initiation from which souls who value themselves cannot escape. Why have so many poets, not to mention prose writers, why has President de Brosses, like Jean-Paul, gone on and on about landscapes that are, all in all, so insignificant?

While we were lamenting our misfortune, we had stopped paying attention; suddenly, our recruit having raised his head in a southerly direction, exclaimed:

— Just look!

It was a new, sublime, adorable sight; we'd been too hasty! We hadn't trusted this enchanting nature, a cunning magician, adept at hiding her wealth to better display its treasures, to make its pumps shimmer at the desired hour, so beautiful, but so great an artist, above all!

We were dazzled and drunk with enchantment, joy and happiness; we were taken to the islands with the firm resolve to spend at least one day there, and perhaps, who knows? the rest of our lives.

CHAPTER TWO

INTIMATE TALKS BY THE THREE TRAVELLERS

Louis de Laudon didn't spend the rest of his life on Isola Bella, nor on Isola Madre, and when he and his two companions, Conrad Lanze and Wilfrid Nore, had spent the day exploring these alluring places, he couldn't resist writing, before dinner, the pages we've just read, which were to serve, on his account, as a preface to many others. The manuscript, crammed into his travel kit, remained there indefinitely and was not continued.

Laudon was quite used to starting things, but a natural horror prevented him from continuing them, let alone finishing them.

Parts of the preceding fragment may have hinted at this character trait. He had honor, a heart of light substance, easy to crack, just as easy to mend; he was perceptive about small things, myopic about large ones, of which he discovered only parts, without ever grasping the whole; but, above all, he was curious, curious to excess about the affairs of others, and the real, true, sympathetic interest he took in them compensated him for the lack of seriousness of his own affairs.

He had become attached to Lanze, discovering in him a host of qualities foreign to his own nature and which astonished him. He felt similarly drawn to Wilfrid Nore, who was no less deserving, albeit in a different way.

After wandering the Isola Bella in all directions, entering all the grottoes, sitting on all the benches, contemplating all the paintings no less than the dwarf palms, and appropriately raving about the majestic motto *Humilitas*, proclaimed on the gilded iron that forms its letters, and surmounted by a count's crown, the whole forming a kind of gigantic tableau repeated on every corner of the terraces, the three friends made their way to the inn where they had announced their intention to spend the night. There, they began to dine like people who will stay at table as long as they feel like it, which is, in all probability, for a very long time; not that their fancy was in the least concupiscent of indefinite eating and drinking; on the contrary, in this respect, the necessities were enough for them, and they

all three were in such a state of mind that anything superfluous would have revolted them. They were equally hungry and thirsty for conviviality. The nature in which they were transported, the freedom and temporary, but all the more intoxicating, carefreeness of the travelling life, their chance meeting, a mutual liking for each other's company, all went to their heads and disposed them to outpourings.

It was Wilfrid Nore who first set foot on the path leading to confidences. Dinner in its serious part was over; we were just playing with some fruit and sweets, when Wilfrid, glancing at the window through which showed a magnificent setting sun and the waters of the lake and the shores of Piedmont, spoke in these terms:

— If heaven created you both capable of dining at Isola Bella, with people you don't know, but for whom you feel the most genuine affection and above all boundless confidence ; At Isola Bella, I say, in the midst of this unheard-of heap of outlandish constructions, of senseless ruffraff, of paintings so bad that they can, without any inconvenience, be attributed to Michelangelo as well as to Raphael; in the midst, I say, of this fit of madness which has taken hold of an owner anxious to find a real way of proving the impossibility of fighting against this incomparable nature and who has achieved his goal! if you are capable, I repeat, of contemplating yourselves on this ground where the Duchess Sanseverina passed, where Liane lived, without feeling transported out of the vulgar world, without becoming a kind of dream, leprechauns with bodies, but bodies absolutely disproportionate to the preponderant power of the thinking part... if, I declare to you for the third time, you believe yourselves to be honest bourgeois, full of realities and seriously bound by the customs, ordinances and regulations of common life, in that case, may the devil take you away! I'm going to retire, and in a rage I'm going to go to bed cursing the day I collided, on Lake Maggiore, with people so unworthy of crossing its waves.

Lanze and Laudon hastened to reassure Nore of their state of mind. He swayed his head for a moment from right to left with a grave air, and continued:

— We are three calendars, the sons of kings; you would disgrace me greatly if you hesitated to accept this truth. That we are equally one-eyed in the right eye is a sadly indisputable fact; my fear is that we are even completely blind, and this is something we will only know for sure towards the end of our existence, provided we acquire the critical sense with which I see you and myself as being rather ill-equipped up to now.

— I agree with your apologue," Laudon replied, "but I'm only too aware of the extent to which it's true.

I'm missing my right eye; as for being a king's son, that's another matter, and I can't find any semblance of it.

— This is because," replied Nore vivaciously, "you're only looking at the question from one angle, and precisely the most insignificant one. Please take the trouble to get to the bottom of things. When the Arab storyteller begins his tale by having his hero pronounce the sacramental words: "I am the son of a king", there is not a single instance out of more than a hundred where the character thus presented is anything other, as far as his exterior is concerned, than a poor devil badly treated by fortune: either a dervish, or a shipwrecked man dying of hunger; often, as in the present case, a cripple, and never, never, never, I say, never, whether the affair turns out well or ends badly, is there any mention of the unknown Majesty to whom the character claims to owe his birth. Why then, in your opinion, make him a king's son, since he is granted nothing of his father's inheritance, neither palace, nor pompous gardens planted with giant rosebushes and plane trees, nor carpets from Khorassan, nor cracked vases from China, nor horses harnessed in gold and turquoise, nor a harem populated by Mingrelian women, nor anything that consecrates and, in the eyes of the crowd, makes it especially desirable to come directly from a reigning sovereign?

This is because, by uttering the magic word: "I am the son of a king", the narrator establishes with the first word, and without the need to detail his thoughts, that he is endowed with special, precious qualities, by virtue of which he naturally rises above the vulgar. "I am the son of a king" does not in any way mean: "My father is not a merchant, a soldier, a writer, an artist, a banker, a boilermaker or a stationmaster...". Who's asking him about his father, whom nobody in the audience cares about, interested only in what he himself is? It means: "I am of a bold and generous temperament, foreign to the ordinary suggestions of common naturals. My tastes are not those of fashion; I feel for myself and neither love nor hate according to newspaper indications. The independence of my mind, the most absolute freedom in my opinions, are unshakeable privileges of my noble origin; Heaven conferred them on me in my cradle, the way the sons of France received the blue cordon of the Holy Spirit, and as long as I live, I shall keep them. Finally, as a logical consequence of these premises, I am not happy with what is sufficient for the plebs, and I seek in the jewels that Heaven has placed within the reach of men other jewels than those with which they panic.

Where do I get so many distinctions, so strong, so marked, that put me in the position of having to choose?

so separate from the entourage, that this entourage certainly feels alienated from me, and shows me only the most mediocre benevolence? Obviously, because I'm a king's son, since the royal quality has the effect of placing the person who possesses it above and beyond the bulk of subordinates, subjects and slaves.

— I understand you," replied Lanze, "and you're more right than you know. Being a king's son is quite different from being a king. A king! My God, most of the time a king is a memory, an ideal; rarely can one recognize in a human person clothed with this title the reality of the fact, in the sense at least that the ancients assumed about this supreme word; but the essential remains strongly and eternally attached to the qualification of son of a king. He is the one who has found the qualities you mentioned, hanging around his neck from the day of his birth; he is the one who, unquestionably, by some lineage, has received from the blood infused in his veins the superior virtues, the sacred merits that we see exist in him, which the surrounding world has not communicated to him. Where would this world have taken them when it doesn't have them? Where would the infant have got them, since nowhere did he have them at hand? What nurse's milk would have given them to him? Are there nurses so sublime? No! What he is is the result of a mysterious, native combination; it is a complete reunion in his person of the noble, divine elements, if you like, that ancient forebears possessed in all their fullness, and that the mixtures of subsequent generations with unworthy alliances had, for a time, disguised, veiled, weakened, attenuated, concealed, made disappear, but which, never dead, suddenly reappear in the son of a king of whom we speak...

— Bravo!" said Nore.

— You worry me," interrupted Laudon. So, to your liking, both of you, and to clarify things, there would be, today, all over the world, a certain number of people, men, women, children, of all possible nations, in whose individuality the most precious atoms of their most precious ancestors would have succeeded in reuniting, by expelling what untoward intrusions would have brought into them of stupefying or irritating mixtures during more or less long series of previous generations, and the result would be that, in fact, these people, in whatever social situation Heaven brought them into being, would be the true surviving sons of Rollon's men and even of the Amâles and Mérowings?

— Of course," replied Nore, "it's just as you say. Many centuries have passed since modern society began its Sabbath, with slaves and sons of slaves raising their heads. The number of rascals has been incalculable. The good people, pushed into the abyss by the crowd of flatfoots, don't even think about it.

could count. Yet, at the bottom of the abyss, not all of them died; many lived on as best they could; a few caught themselves, slowly, slowly, in the crevices of the rock, the tufts of grass, the branches of bushes. They came back to the surface of the ground, soiled, bruised; it took time to clean them up; besides, I don't pretend to say that they're absolutely perfect, and so I present to you, in my person united with yours, three calenders, one-eyed in the right eye and sons of kings.

— You're opening up a horizon that strikes me and stops me in my tracks," says Laudon, "and to use a word that pleases you, how many do you suppose the number of sons of kings in the world today might be?

— Peuh!" replies Nore, "what do I know? You're asking me a statistical question with very few possible solutions. But take a l o o k in your memory at the list of people you know from near and far. Would you find it difficult to admit that in Europe alone, there may be between three thousand and three thousand five hundred well-trained brains and well-beating hearts?

— Your calculation seems highly exaggerated," objected Conrad Lauze.

— Peste!" exclaimed Laudon, "and all the millions that are left, what do you do with them?

— What I do with them?" replied Wilfrid, and his voice took on the bite of invective; "what I do with them? But look at what they're doing with themselves! Here, let's go to the window: I'll show them to you.

He opened the window wide and stepped out onto the balcony, where his two friends followed. The three of them leaned back, arms folded, against the iron balustrade. Their dinner, their talks and their discussions had lasted a long time; it was nearly midnight. All was calm; the earth was asleep. The waters of the lake, streaked with luminous stripes, rippled under the night light.

— I wish," says Wilfrid, gritting his teeth and speaking in a low voice, "I wish that instead of this scene of repose we could see here in full, with the eyes of the body, the kingdoms of the world and their magnificence. But let us look at them with the eyes of the spirit. Let us contemplate these multitudes swarming and gathering, dolled up, adorned, adorned or in rags. Let's not exclude anyone. Do you recognize the full barbarism, not this youthful, brave, bold, picturesque, happy barbarism, but a louche, sullen, surly, ugly savagery that will kill everything and create nothing? Admire, at least, its mass! Its mass, indeed, is enormous; admire the beautiful order of its division into three parts; at the head, the variegated tribe of imbeciles! They lead all, carry the keys, open the doors, invent the phrases, weep for having made a mistake, assure us that they would never have believed... Now for the funnies! They're everywhere, on their sides, on their foreheads, on their tails; they're running around, getting restless,

and their only business is to prevent anything from settling or stopping until they themselves are seated. What's the point of them being seated? No sooner does one of their bands declare itself sated, than hungry swarms of the same kind come running to take over its trade.

And now here come the brutes. The fools have unleashed them; the jokers are pushing their innumerable herds. You ask me what I do with this pandemonium, Laudon? I make it what it is: daze, destruction and death.

— This is tantamount to saying that apart from these three thousand or three thousand five hundred elected representatives, whose number still seems too considerable to Lanze, you see nothing worth living for?

— All I see is a world of insects of different species and sizes, armed with saws, pincers, augers and other instruments of ruin, bent on throwing to the ground morals, rights, laws, customs, what I have respected, what I have loved; a world that burns cities, tears down cathedrals, wants no more books, music or paintings, and substitutes potatoes, rare beef and blue wine for everything. Would you spare this peat, if you held in your hands a sure means of destroying it? That's your business! As far as I'm concerned, lend me Jupiter's thunderbolts for a moment, and I'll only destroy what I need of the irresponsible mass of brutes. I don't recognize their soul, and it's not their fault if we don't contain them. And don't be too harsh on the jokers either! I can't assure you that they are the salt of the earth, but they are the brine. The rest can be employed, if not in honest ways, at least in useful ones. And let's face it, the planet produces them naturally! No matter what the world does, it will never be able to get rid of them, or perhaps do without them.

As for the fools, I'd be merciless. They are the vain and bloody perpetrators, the unique and loathsome engines of universal decay, and the rain of my flaming tiles would plow mercilessly through these perverted skulls. No, such a band doesn't deserve to live; no, this croaking vermin cannot exist and let the world live orderly beside them. The great and flourishing eras were those when such reptiles did not crawl on t h e steps of power.

A prolonged silence followed this statement. The three friends abandoned themselves to the impressions of their conversation, of the environment that enveloped them, of the situation of mind created by the journey. At last, Lanze resumed:

— You're right, no doubt, Nore; I couldn't care less about the masses.

of what we call men. I suppose that, in the plan of creation, these creatures have a use, since I see them there: they get in the way and we push them. But I can't imagine or see anything good or beautiful without them. The moral world, finally, is in every way similar to that starry sky whose magnificent depths are currently being rounded off. My gaze discovers, seeks and wants to see only the sparkling beings who, their foreheads crowned with eternal glitter, group themselves intelligently in infinite spaces, attracted, associated, by the laws of a mysterious and irrefragable affinity. I know that apart from these stars, the entire atmosphere, without leaving a single point free and vacant, is filled, saturated with existences invisible to my eyes.

Sometimes it's the extinct bolide that criss-crosses the silence and carries into some corner of the unknown abyss a remnant of matter, an impure breath of sulfur and noxious gases; sometimes it's the myriads of animalcules propagating plague and typhus, sometimes the clouds of locusts that, from one continent to another, will carry sterility, destruction, famine and death. My gaze, my affection, my respect, my tenderness, my curiosity, are attached only to these luminous beings criss-crossing their steps in the celestial curves; I associate myself only with those intimacies with which I see them so occupied: constellations, meetings, groups, whether fixed or wandering, this alone is worthy of admiration and friendship, and I find this idea very natural and very right, always present, in all centuries, under all forms of societies, under all conditions of existence and with all religious laws, to the thought of honest people, people of conscience and power, men who knew how to think and execute, and who never failed in isolating themselves from the crowd to call themselves a Pleiad.

— Not to mention," added Nore, "that if they didn't do it, we didn't fail to do it for them. Yes, Lanze, it's wise, it's good, it's healthy to hold on to what's like you and to let go of the rest as indifferent, an enemy or dangerous. You can, on occasion, be generous with the rest, but only generously; and now, please, let's get off these heights. As the night draws on, it would be ridiculous to prolong the rest to which we are entitled too long into the morning. As we've been wandering in limbo since this morning, none of us has asked the others what we intend to do tomorrow. It's time to find out.

— As for me," replied Laudon, "I'm going to Milan, where I'll find some letters, and from Milan I'll probably make my way to Burbach without any hurry, arriving around autumn.

— In Burbach?" asked Lanze, with a clear accent of interest. Do you know anyone there?

— I know the reigning prince, with whom I've had the honor of hunting on occasion; he's the one I'm going to see.

— I think I'll go to Burbach too, at this time," says Conrad, after a brief moment's hesitation. First of all, I'm from this town, then the Prince has entrusted me with some work; when I've spent a few weeks in Florence, I'll no doubt return home, and I'll be there before you.

— Since that's the way it is," exclaimed Wilfrid Nore, "I'll take my side. You, Lanze, are a man with an occupation. You, Laudon, perhaps believe yourself to be in the same situation, which is almost the same thing; as for me, I have no such illusions. Nothing obliges me to turn right rather than left, south rather than north; consequently, I'll accompany whichever of you wants me, until such time as this indulgent guide sees fit to go to the rendezvous you've set for yourself, and at that fateful hour, I'll follow him obediently to Burbach. Don't be surprised otherwise by my resolution; the prince is my first cousin, and I'll gladly pay him a visit.

This revelation made both listeners smile, and Wilfrid Nore continued:

— I'm sure you're both flattered to have met someone of my importance as a friend on Lake Maggiore. You'll agree that there's something rather mysterious about my appearance. How can an Englishman, traveling without the slightest escort and who doesn't seem to have much more continuity in his ideas than in his home life, possessing in the face of the sun only a rather petty suitcase, of cramped dimensions and on the corner of which we can still read the half-torn white paper bearing the word *maldonado*, w h i c h proves that it has arrived from Mexico, how can this Englishman be the first cousin of the powerful Jean-Théodore, reigning prince of Wørbeck-Burbach? Admit it, there's enough here to keep any imagination that knows its trade, mouth open, one foot in the air and arm outstretched as if to catch flies.

— Well, what does that mean," exclaimed Laudon, "if not that we're naturally advancing towards the point where we must arrive of necessity? Can we keep our masks where we are? Is it not essential that we get to know each other better? I mean, aren't we at the point where we can't ignore for a minute why and how we are, you, me, him, Calenders, son of a king and one-eyed in the right eye?

— Nothing could be fairer!" replied the English gentleman sharply. Lanze lit a cigar and made himself comfortable in a cane armchair:

— I see we won't be going to bed tonight; but everything is so

beautiful, here, heaven and earth, that it would be a crime to even think about it. And now, you, Wilfrid Nore, begin your story, and we'll listen to you as best we can.

Wilfrid Nore sat sideways on the table, his closed left hand supporting his slightly bowed body, his open right hand resting on his hip, and with his eyes fixed on his two friends, he spoke as follows:

— I was born in Baghdad...

Before following the narrator any further, it is necessary to take a precaution that will give the following chapter the most advantageous form and scope.

CHAPTER THREE

STORY OF THE FIRST CALENDER SON OF A KING

Wilfrid Nore did tell Laudon and Lanze the real truth about himself, but he didn't tell them the whole truth. Far from it, he wouldn't have let anyone into the recesses of his personal existence, so he confined himself to enumerating the external facts. I must say that, when he had finished what he thought appropriate, Lanze conscientiously imitated him in his reticence, so that, to indicate only a part of the main ground of both their reservations, one could have believed, one should even have remained convinced, when they had finished, that neither of them had ever in their lives looked at a woman.

Laudon didn't do as they did. On every point, he made a point of being very explicit. But, as what matters to us at the moment is to know the characters in this story to an equal degree, to get to know them thoroughly, to penetrate them completely, to take hold of what is theirs and of them, we shall treat, with the utmost disdain, the impotent treachery that Nore and Lanze claim to use here vis-à-vis the reader; We'll seek out their secrets in the depths of their souls, whose sly contractions can steal nothing from us; we'll wrest from them what they want to hold back, and in order to chastise them more severely for their ill-timed mania for dissimulation, we'll make them declare, to each other, not what they have confessed, but what they felt and knew about themselves at the moment they spoke. Thus, in a tale from the last century, called *the Palace of Truth*, visitors to this unfortunate monument could keep nothing on their tongues. Everything was gone, and the unfortunates compromised themselves to their heart's content. Here, however, only the reader will see both sides of the story: in the Isola Bella inn, the listeners heard and knew only what the narrator was willing to tell them. So Wilfrid Nore said and thought this: I was born in Baghdad, where my father had been sent on business for the Compagnie des Indes, and where he resided for a long time. I won't tell you much about him, but you must know something about him. The youngest brother of Lord Wildenham, he had entered the military service of this association of merchants at a young age, whom the Hindus took to be an old lady whose prodigious longevity they admired.

I was always happy to hear from him, whenever the opportunity arose. My father became a lieutenant-colonel, made a handsome fortune and won a liver disease that spoiled his character. My poor mother, who died young and two or three years after I was born, felt something of this, I think. However, I can't say that I had too much to complain about; for, by a rare occurrence in English families of any consideration, I was never quarrelled with the author of my days, as he had been with my grandfather and continued to be with his elder brother, by means of an uninterrupted series of bad manners which, continuing on both sides with the most edifying firmness, only ended with the death of both. It must be assumed that the present generations have greatly degenerated from the bellicose mood of their ancestors, for I have never ceased to be very close to my cousins, who have given me tokens of friendship ever since we came into contact.

You French, my dear Laudon, have created a type of your English neighbors that is certainly the most bizarre and false, and the least in keeping with reality. For you, an Englishman is a ridiculous being, lacking in taste, original, you say, but, in fact, stupid in his behavior, dressing like no one else, having fun like no one else, and of a coldness above or below all comparison. If you object that nowhere in the world are there richer collections of statues and paintings than in England; that nowhere is more poetry written, you have an easy answer, and you routinely allege the effects of British pride, an answer that seems peremptory.

But, in so mistreating our graces, you endow us with supreme wisdom. According to you, we possess solid reason, which enables us to see our true interest first; we know the finest of political constitutions, and our unanimity in defending it is complete, as is our enlightened submission to the law. Finally, to crown the edifice, nothing equals the serious and didactic love we have for those legitimately designated for our affection.

Ah, my poor friends, how close you are to the truth! You'd hardly find a well-bred Englishman exempt from the fury of the fine arts, and that's why we cover Italy with our annual invasions. We are the most passionate people in the world, and the most fundamental slaves to our first impulse. This is evident enough from our history, a pandemonium of violence and absurd crimes always committed without thought. Our respect for the law has never prevented us from being the most insurrectionary, I don't say the most revolutionary, country that the sun ever shines on; our love of the family is evident in our

by the invention of the clubs where we spend our lives, and, in short, there are more deviations from individual fantasy in our private and public conduct than in any other nation on earth. As for being ridiculous, this opinion simply proves that we are made differently from you, and is not worthy of discussion.

I was brought up among Indian and Portuguese servants, cipayes, Arab and Persian merchants, and the entire Muslim, Jewish and Christian population of the ancient capital of Haroun-Al-Raschid, with its many different skins and costumes. As soon as I was able to think and compare, I took this world in contempt, and nothing, certainly, was more natural, since I saw every day, in great as in small affairs, the distance which separated the resident, and even the least English lieutenant, from the most sumptuous of the native dignitaries. What! the pasha himself, the head of the province, only had to say amen when an injunction of any kind came from our house! This early education, I confess, did not give me a high idea of the intrinsic value of the dogma of equality; but it did inspire in me, for England and for what was English, a love, a cult, a veneration, an attachment!... I don't know how to define, in a way that is sufficient, the patriotic fervor with which I was gradually seized. England was me; then it was a radiance that radiated out from this central point, encompassing my family and mine; then, transporting myself in imagination to the bosom of our hereditary estates, which I had never seen, I pictured our farmers, our tenants, and surrounded them with a vehement love. I'd enter their ivy-covered cottages; I'd see them, I'd know them, their wives, their boys, their girls, right down to the five-year-olds whose hands my imagination, in love with the details and powerful at expressing them, would reach out for the snack distributed by the housewife, and nothing escaped my notice of the rustic furnishings of the thatched cottage or the pompous luxuries of the château. The childhood memories that remained in my father's mind were priceless archives, whose minutiae I constantly asked to know. I knew about the day, fifty years ago, when groom James had broken the stable lantern, which had caused Sommelier Ford to explode in anger, and what had followed. On this theme, I never tired of applying deep meditations.

To the family, to its dependents, I attached the people of the county, and, step by step, the inhabitants of the three kingdoms found themselves completely gathered in my head under the caressing rays of a sympathy, the most affectionate, the most tender, the most passionate that one can imagine.

The country inhabited by this happy race, by this elite nation, bore a prodigious resemblance to the landscape I had imagined for myself in the Garden of Eden. In any case,

it had nothing, absolutely nothing in common with the land illuminated around me by the Asian sun. From the accounts of my father, a man, moreover, not very sensitive to the impressions of nature, and consequently mediocresly descriptive, I had composed backgrounds of paintings which were gradually perfected by the assiduous contemplation of drawings, engravings and paintings, brought before my eyes by chance, and what I exultantly called my good fortune, so that, not only were the English people the first of peoples, but the island of Great Britain was also the most picturesque, the most imposing and the most delightful of inhabited regions.

I don't need to tell you that with such a mindset, I read a lot, and what I read that suited my preoccupations was engraved in my memory and made the shapes of my universe more precise. If I'd been born at a time when children didn't have so many books in their hands, I don't know what kind of man I'd have become. I am solely a product of books; I lived in them and through them. Before I was seven, everything I felt came from paper and ink. It's likely that, in the absence of this nourishment so suited to my temperament, I would never have acquired any degree of intellectual vitality. I must therefore bless my lucky star for having thus appeared in the midst of a world fit to sustain me. But, to return to the examination of myself, know that, from all my reading, history books, novels, especially novels (devoured, from my earliest youth, with insatiable hunger), conversations with my father, endless questions with which I pursued my compatriots, it had resulted that I saw of England and English life, and wanted to see nothing else, but the poem, and by no means the reality. To me, they were Norman knights, men-at-arms of the two Roses, Puritans and Cavaliers, generous Jacobites, squires hunting and toasting, loyal farmers, ardent, convinced, majestic orators, filling the vaults of the House of Lords with the accents of their wisdom, or making the deeply stirred commons flinch with enthusiasm. Dickens' books didn't exist then, and if they had and I had read them, they wouldn't have made the slightest impression on my stubborn optimism.

When I reached the age of eighteen, there was a noticeable change in the nature of my dream. Hitherto, my sympathies had been entirely absorbed by great figures or virtuous inferiors. These were the only individualities with whom I populated my forests, my favorite heaths, and I saw only them in the upper rooms of feudal manors, as well as in the oak-panelled bedrooms of my bourgeois. Finally, I had become intimately acquainted with Ivanhoe, Gurth and Robin Hood.

Lady Rowena's presence.

I began to think about it, and it was thus that I left the experimental field of positive history, to complete my education with a course in metaphysics.

I wondered, with an interest that grew with each passing day, what was the meaning of this singular attraction with which women seemed to be endowed, and which determined in Europeans such an explosion of strange feelings. The mere need to propagate and maintain the human species did not require so much apparatus. I could see how people around me dealt with these necessities. Either you married a girl from a good family or you bought a slave at the market; in both cases, you locked up your acquisition in a harem, from which a child, two children, three children would emerge at a given time, and that was all there was to it. I could see from the poetry of the land that it was natural and gracious to make a request of a beautiful person, a request to which one attached great importance at the time. But I also saw that serious, staid people, who didn't drink wine, who didn't frequent the society of dancers, treated these sorts of affairs sometimes with contemptuous mockery, sometimes with outbursts of anger whose tone was equally set by the holy books of all sects. What could be further from love? Until then, as I have just said, I had read a lot of novels; I devoured more of them, seeking in them anything other than what I had done in the past; the passion for poetry took hold of me almost at the same time; I not only swooned night and day over Byron and Wordsworth ; I felt compelled to reproduce, under the guidance of rhythm and rhyme, my personal impressions, which seemed to me to have absolutely nothing in common with what the most refined humanity had felt until then, and, strengthened by the conviction of my absolute originality in this respect, not doubting that I had discovered new sources of sensibility, I dared to persuade myself in my verses that, not only did I know a certain Sylvia whose English perfections were indescribable, but also that I loved her with all the delicacies of which I alone was capable, and, I confess with a blush, that I was, to the letter, idolized by her! If anything can be alleged for my excuse, it's that, without this last fiction, I absolutely could not have described the ineffable delights with which I knew, from certain science, that an elite soul is inundated by the mutual confessions of a virtuous love.

This is what I told my friend Georges Coxe, a midshipman aboard the Company's steam aviso "*Sutledge*", stationed in Baghdad. I found it somewhat inconvenient to tell him the unvarnished truth about Sylvia, and preferred to elaborate a story in which my heroine was the only daughter of a

major who, on her way back from India, had come to visit us in Aleppo and Damascus. She had stayed at the Residence for a month, and that month had been more than enough to bring about all the incidents I told her about. In good conscience, it would have been enough to defray ten years of the most hectic and busy love affairs. But George Coxe, the good boy, was so penetrated by the exaltation of my tales, that he wept, and I had described Sylvia's person so minutely, from her curly blond hair and dying blue eyes to those two pleasing dimples with which her cheek was caressed, that he wrote to me three years later, from London, where he was on leave, that he had met my belle in the Strand, followed her, inquired about her, learned that for six months she had been married to a lawyer, and begged me to forgive her, which I did.

For the time being, since nothing could give me reason to suspect such a terrible infidelity, I talked to Coxe only about the happiness of my passion and the torments of absence. I absolutely had to talk about love, since I couldn't think of anything else. I was delighted to develop my feelings, first to myself, then to a listener who did me the honor of understanding them. However, I wouldn't have minded if my friend had had some experience in the matter, and could have given me some communication where I could have found something to extend the radius of my ideas. Unfortunately, the poor child had had little opportunity to win hearts. Apart from the fact that heaven had created him ugly and overly shy, he had spent his life since the age of ten cruising the coasts of India. In his entire life, he had never said thirty words in a row to a European woman. Yet he had had **w h a t h e** considered an adventure. Having fallen in love, in Madras, with a twelve-year-old native girl, extremely pretty, though very dark-skinned and a dancer in a pagoda, he had undertaken to moralize her with some hope of bringing her to baptism. He foresaw great satisfaction in the execution of such a work. Unfortunately, the neophyte had left on the third day of preaching with an elephant driver. I couldn't learn much from all this. It was nonetheless true that Georges Coxe was marked by destiny as my initiator into a new life.

One day, I took him to a Mountefik camp. After hunting with the Arabs, we were returning to town at sunset, when, in a narrow street, we were stopped by a group of porters laden with packages.

We were considering the obviously European appearance of these trunks, studded chests, innumerable overnight bags and wooden crates laden with black letters, when, at the tail of the procession, appeared a gentleman, head

venerable, wearing a wide-brimmed hat, with long curly white hair, a tie of the same color, an ample black habit, vest and pants of the same color, a clergyman, in a word, certainly a missionary. It's not uncommon in Baghdad, or in any of the main Asian cities where there are British authorities, to meet a civil servant of this kind, whether a Protestant minister or an agent of the Bible Societies. The latter was giving his arm to a lady completely hidden by her wide-brimmed straw hat and green veil, and as soon as George Coxe looked at the figure, he stopped his horse short, motioned to one of our servants to come and take the bridle, dismounted, walked up to the old gentleman and the lady and said in a composed voice:

— Hello, Father, how are you? Harriet, I hope you're well. My father, Monsieur Wilfrid Nore! Wilfrid, Father! Harriet, Monsieur Wilfrid Nore! Wilfrid, my sister Harriet!

The proper introductions accomplished in this manner with *de rigueur* deportment, Georges continued in these terms, Mr. Coxe not having uttered a single word, and having contented himself with shaking his son's hand strongly, raising his eyes to heaven:

— Are you from the Burmese country, Father?

— Without a doubt.

— Have you come to live here?" continued Georges.

— Certainly; when you have time, it will be a pleasure to see you. I live in the same house as the porters. Monsieur Nore, if you'd like to accompany my son, I'd be delighted to see you.

I saluted, and we parted. I had not been able to discover a single feature of Miss Harriet; only she was young, I was sure, and graceful, I was sure. sure! She was graceful, she was young, she was English, English not from Asia, the colonies or Malta, but English from England! I melted into a kind of inner rapture that took away all my nervous strength. I would have sat on the ground for a word! I would have screamed, I would have cried, I would have laughed, I would have done every extravagance imaginable, if only someone had asked me to. I got rid of my best friend, whose presence was unbearable, as quickly as possible and under the worst possible pretext, and locked myself in my room.

— What's this?" I thought.

I fell into a deep melancholy. Night came, and I hardly slept; but I felt, for the first time, the power of those nocturnal reveries through which everything, even our own feelings, is transformed at the whim of the most unhealthy exaltation. I waited for daylight, I remember, with extreme eagerness, convinced that at dawn I would be free to rush off to the

Reverend Coxe and contemplate his daughter, who would understand wonderfully, as would her father, the timeliness of this morning visit.

Fortunately, these kinds of follies are cured by the first rays of sunshine. I calmed down when I saw them appear, and waited, not without some inner stomping, but finally I waited wisely until Georges came to fetch me to make a regular visit.

We found the missionary busy settling into his new home.

Hammer in hand, he hammered nails to hang frames on the wall. At times, transforming his work instrument into a command staff, he gestured to the different parts of the house where a cupboard, a table or frames should be placed. Absorbed in his task, he gave us few minutes; George devoted himself to helping him, while I followed in Miss Harriet's footsteps and acted as her second in sorting the linen. The moment has arrived to tell you that she was mediocresly pretty and a few years older than me; but an extreme distinction gave price to her whole person. Her figure, a little skinny, was expressive to a sovereign degree; she had dignity, and I was not at all mistaken, at first sight, in finding grace in her. I believe that she would have had no grace, that she would have lacked all distinction, and that her admirable black eyes would have been the most insignificant in the world, that I would have always fallen in love with her, for the reason that I was eighteen, that my heart was starving, that Mademoiselle Sylvia, with all her sublime perfections and infinite kindnesses, was not enough for me at all, and that finally, reason without reply, I knew absolutely no other woman. So I was transported to the most ethereal of celestial spheres as I went from room to room, distributing the contents of the trunks, following the indications of the angel who had just descended into the middle of my life.

Since then, I've learned that it's a rule written in indelible characters on the twelve brazen tablets of nature, that no teenager is allowed to fall in love for the first time with a woman who isn't his eldest. I don't know the reason for this order; but the law exists, it's imperious, and, without suspecting it, I obeyed it. Without suspecting it? I was so far from it, that I imagined this circumstance as one of the most remarkable of my destiny, and saw in it a final trait by which I completed my singularity in the midst of the human herd, so that instead of conceiving the slightest concern about the legitimacy of my passion, I saw in it, on the contrary, one more reason, a flattering reason to abandon myself entirely to it. I don't need to tell you that from that day on, whether with George or on my own, in the evening or in the morning, at any hour, I never left Mr. Coxe's house except to return.

CHAPTER FOUR

CONTINUATION OF THE STORY OF THE FIRST CALENDER SON OF A KING

The missionary was not an ecclesiastic by any stretch of the imagination. Born into a good family, he had gone into business, where his tastes did not attract him, and had eaten up his good fortune. To make up for it, he married the fourth daughter of an Irish lieutenant on half-pay, and this excellent woman, feeling, after a few years of a very mediocre existence, that her husband had not taken the best path to fortune by choosing her, let herself die, no doubt out of devotion, giving birth to George. The unfortunate Coxe misunderstood the eminent service poor Kate had rendered him. With grief, he almost joined her. His meagre resources, derived solely from a precarious job as a junior agent for an epizootic insurance company, allowed him neither a splendid home nor a large household in the small town in the north of England to which he had retired after his marriage. He had only a twelve-year-old maid to look after the baby, so in reality he looked after her himself, and, to put things in their true light, Molly was so completely useless to him that he would have sent her away, and reason advised him to do so; but what would have become of Molly, fatherless and motherless? So Coxe ran Molly and Harriet. When the weather was fine, he could be seen strolling through the fields with the bikini-clad child in his arms, Harriet walking at his side, and in a fatherly voice telling Molly not to wander off for the obvious purpose of stealing apples.

I'd be conscious of tempting you into nonsense, if I seemed to imply that Providence protects eccentricities; yet it happened that a few people were touched by Coxe's way of life.

It was talked about in the good houses of the country; a lady, known for her exquisite sensibility, even made a romance of it, which contributed more to the glory of the patient than to the perfection of his ordinary; and, finally, an architect who knew a bishop, got this prelate to recommend Coxe to a shipbuilder, who spoke warmly to a theater director, and the latter to a dancer; the dancer urged an old general; the hero dropped a few words into the ear of an antiquarian, and so the proposal was made to Coxe to take on the task of spreading the word.

knowledge of the holy book among the populations of the northern part of the Ava kingdom.

When this brilliant overture was presented to the poor widower, he was in possession of two shillings sixpence, and, what's more, he owed his rent. As his epizootic insurance company had failed to insure itself against insolvency, it had just gone bankrupt, so once the two shillings sixpence had been devoured, which couldn't have taken long, Coxe had absolutely no idea what would become of George, Harriet, Molly and himself.

So he accepted the job offered him with exalted gratitude, moved to tears by the solicitude of Providence, so indulgent as to send him only to the ends of the earth to fetch his bread, when it would have been so easy to let him go to the devil, and off he went. And so, without ever having planned or wanted it, he became a distributor of Bibles; and I have noticed, since then, how it is an ordinary effect of our great civilization, and I would even say one of its most constant effects, to shake men so well into the sack of necessity, like lottery numbers into their own, that they will, most generally, fall headlong into professions where their instinct would not have carried them in any way. Hence priests who are furious, warriors who would do better grazing sheep, poets who are as inspired as mechanics, and *so on*.

Unhappy people become ridiculous; that's more or less what Plutarch meant when he said that the greatest souls lose their magnanimity in slavery. Coxe was therefore a little ridiculous; but he had sense, extensive knowledge, firmness and honor, and I need say no more about his goodness. He fulfilled his duties very well. The biblical societies have based their system on the notion that no one can read the Old and especially the New Testament without being charmed by it, whatever the intellectual milieu in which the reader has lived, up to the moment when the divine volume falls between his white, yellow, red or black fingers. Therefore, it is important to spread the book in as many copies as possible; God will do the rest. As a precautionary refinement, the last term at which human wisdom recognizes it must stop, the book is translated more or less into the language of the country where it is to be deposited. This is usually the work of some special philologist, gifted with more zeal than grammar. This results in stylistic effects that dismay the native literati; no matter, Grace is supposed to be watching, and the miracle must be accomplished.

Moreover, distributions are made with extreme ease; the peoples of Asia, a little reticent at first, and only accepting the precious volume at the tip of their fingers, are very receptive.

The Chinese use them as tiles for their houses. The Chinese use them as roof tiles for their houses; the Persians, more literary, apply the bindings to their own books. This is nothing to be discouraged about. Grace can lie in the loose leaf that the wind whirls across the fields and eventually lays on stagnant water; from there it is easy, if it sees fit, to jump out at the first cowl that comes along to fill its bucket. In this very natural hope, our English populations give their money, the Bible societies give their places, the agents live at ease, and even richly, on all points of the globe, and our consular corps recruits from their ranks representatives of the United Kingdom, who, generally, have none of the qualities of Mr. Cox.

He raised his children well, commissioned George into the Company's navy and married Molly to a drum major in the 119th Regiment of Bengal Sepoys.

As for Harriet... she agreed to teach me Italian and Portuguese! She was always busy; every time I arrived, she had some work in her hand; she was either sewing, tidying up or reading. I never saw her do any tapestry or embroidery, and she once confessed to me that she wasn't interested in anything that served no purpose. She would hold the Camoëns open on a table and we would read:

E, tu, Padre Oceano, que rodeas
O mundo universal e o tens cercado,
E com justo decreto assi permittes
Que dentro vivam so de seus limites...

"And you, Father Ocean, who surround the world and, on all sides, hold it hemmed in, and, by a just decree, allow me also to live within its bounds."

She was teaching me to pronounce this language, so noble in the fiery pages of Diu's conqueror, so pretty to contemplate with the eyes, and which, in her mouth, seemed to me the most delicious of warblings, and, one day as she held the volume in her lap and made me repeat part of the sixth song, which I had wanted to learn by heart, I was sitting opposite her, very close and almost touching the folds of her dress; There I was, head down, my hair falling like a veil over my face, which I wanted to hide from her, and when I got to stanza one hundred and four and had said these two lines:

Ella che prometteo, vendo que amavam
Sempiterno favor em seus amores...

"She promised him, seeing that I loved, an eternal favor in her loves..." I

paused.

— Have you forgotten the rest?

— No," I answered, and so faintly that I don't know if she heard me. In any case, she fell silent, leaned back in the chair and the book fell to the floor.

I didn't pick it up. We were silent for a long time. Then I ventured to look at her. I met her eyes, which locked with mine. A tear rolled down her cheek. I wanted to take it from her.

She withdrew it, but not forcefully. I didn't dare do more.

— What's the point?

— To being happy!

She smiled bitterly and said nothing. Then I added:

— Shall we?

She looked at me again, very attentively, then seemed to reflect; finally, she put her hand on mine, motioning with her eyes for me not to speak. If my heart was beating, you can believe it! My whole being, my whole life was leaving me to rush towards her!

After a while, she asked me:

— Will you obey me?

— To the death, and never backing down!

She smiled faintly, and a certain rosy tinge spread over her face.

She was all expression, all thought, she was sublime!

— Well, here's what I want you to do: you're not to tell anyone about our engagement, not your father, not mine, not Georges, not anyone, do you understand?

— But why? We'll end up declaring it, won't we?

— When the time comes, I alone will decide, will you?

I was not happy; I would have liked to go shouting through the town that I was getting married, and, as for opposition or resistance, or even defiance, that was all that was needed to take me beyond the height of joy! I tried to reason; but Harriet shook her adored head and said with a smile:

— What! We're still nothing to each other, and you're already resisting? I submitted, but added with a sigh:

— Is that all?

— That's all..." she said, "for now!"

— So... do you love me?

— You're asking too much," she replied with a look on her face that drove me mad. I wanted to grab both her hands and press them to my mouth, but she laughed and resisted, and just then her brother entered.

I conceived the most absolute contempt for those wretched people who love women younger or as young as themselves! I understood that an eighteen-year-old girl could have neither complete beauty, nor an absolutely blossoming soul, nor a completely open heart, let alone an accomplished intelligence! The ascendancy of my star had made me meet these merits, and to what degree of perfection, great God! How attractive it would have been to tell the whole world about my bliss! But my oath held me back from all men, without exception. So I tell the trees, the plants, the horses, my dogs, the stars, especially the stars, and I wish I could sob with happiness on the moon's neck!

Every day, Harriet grew more tender and affectionate. She wanted to know what I had learned. I told her about my readings, I explained my ideas, I tried to interest her in my preferences, and the attention with which she listened to me, the care she took in questioning me, the marvelous intelligence that made her understand at once the scope of what I was only half expressing, gave me the most accurate idea of her affection, at the same time as each of our conversations added to my admiration for what I then called, and will always call, her genius. What surprised me was that, reading my verses addressed to Sylvia, she wanted to know even the smallest details of that young lady's biography, and the more I told her, the more she asked, listening gravely to these accounts, which I could not continue myself without bursts of laughter, and often I saw her look at me sadly and reflect as I explained these follies that each day erased more and more, not only from my mind, but even from my memory. Harriet! I involved her in my life; she lent herself wholeheartedly to it. I didn't realize it then, but I've recognized it since, that her feelings and beliefs penetrated me at every pore, and took hold of me so well that I've never been free of them. In the most delicate and essential matters, she gave me, almost unbeknownst to me, insights that let me see, judge and decide them for ever, as I could never have done on my own; in a word, she took over me an unbounded authority, and, while in my soul I boasted and sang hosanna that I had conquered the love of a woman, I was conquered.

Three months passed in this way. Our only quarrel, which led to frequent sulking on my part, arose from my desire, day by day, to be more and more

and her increasingly positive resistance. To my reasons, to the endless argumentations into which I plunged and dragged her with the most vehement pleas, she used to reply:

— I'm putting you to a test; if you can't stand it, my confidence in you is madness, it's gone, and I'm giving up on your promises.

So I kept quiet. The regime of trials, pledges and self-won victories seemed to me the height of chivalric morality, and I had absolutely nothing to object to Harriet's claims. But this wonderful existence couldn't last forever.

My father called me one morning and ordered me to leave within eight days for England, where Lord Wildenham, he said, that wretch! wanted to see me.

— Family ties, my boy," said the colonel, "are sacred things! We may hate each other, but it's no less true that we share the same blood, and that can't be forgotten.

My thoughts fell into a turmoil and confusion that you can easily imagine. I was seized with despair, and, at the same time, exhilarated by the call of twenty triumphant trumpets ringing in my ears, fanfares of excited courage, poignant curiosity, admirable promises. I was going to see England, if I consented; but that meant consenting to part with Harriet! I let all the lovers in the world be the judges of my situation.

I ran straight to my advisor, my idol! I fell onto a chair, pale, panting, beside myself. I grabbed her hand!

— Ah, my God! What's the matter, Wilfrid?

— My father is sending me to London!. He wants me to leave within a week with the Resident's courier. To leave you! A thousand times better to die! Lord Wildenham wants to see me! I told you he lives in our family manor... What's the answer? Will you go away with me? If you love me, Harriet, everything is easy and the pain that overwhelms me becomes the height of bliss! To leave this savage world, but with you, is to pass from darkness into light.

I think I was eloquent, but Harriet remained steadfast, opposing my ardor with a patient but resolute shake of her head; when I got too carried away, she would look at me with the sweetest, most affectionate smile, and raise a finger in the air. Then my fury would subside, and I'd stammer instead of command.

— No, Wilfrid, no," she said, "your speeches are unreasonable. You will continue, as you promised, not to speak of us to anyone! What will be, will be; there's no need for any hasty, emphatic declarations. Besides, you swore me to secrecy, and if Wilfrid deceives me, in

who can I trust? Then you'll leave... You'll leave in a week!... Don't interrupt! Don't interrupt! This England you cherish so dearly, your country, the country of your brave forefathers, this land you've called home ever since you came into this world!... don't you want to do anything for it?... be anything for it?... Have you forgotten? But the two of us, you say? And if I only want an avowed commitment with a Wilfrid worthy of his name, worthy of himself, worthy of me, what do you have to say?

Half begging, half commanding, the authority she exerted over me achieved everything. She knew me so well! She played my opinions and feelings like the keys on a keyboard, and my whole being acted under the pressure of her will, without me having the power to defend myself. So it was resolved that I would obey, and that as far as she was concerned, our love would remain closed between heaven and us.

Did I live, or did I not live at all during that week? I don't know. Time passed like a dream, and the hours, however, marched on with leaden feet. When I took leave of Harriet, only then, by a kind of sudden revelation, did I understand that she was suffering. She was pale, she was thin.

— May God protect you, Wilfrid," she said, and rested her forehead on my chest.

I was in such a state of despondency myself that I was barely aware of what was happening. Yet I felt it, she was pressing me lightly with both hands, and her forehead was beneath my lips... Farewell! I can still hear that word and the accent with which she pronounced it.

From that moment on, I don't know what I did: I acted like a sleepwalker. I came to in the middle of the desert, galloping with the mail and the escort. I had entered the new life, I had entered it, not as I had once presaged, ensigns unfurled and drums rolling, but forced, pushed, thrown into the midst of splendors, I told myself, or thorns. Nevertheless, I was there, and as I drew closer to Beirut, where I was to embark, my deep sorrow became more mixed with the questions I asked myself about Wildenham and his hosts. Don't think that the memory of Harriet faded in the slightest. It dominated everything; she was too much the master of my soul, of my mind; she was too much in my thoughts, as in my ideas, for any preoccupation to detach me from her for a moment. I stayed in Beirut for a fortnight, waiting for her first letter. The letter arrived, and this is what I read:

"You've loved me, Wilfrid, and heaven will reward you for it. In a few weeks, in a few months, the world, its necessities, its rules, this

and never, I hope, what is bad, will take hold of you. Impressions that are all the stronger for being absolutely new, will exert their empire on a sensitive nature like yours. It would not be good for you to be hindered by the debris of wilted flowers. I won't tell you that I'm returning your word; I've never accepted it. I know you'll think of your old friend often. Right now, I'm grieving for the pain I'm causing you, and your tears, dear, dear Wilfrid, are falling on my heart.

But one day, I also know that I'll be proud that I wasn't a nuisance, an obstacle or, perhaps, a source of remorse for you. Let me fortify myself a little with this hope. Hear me out. You're going to be very angry with your poor abandoned wife. Don't you want to love her at all? If your heart is too big, let a few weeks go by, as little as possible, and later, when you've become just, come back to your sister and talk to her about what will make you happy, and, even more so, about your worries.

"HARRIET."

The letter cut into my heart like a knife. Every sentence stabbed me. But I don't know how it happened: it was impossible for me to curse the hand that was murdering me. On the contrary, out of the excess of despair came the excess of admiration. It was Harriet, it was really her! that noble creature, the most worthy of being loved and served, the most delicate, the most intelligent I had ever met! She spent her youth in the depths of the most barbaric and abandoned region. There, she cultivated her mind beyond common bounds, like the nightingale that cultivates its voice to sing in the desert. She was her brother's mother, his servant; she taught him everything, she created and granted him his state. She returned to her father, with usury, what the poor man had lavished on him in his childhood; she found, on her way, by chance, a boy of eighteen, whom her imagination was perhaps leading adrift, she made of him, I dare say, a good man, and, without it having cost her a blush, she made him know, of shared love, all that he will ever know of it; oh my friends! all that exists of it more delicious! Well, what did heaven grant her in return for so many blessings spread around her steps? Well, I don't know... probably something... that my eyes cannot grasp... Yes... perhaps my affection and my gratitude; but if he had only deigned to call her into this world a few years after me, instead of giving her to me as his predecessor - a combination which, I imagine, would not have cost him much - I could have lavished on this heavenly creature such faithful happiness that she would have considered as well paid what, I fear, will never be!

What I owe him most of all is my first experience that he

There are devoted hearts and heroic souls. The hideous or vile encounters I have subsequently encountered have never prevailed against this acquired conviction; it is this one that casts the main light on my existence; Harriet has reassured me in everything; she has given me confidence in everything. I know I'll never contemplate another Harriet; but I'll see more or less similar copies, and I find Coxes and Georges. I don't want to make myself better than I am; it wasn't at first that I understood the greatness of the one who abandoned me. I went through the ordinary phases of such an adventure. I thought I'd been betrayed, I suspected coquetry, perfidy and falseness; fortunately, these nervous crises didn't last long; they went away and never came back.

Nevertheless, I remained worried for a long time. In her *l e t t e r s*, Harriet advised me to take up some sort of continuing occupation, and even suggested several courses of action. So far, I haven't made up my mind. Certainly, no matter how infatuated I was with the merits of England, I didn't exactly expect to greet Richard the Lionheart on his way off the liner, giving Lord Cecil his arm; yet I was even less prepared to contemplate the decrepitude whose repulsive traces I discovered after a while. I had dreamed of political life, but I was repulsed by the way things looked. I'm not of an age to have taken a definitive stand, yet I feel I have very little to do with politics.

In the meantime, I'm traveling. Last year I was in La Plata, now I'm coming from Mexico; I'm visiting northern Italy with you and, with you, I'm going to greet my august parent in Germany. Harriet urges me to marry. The truth is, I almost fell in love with my cousin, the honorable Lady Gwendoline Nore; but she has a way of singing from the nose that is unbearable to me. Last year, in Baden, I could have been seen for four hours on a November night at the top of a fireplace belonging to a Russian lady I idolized. I almost had the whole town sweeping when, at dawn the next day, the ratty burghers admired my presence.

So Wilfrid Nore finished his story, and Conrad Lanze took the floor to tell his own.

CHAPTER FIVE

STORY OF THE SECOND CALENDER SON OF A KING

To consider myself! To know myself! To unravel and judge what has been going on in my sad self for the past two months! Can I do it? I have tried twenty times, and twenty times I have failed in the face of the violence of my suffering. All I have to guide me is a sick reason whose flame flickers and fails to illuminate.

But I'll try. I'm far from that woman. I can't feel the taut rope pulling me towards her.

It was a Saturday evening around seven in May. I was in a very calm mood. I'd been working all day and had solved a few problems I hadn't mastered in the morning. I was working on a bust of Anna Boleyn that had since been bought by the Russian minister. I went into Neumeyer's jeweller's store, which is usually home to Burbach's finest jewellers. My sister Liliane's birthday was approaching, and I intended to give her a ring, a bracelet, a necklace, whatever I could think of that would be most appropriate for a seventeen-year-old girl.

A few people had arrived before me. They seemed to be shown various objects, talking and laughing. I took no notice and, speaking to a store clerk, explained my intentions. He hastened to place several cases in front of me. I had just sat down to examine them at my leisure, when I heard myself being called. I turned my head and, seeing a lady come forward smiling, I stood up and saluted.

She looked beautiful to me. I recognized, not so much from the way she was dressed as from her air of assurance, that I was looking at a woman of the world, and even a fashionable one.

— Mr Lanze," she said, "I'm ashamed to introduce myself. And yet I must; I'm Countess Tonska, and I need you.

I saluted again. Like everyone else, I had heard of Madame Tonska. She was Polish; the reigning prince was said to be very-occupied with her, and so were many others.

— In what way, Countess, could I be happy enough?...

— You're willing to be friendly," she said, interrupting me,

please come tomorrow around three o'clock; it's impossible to explain anything here! We'll talk, you'll do as I wish, and after admiring you from afar for the past two years, I'll be able to thank you for past pleasure and future service.

With that, she held out that hand whose beauty is justly famous, squeezed mine and left with the friends accompanying her.

My mind was perfectly free, and I finished the business that had brought me here, without turning my head, without worrying about what had become of Madame Tonska. Then I went home.

On the way, the idea of my next day's visit came back to me in the midst of many others, and put a stop to my thoughts. What artist doesn't know the eagerness of Russian and Polish ladies? There are those in a bad mood who accuse these admirers, always and constantly passionate, of lacking good faith, of in reality loving neither the arts nor intellectual life, and of finding, in the ecstasies to which they give themselves up, only opportunities to pose as seraphim, archangels, madonnas, and to give the most advantageous idea possible of their sensibility. Others go further; they claim that, quite indifferent to the god, these so-called believers seek out the priest, in the often false belief that he possesses the sincerity they lack, and that, gifted with the most frank enthusiasm, the most naively thoughtless, the warmest, the most abandoned, there is profit in taking this living censor away from the muse to give oneself honor and pleasure.

I don't accept these hostile judgments. Sensitivity can be true in all countries, albeit in different forms. Women in the North-East detail what they imagine themselves to feel, in great detail and with attitudes, sets of eyes, inflections of voice and sighs that belong to them alone; women in the West use other methods; the result is identical. So I had no prejudice against the Countess. However, I was annoyed to be disturbed the next day at an hour that my work demanded and, probably, on a whim. So I reluctantly picked up my hat when the time came and went to Madame Tonska's house.

She'd gone out and left me an apologetic bill, asking me to come for dinner, tête-à-tête, the next day. I got angry and swore I wouldn't do anything about it.

But on reflection, my impatience subsided.

— We'll always have to come to see her and find out what she wants, I say to myself; let's end this childishness as quickly as possible.

The next day, I met a dozen people at her house. I

I didn't know whether to laugh or get angry. The Countess was charming, didn't seem to have the slightest idea that she was wrong about me, and as, among the twelve guests who kept me in check, there were four perfectly amiable and eight very interesting ones, I spent an excellent evening and didn't regret the tête-à-tête for a minute. Madame Tonska was very busy with a Norwegian naturalist who had recently arrived from Sumatra, and who gave us such striking descriptions of what he had seen, imbued with such true and grandiose eloquence that, there, for the first time, I understood how superior men grow in the midst of special studies, which overwhelm mediocre minds. Professor Stursen, with his roaring bull's head, his athletic stature and his research into the lower jaw of the buffalo, showered us with as much poetry, and poetry as lofty and as pure, as brilliant and as serious as Aeschylus himself could have done, had he fallen from the sky into our midst.

Despite her marked and quite natural attentions to this eminent man, the Countess did not forget me. Towards the end of the evening, she came to me, took me aside and said:

— Are you angry? Instead of giving you the meager pleasure of an uninteresting conversation with a sullen woman, I wanted to show you how I treat my friends, and you're one of them, if you like. Come and see me again whenever you like, as I'm always busy. I bowed.

— But, Madame la Comtesse, that doesn't tell me what you have to order me to do.

— What do you mean, you don't know? But it seems to me you've known it since you got here. Look at the people around you; do you think I do the first comer the honor of admitting him to such a circle?

She pronounced these words rather proudly; she had an admirable expression and looked more like a victory than a muse.

— I'm very small for such grandeur," I replied with unabashed humility.

— If you really think so," the Countess replied, "you're all the more worthy of our esteem. Go on, then! I've heard of you, I know you, I've seen your work, and this is your house.

With that, I thanked him and left. It was clear that I could only gain a great deal from living in such an environment. However, the way in which Madame Tonska had treated me, in my opinion cavalier, displeased me greatly. I didn't accept the haughty authority she had suddenly assumed over me, and I resolved to make her feel it at the first meeting, even if she got angry. I could lose; I'd probably lose evenings.

like the one that had just taken place and which had made a strong impression on me; but I would gain the maintenance of my independence and the freedom of my pace; nothing is worth that. The opportunity soon presented itself to repel the invasion of which I saw myself as the object. About a week after my first introduction, the Countess wrote to me one morning, asking me to bring her, that very day, some drawings she wanted to show to one of her friends. I replied, in the most polite but peremptory manner, that I was busy and that what she was asking was impossible.

Two days later, she wrote again, asking me to accompany her to a nearby chateau, which she intended to buy. I refused again, this time adding that none of my days were free. A third, more difficult attempt took place the following week. One evening, the Countess announced her intention to come to my house the next day to see the Anna Boleyn.

— Excuse me, Countess," I replied. There's still too much to do to the marble.

— But," she exclaimed moodily, "you let Schorn's lieutenant see it this very morning.

— Schorn is my special friend, and I don't intend to show my work to anyone else until it's absolutely finished.

— It's a rather disparaging whim.

— So be it," I replied dryly.

The Countess looked at me with such insolence that I promised myself I'd never set foot in her house again, and indeed, I didn't return for a month. I found my evenings a little longer, I remarked a little more harshly on the houses I returned to, I missed four or five people from the intimacy I'd given up; but, all in all, I was delighted with this break. The Countess was certainly very beautiful, but with a domineering beauty that I didn't like. Besides, I was obsessed with her! I had no other imagination than to resist her, even when she didn't want anything, and what I would have willingly given to anyone else, I was furious to refuse her. All in all, and to put it bluntly, I disliked her.

One day, as I was crossing the promenade, I came across her car. She made me stop. It was impossible not to say hello.

— Are you running away from me? You're right!" she said. I've been unbearable with you. People of the world find it hard to understand that artists are not idle like themselves, and their habit of taking everything as a distraction blinds them to the thousand delicacies you people are gifted with. Finally, I was wrong, what more can I confess? Won't you forgive me

not?

I found myself ridiculous and threw myself into a thousand protests to persuade her that it was only business, family embarrassments, a trip, that had prevented me from going to her house for so long.

— That's a lot of lies," she said, interrupting me. You were angry and had a reason to be.

I protested again.

— So you're not mad at me anymore?

— Oh! Countess!

— Give me some proof!

— Right away. Which one?

— Come upstairs and have a friendly chat with me. Then stay for dinner. Is that all right?

Her accent was almost pleading, yet so affectionate, so friendly, that the idea of hiding any longer seemed unacceptable. The footman opened the door and we returned to the hotel.

I'll never forget, no, no matter how bitter my life may be from now on, I'll never forget how delightful this day seemed to me; it will remain for me as an image of the most striking happiness. As we entered the salon, the Countess was laughing with childlike gaiety.

— I've won you back," she said (and the look in her eyes seemed to beg forgiveness for the word's wounding of my pride) "I've won you back, but only to prove to you in the future that I'm a much better character than you suppose. We're not staying here. Don't you think this grand salon is too stately for just the two of us?

She took my hand and led me, as if I'd resisted, into a boudoir draped in gray moire. She sat down on a loveseat.

— Next to me," she said, and patted the spot she'd chosen for me.

— Would you mind if I took off my hat?

— Please, Countess!

— Jean, take Lucile downstairs.

Lucile was the French chambermaid. The Countess had had her with her for ten years.

— My child," said Madame Tonska to the cameraman, as she handed him her parasol with her hat and pulled off her gloves and handed them to him, "you'll say downstairs that I've been out all day..., all day and all evening!... You hear me? All evening too!... Then you'll tell Prévôt that monsieur is dining here and that he'll make us something nice... Let's see, Mr Lanze, what do you like best.... Do you? Come on, help us,

you, Lucile!

— Well, Madame, I don't know!" Lucile replied, laughing. I laugh too:

— My dear Countess, please don't look for me! Prévôt is already too much of a genius in the kitchen for my limited knowledge.

— Anyway, since neither of you is any good to me, tell him to give us some of that wine he got the other day from who knows where. Go on, girl!

She showed me a lot of things: curious jewels, weapons that belonged to Count Tonski, magnificent weapons! She even fetched a collection of cameos of singular beauty, inherited from her grandmother. As we gazed at each object, we lost ourselves in endless conversation, touching on all subjects at once. I had never observed so well how subtle and sharp her mind was. She understood all the minutiae of an idea with the rarest perfection, and her eyes seemed to anticipate what was being shown to her. In many matters, she knew more than I did, and I never tired of listening to her. I don't know what detours our talk about an onyx depicting Cleopatra's head led us to talk about Slavic women in general; this is, incidentally, a much sought-after point of discussion for those interested.

— I wouldn't want to be accused of exaggerated partiality for anything in the world," said the Countess, throwing her head back on the back of the loveseat, while the precious stones remained spread out in front of us; but, believe me, Slavic women have no rivals in this world, neither for the heart, which comes first, nor for intelligence and all that goes with it; we know best how to love, because we know how to submit, and our devotion, which does not have the reflective and calculated character of a duty, borrows an incomparable gentleness and nobility from the very fact that it is complete self-sacrifice. We are annihilated in the beloved, because we are happy to be so; we see nothing above what we cherish; perhaps we are wrong to transform the creature in this way into a God whose every thought is good and whose every act is just, by that very fact that thoughts and acts emanate from him; but you must also agree that such a flaw, and if you like, such a vice, cannot be condemned by the one who profits from it.

— I was inclined to believe, on the contrary, and on the basis of striking examples, that nowhere was the spirit of domination more common to women than in Russia and Poland, and not a domination exercised in the domestic sphere or aiming only at the domain of affections, which would be understandable; no! I'm talking about a tyranny establishing itself on the grounds most reserved for man by the way of seeing things.

accepted in all countries and at all times. So, for example, isn't it well known that Polish ladies are passionate about political issues? Have they not, on many occasions, played the most decisive roles in conspiracies and revolutions? And haven't mothers, daughters, sisters, wives and mistresses knowingly thrown the lives hanging on theirs into the dungeons that have devoured them, into the exile that has extinguished them, in front of the bullet that has pierced so many chests?

— It's true," replied the Countess, and she looked at me with a twinkle in her eye: "we love great things and, to tell the truth, heroism is familiar to us. We've sent our men into harm's way before, and we'll do it again; but do you know that we were there alongside them, and do you think we'd ever leave that place? What is great pleases us; therefore, when we love, and the more we love, the more our inclination is invincible to bring our idols there to erect their temples in the midst of splendor!

— As for me," I laughed, "I'm not a Pole and, consequently, I have no chance of ever becoming a liberator. Should the opportunity even present itself, would I have the right to dream of such vast ambitions? I'm a poor man, I confess, and the task would probably not appeal to me.

— You have another job in this world," Madame Tonska replied with a smile, "and as long as you produce beautiful works, no one need ask anything of you. But do you think the advice or encouragement of a friend could be useless to you in the arduous path you're on? Are you sure of yourself? Have you never been discouraged? Do you always see clearly into your soul? Are you never afraid of falling short of yourself, of wanting and not being able, of being able and not wanting, of lacking inspiration or science? Don't you dread any of those inner illnesses that have paralyzed and lost so many thinkers, or made them live in despair and boredom, and which, no doubt, a woman's devotion would have destroyed, or prevented, or at least softened? Finally, for a soul as prophetic as an artist's, don't you think it's a good thing to be sustained, in the depths of the ether, by that brilliant and powerful seraphim, affection?

I was moved to hear her speak like that; but I didn't want her to notice, and I replied coldly:

— It would certainly be convenient to concede all this to you; but, forgive me, I'm sincere and won't disguise myself. Of all the evils you display before my eyes, I know none! It may be that, later on, one day, I don't know when, my temperament or my character will be affected by some of these miseries.

germ. It seems that these are possible and dreaded eventualities. I've heard a lot about it; I've had companions deeply concerned about the symptoms they discovered in themselves. Books, especially, seem to me to be full of lamentations in this regard, and it would follow that an artist is, more or less, a kind of convulsionary always on the verge of swooning for lapses or discouragements falling from the air. I confess I've considered these kinds of questions like the story of the earwig that gets into the heads of children asleep on the grass with the express intention of perforating their brains. I've never actually seen brains perforated by ear-piercers, and artists annihilated under the moral and supernatural suffering born of their sensibility would have done better, I think, and more modestly, to admit to themselves that they lacked strength, verve, imagination or intelligence, and that they were only halves, quarters, diminutives of artists. I've produced a lot of bad sculpture in my life; as soon as I realized it, I tried to correct it. I work as hard as I can, as much as my nature allows; I strive to learn. If I ever achieve a masterpiece, I'll bless heaven for it, and I'll certainly enjoy it to the full. If this happiness does not come to me, I will console myself, and, having nothing to reproach myself for, I will live in peace with myself. In all possible hypotheses, be sure, the woman most attached to my interests could not give me talent, if I lacked it, and as I am never discouraged, **b e c a u s e** I never presume much beyond the truth about myself, I would not want nor could I give anyone the trouble of caring for a poor being suffering from the painful swellings of vanity.

— So I won't be consoling you!" exclaimed the Countess, laughing heartily. I imitated her and offered her my arm, for dinner had just been announced.

We were extremely merry at table; being just the two of us, all alone, we talked about various members of society, and, as I was quite happy with the way I maintained myself vis-à-vis my beautiful adversary, I let myself go, after the victory, more than I had done since the first days of our acquaintance. I was enjoying myself immensely; she seemed to be enjoying herself too; I found the Tokay wine she'd told Lucile about delicious; I became animated, and when we had left the table and returned to the small salon, I took up the piano while coffee was being brought in, and played for the Countess a waltz of my own composition, which I offered to dedicate, which she accepted with many thanks and in exchange presented me with a cup of coffee, sweetened by her beautiful hands according to my precise indications, given at the same time as I was plotting the chords.

After a moment, Madame Tonska took my place and began to sing. We

had told me a lot about his voice; until then, I hadn't heard it. Neither the timbre nor the method appealed to me; I found it harsh and broad, reminiscent of the theater. Nothing is more detrimental to the charm of salon music than such an effect. Yet I was in such a good mood, so excited, so disposed to find everything good, that I rebelled against my sensation, and said to myself:

"Biases are inept when they are carried to the point where my distrust of this good and charming woman leads me! It's constant that she sings as few people are capable of. Let's enjoy it, and let's not be fools!"

I sat down next to the singer. Little by little, my false impressions gave way to the charm I was feeling. Either my mortified mind shut up and let my sensations run free, or I actually managed to grasp what was truly beautiful in what I was hearing, I was struck and moved. When Madame Tonska wanted to finish, I begged her to start again; she introduced me to the tunes that were most new to me, Serbian, Cossack and Circassian tunes; she made me enter and glide through the most fantastic, the strangest world; I had never imagined anything like it! She sang, and at the same time, she chatted. She was ravishing; from her person and from her black hair, twisted in braids, escaped aromas of a subtle and unanalyzable perfume, which thickened around me a magical atmosphere; her adorable hands, of an elongated and exquisite shape, of a solid whiteness like that of marble, so lively, so agile, so dexterous, made me dizzy running over the ivory of the piano. Truly, I was no longer my own person! The songs of the Serbs had made me wander through the forests of Herzegovina, where the Countess's descriptions had led me; I had crossed the steppes of the Ukraine following the Cossack's death convoy; I had entered the Cherkessian aul on horseback and lifted the veil of her harem. No, I was no longer my own!

The Countess had stopped playing; one of her hands was still tinkling the keys; she was talking to me; I never remembered what she said then. The blood was ringing in my ears; if I had wanted to get up, I wouldn't have been able to; all my strength had fled into my heart, abandoning my limbs. All I know is that I was looking at her and she was looking at me; I can't say at what moment our eyes met; but what I know too well is that, once they were together, they seized each other, they kissed each other, they never parted again! I was caught by the eyes, as an animal caught in a trap can be caught by the feet; only, I didn't want to free myself, and I fell broken and bruised, when, after a long time and suddenly, the Countess closed me, as it were, the access to the "world".

abyss in which I was drowning distraught, changing the expression of his gaze,
and exclaiming brusquely:

— What are you asking me for?

CHAPTER SIX

CONTINUATION OF THE STORY OF THE SECOND CALENDER SON OF A KING

At this question, I came back to myself a little.

— Nothing!" I replied.

I was confused, exhausted, as if turned upside down and, above all, ashamed.

— Do you love me?

— No," I said.

If she'd asked me the opposite question, I'd probably have given her the same answer, so great was my prostration and so bewildered was my mind.

— You're wrong, Conrad," she said, "you love me, and that's a great misfortune. Try to take it on yourself; get rid of this impression and don't force me to lose you, because I love you, albeit in a different way.

It shot into my heart like a ray of joy. I was delighted to hear her tell me she didn't love me. What demon had attacked me? What temptation had I yielded to? The truth was, I didn't love her at all. However, now that I thought I was safe, after the storm had passed, even though the storm was still roaring, it would have been extremely painful for me to detach myself too abruptly from her, and since, once again, there was no longer any risk to run, I let her believe what was apparent.

— Why won't you love me?

I repeat: this question had no other purpose than to arrange a retreat, and if, at the moment, I was calculating anything, it was, and nothing more, not to appear offensive to her and to retain her friendship. She replied, seizing my hand:

— Don't take my words too much to heart: I can't love you because I'm not free, even though I don't belong to anyone, do you understand?

I can't say that this admission hurt me; but it scratched me, and I exclaimed bitterly:

— Ah, I know! So it's true!... the prince?...

— What do you care?" replied the Countess harshly.

I leaned over his hand to kiss it, first to beg my forgiveness, then to conceal a smile; for, second by second, I seemed to be coming to myself, and I was more sure than ever of retaining my

freedom. I emboldened myself, and, driven by a certain feeling of resentment, for madame la comtesse had tripped me up rudely, I put on an act and murmured:

— The prince! You can't fight a prince!

— Go away! It's late," says Madame Tonska. It's childish. I like you; I've just given you proof of that. I've loved you for a long time, you ingrate! But don't ask me for what I can't give.

— Do I at least have your sympathy?

— All of it! But come on!... come on! Already past midnight! You'd never know it! Take little street I

— Your hand only!

She bowed to me, held out her forehead and I left.

— Which of us has no love?" I asked myself on the way.

The next morning, just as I was finishing getting dressed, my mother brought me a cup of café au lait, as was her daily custom, and said:

— Conrad, your father wants to talk to you before you go out. Be sure to go to his office.

I found my father wrapped up in his flannel robe, smoking a large meerschaum pipe and reading a book of his profession. Doctor Lanze is not only a doctor by trade, he is also, and above all, a doctor by passion. He looked up at me, smiled and put his book on the corner of the table.

— Sit down, Conrad. We need to have a little chat. Do you see much of Madame Countess Tonska?

I laughed:

— My God, yes! I haven't been to her house in a month, and I just had dinner there yesterday. Do you think it's worth warning me about her?

— I don't really know. I just wanted to let you know that yesterday evening, after we'd stayed an hour or two with the Prince and talked about various things, as was our daily custom, His Highness said to me, in his own words: Lanze, you're a very learned man, but you seem to me to be ignorant of the fact that very beautiful ladies are bad advisers for young men. Remind Conrad of this for me. This comment, as you can imagine, made me fall out of my chair. naked! I replied: Highness, would my son mind? But the prince pretended not to hear me and, dropping into an armchair by the fireplace, he rested his head on one hand and, holding out the other, said brusquely: Good evening! See you tomorrow! And, as I had already opened the door and left, he said: "See you tomorrow!

was about to cross it, he called me back and shouted: Lanze! Lanze! On second thought, leave Conrad alone and don't say anything to him. That's what happened to me last night. The prince was visibly moved; I know him too well to misunderstand him, and, despite his recommendation, I thought it would be useful to tell you this scene so that you can tell me what I should think of it.

Before recounting my response, it is necessary to explain the relationship between my father and the reigning Prince of Wørbeck-Burbach. They were brought up together from the cradle, as their fathers had been and their grandfathers before, and, to explain it all at once and not return to it, you should know that in 1494, a certain Samuel Lanze, architect and sculptor employed on the works of Cologne Cathedral, became a sort of favorite of the immediate count of the Empire Jean de Wørbeck, later shared the prison of this lord locked up by Charles V in the great tower of Nuremberg, married on the same day as him, on the same day had a son, Sébald Lanze, who became court preacher, and also never left Guillaume de Wørbeck, son of Jean, who preceded him. Since then, the Wørbeck and Lanze generations have always followed each other without ever separating; it's not enough to say that not a single day of their lives passed without the Wørbecks and Lanzas exchanging a few words. Members of the reigning family have sometimes, and often enough, been known to indulge in very reprehensible feelings of hatred or jealousy; but a Wørbeck who didn't love the Lanzas, or a Lanze who didn't believe himself primarily created and brought into the world to idolize the Wørbecks, was never to be found; and that's why my father stayed at least an hour every day with the Prince, after accompanying him on his travels, after sitting on the same benches during their university years, which had succeeded a childhood in which my father and uncle had had the honor of fighting, sometimes with one, sometimes with the other of the young scions of the sovereign house.

So I replied to Professor Lanze:

— This affair is easy to understand, and I would have thought that the Prince had long since confided everything to you. He loves the Countess and is loved by her, or so I imagine. As for me, I greatly admire this lady as mistress of the house, as a woman of infinite wit and knowledge. She gave me a delightful evening in which I heard her sing ravishing things. She showed me antique cameos of the rarest perfection. But, as a woman, I don't share the Prince's taste, and I don't like her. Her haughtiness, her humility, her exaltation, the sincerity of which I suspect, everything about her repels me.

my strict duty as a well-bred man; but, fortunately, it's out of the question, and I believe she's absolutely absorbed in the feeling the Prince has succeeded in inspiring in her. From what you tell me, it would seem that Her Highness has had, towards me, something like a passing shiver of jealousy; this is irrelevant; besides, I don't need to protest to you that it's not from me that a justified concern of any kind could happen to Her Royal Highness.

— I think so, my child," replied my father, smoking diligently. But there are things in this that I don't like.

He remained thoughtful for a moment, then suddenly exclaimed;

— Where did he get the idea, at his age, to fall in love with a Polish girl, or even a Chinese girl! He's at most a year or two younger than me, and even then! I know the princess is intolerable, poor woman, but what the hell! Ah! I didn't know about this new outfit, and since our man broke up with the Marquise Coppoli, I thought we were frank for the rest of our lives. Apparently not! My sincere compliments to her! As far as you're concerned, I can't see very clearly either. What is this sudden taste that takes you for a talkative, pretentious, mannered foreigner, whose nervous system, always overworked, is obviously in the most pitiful state! Do these women amuse you?

— I don't say they amuse me; for one thing, you're singularly exaggerating the Countess's faults: either she doesn't have the faults you suggest, or she only lets them show to a very tolerable degree. In any case, I can't answer a woman who attracts me to her house that I don't want to go. And why shouldn't I, since, I assure you, I'm in no way in love with her, nor, what's even stronger, disposed to become so?

— I believe you, but I've got the wrong idea about your relationship with that woman. I, for one, have never understood this mania for seeking out women, except for the bare necessities, i.e. marriage! Apart from that, whether you know your mother, your sister or your daughters, these are obligations you can't shirk; but, of your own choice and free will, to let yourself be approached by one of these creatures, except the one whose customs, law and good morals force you to make your companion, according to the accepted expression, that's what I don't understand!

— But what should also reassure you, Father, is that as we've never been chivalrous in the family, and I don't know my blood to be degenerate in that respect, you needn't fear any folly on my part. I only beg you to pacify the Prince on my behalf.

— I'm going to do it today.

The conversation went no further. My father resumed his reading, and I left to go to my workshop.

I was sure I didn't like Madame Tonska at all; if I thought of nothing but her all day, it was to congratulate myself on having kept so completely out of harm's way, and especially on having such a rival that in any case an abyss existed between her and me. I was in a kind of excitement that made my work easy. The curious thing was that, just as I had slept very peacefully last night and woken up thinking of her without any pain, I was only concerned with her in the main, and the incidents of the evening swirled around in my head, all together, presenting me with only indistinct shapes.

I came home around eight for supper, and when I found my father, mother and sister Liliane in the living room, I was in the happiest mood in the world.

How was it that my mind gradually changed?

Professor Lanze, serious as usual and eating almost without saying a word, absorbed in his scientific thoughts, my excellent mother, with her pink ribbon bonnet and green dress, my sister Liliane, with her gentle, quiet air, were certainly not to blame. Nevertheless, everything changed; I felt sad to death, and I saw appear in the dark chamber of my mind two rays of intense light that seemed to me to twist around my heart and cause it a kind of cruel happiness. They were the eyes of the day before, to which mine had clung for so long! Where had this fatal sensation come from? Why had I forgotten it? How could it be that such a horrible obsession had kept me in grace for so many hours?

When dinner was over, my father went out to spend the evening at the palace; my mother knitted; Liliane sat at the piano. I sank into an armchair and picked up a novel. I didn't read.

I was frightened of my injustice. I came to hate the Countess! She seemed odious to me; her gazes, which never wavered from mine, made me suffer indignantly, right down to the marrow of my bones. What madness, what frenzy was mine! What had this woman ever done to me, after all, to hate her so? She had been kind, good, affectionate, tender, and I had told her I loved her.

Did I tell him? Yes, I think I said: I love you!

And as I couldn't free myself from her gaze, I kept repeating to myself: I love you! I love you! at a time when I was blaming myself for hating her so much!

Almost unbeknownst to me, my sister's music was reaching my senses.

and served as a theme for new ramblings. Liliane played like a child who hasn't felt anything yet, and I compared what she could produce to what I had heard the day before, which had displeased me so much at first and intoxicated me so much afterwards! I felt very unhappy.

In reality, she loves me, I thought. Whether it's a whim of this sick, jaded imagination, it's probable. But she does love me, and what happens to thwarted whims in these strange souls? Sometimes passions, and what excesses...

I didn't dare think that far ahead.

— You're very absorbed this evening," says Liliane.

— Did your father upset you this morning?" my mother asked, looking at me over the top of her glasses.

— Not at all; I've got a terrible headache, and I'm going to bed.

I kissed them both and retired to my room. It was ten o'clock. My mother brought me some violet infusion: I put the cup on the chest of drawers, undressed and went to bed. She had a lot of people there, and I was desperate.

I sat in a corner and remained there without saying a word to anyone, perhaps for a good quarter of an hour. Suddenly, however, it occurred to me that, if anyone's eyes turned my way, my overwhelmed expression was open to comment. So I stood up abruptly, tried to give my face the most carefree and deliberate expression, and advancing towards Tropf's intimate adviser, I asked him insistently about his cello. We were engaged in this conversation, when the Countess, coming up behind me, lightly touched my left arm with her fan:

— Come on! Let me have a word with you!

Bowing first, then following her into the small boudoir draped in grey moire, it took a minute.

— We don't have much time," she murmured as she sat down, "so sit here, listen and don't interrupt.

She stared at me with an air that was both serious and kind:

— I'm a coquette. I tried to turn your head last night and succeeded. I'm talking about your head," she continued with a sad smile, "and not at all about your heart, even though you pretended to offer it to me. You don't love me in the least; I don't know whether it's happy or unhappy, but I don't love you either; we'd put all our efforts into it, one and the other, that we'd hardly succeed; yet I'd manage too easily to hurt you a lot. I don't want you to. It's an unfair game, I was wrong to start it; it's not too early to end it. Get up, leave, don't come back

never here, and remember, if you are as valuable as I suppose you are, the sincere proof of esteem and friendship you are receiving from me at this moment.

I was stunned. The Countess shook my hand and left the boudoir. At the same moment, and as I could well imagine a man who, violently thrown ten fathoms under water, rises to the surface and has not yet had time to catch his breath, I saw Lehne's chamberlain slip into the salon, pushing his small stature forward with his particular air of discretion and searching with his beady eyes. He spotted Madame Tonska, came up to her, greeted her, bowed, and I don't know what diabolical instinct, what double vision, I remained certain, but certain, convinced, penetrated, that he had said certain words to her that were only for her.

Lehne's chamberlain was considered to be His Highness's confidant in many respects. He was a good man, gentle, obliging, perfectly honest, and the proof was that he had no fortune. His wife, a good lady, excessively long and lean, with a prominent red nose, had given him eleven children, and to him, he was the model of husbands, never to be suspected of the slightest misguidance; but he loved those of others; He was passionate about pointing out the wrong path to the first person who came along, and if only he was asked, and even of his own accord, he would act as a guide along the wrong path, so that with him there was no way out. This peculiar natural disposition took nothing away from his solemn gravity, the dignified smile, the compassed air that impressed everyone, and would have earned him more consideration had it not been too public that apart from his special aptitudes he was a complete nobody.

As soon as the chamberlain had completed the salute with which he ended his short compliment to Madame Tonska, he turned on his heel, stretched out his arm towards a tray laden with ice presented by a servant, and while playing the vermeil spoon in the rosé and white, he gained the gallery; arrived there, he discreetly placed the saucer on a console and slipped out through the small door.

Do you want to know what I did? Well, I followed him!

My God, yes! What do you want? Have you come to realize that I was born without a shred of discernment? These things, ridiculous, inept, odious at all times and on all occasions, are at least understandable, if not excusable, on the part of someone who loves. But what can you think of it when it was I who abandoned myself to such ignominy, I who didn't love, and who hated on the contrary, and who despised (oh! with what fullness of fury I despised her!) and who despised, I repeat, this woman, ultimately without beauty, without grace, without sincerity, without kindness; well, let's say the whole truth, without honor, obviously! and who wasn't worth being seen for!

in its perversity!

It's not that I attached the slightest importance to what she could do or say. But I was quite at ease, I was curious, purely on a whim, to put my finger on the bad faith and wickedness of this monster. Didn't she love me? She was certainly right, and very much so! I didn't like her either! But the prince had just called her on a date, right before my very eyes, and that odious Lehne had won the day!

I'm sure you'll tell me... What will you tell me that I haven't told myself? Nevertheless, I followed him down the stairs. I saw him cross the square; I followed him into the Rue du Marché, he turned right - as I'd expected! entered the Rue Frédéric and, through a small door, entered the palace.

I was very pleased with my perspicacity, and this ordeal amused me greatly. But that wasn't the end of it! An appointment assigned in such a hurry was certainly not for the next day; it was for that very evening! Don't you think I was right to hate this person the way I did?

I set off on my errand and returned to the Countess's house just as a closed coupé was getting out. The car turned left. It's Monbonheur! Monbonheur!" I thought, "is a little château de plaisance half a league from the city, where the prince has his books and his cards, and where he holds hunting parties. The princess never sets foot there. So it came as no surprise to me that Monbonheur was a haven of bliss!

I had accumulated enough foolishness up to that point, and it was time to stop. In that miserable night, a furious madness had seized me, and in what way? For what cause? Who could say, or even suspect, since, once again, I didn't love the Countess!

When I saw this carriage, which I'm sure was his, take the Monbonheur road, I started to run, and, as there was a side road, I flattered myself I'd be ahead of the horses, perhaps by ten minutes.

The more I ran, the more my mind wandered. I missed the gate, I came to a wolf's jump, I went down into the ditch, I climbed against the steep wall, clinging to the stones, and I said to myself: If the guard sees me, he'll think I'm a thief!

I reached the top and jumped onto the platform. As I did so, a hand came to rest on my arm and grabbed me angrily.

— Where are you going, sir?

It was His Highness. I was appalled. I'll always see my master, in that horrible moment when my anguish reached a peak it would hardly know

exceed. I'll always see," I said, "that noble, imposing stature, that handsome, bald, slightly rosy forehead, those long blond whiskers waving down both sides of the mouth, those blue eyes fixed on mine, covering me with the fire of their indignation. I woke up. I felt as if I'd just woken from a nightmare.

— Highness, if I weren't a madman, I'd be a wretch; but I am a madman!

— And a wicked madman," exclaimed Jean-Théodore with ill-contained anger, "wickedder and madder than you seem to realize!

Yes, I suspected it. From the absurd feelings that had led me there, I sensed that wounded pride was ready and willing to spill its violent guts. A less baser instinct still spoke, however, in the depths of this rotted conscience, and I could hear it whispering: All you need now is to be insolent.

Sweat covered my face. Tears rolled down my eyes. I wished the Prince had stabbed me; in falling, I would at least have had the right to tell him... to tell him what? I was wrong everywhere and in everything!

— Yes, you're mean," continued Jean-Théodore, "meaner than all the others I'm surrounded by, and, like them, you're a coward. Would you dare, without cause, without any pretext other than a ridiculous love that perhaps you don't even feel, to invade the home of one of your equals? Would you dare spy on him? Would you knowingly declare to the beloved wife of one of your friends that you love her? You know you wouldn't! This man would chastise you; he would have the right, the duty to do so, and everyone would agree with him. But what can I do to defend myself? I can't! If I hit you, I'm a tyrant and you're a hero! What's more, it's your father's son who's proving to me that I can't crush him!

— That's right, Your Highness. What did Madame Tonska tell you?

At that moment, the moon's rays enveloped us. I could see the prince as clearly as in daylight, and he could see me.

He seemed surprised by my question and looked me square in the face, no longer like a God ready to strike me down, but only like an astonished man. It's true that with tears covering my cheeks, I must have looked very strange.

Do you know what he did? He drew his handkerchief from his pocket, wiped my face and sat me down on a bench where he stood next to me; but I fell on my knees, let my head go on his and sobbed bitterly; bitterly, no doubt, but with deep relief.

— What she told me?" continued the prince, unaware of what was happening, "she told me what had happened between you since the meeting at the

jeweler. She claims that you're in love with her, but that you don't want to and can't understand it. She assures me that she doesn't love you any more than she loves me, and that she has never loved anyone; but that, finding herself with duties towards me that she doesn't have towards you, she intends to break off your relationship.

— She did.

— Did she?

— Tonight she forbade me ever to return to her home.

There was silence. After a few moments had passed, the prince said to me:

— Do you want to leave tomorrow for Florence?

— Certainly, and I won't come back until you tell me to.

— That's fine, just go.

He gently lifted my head and I stood up. I was another man.

I was still quite moved and troubled, but I was no longer ashamed of myself.

— Farewell," said Jean-Théodore, and held out his hand. I wanted to kiss it, but he withdrew it and, giving me a friendly wave, walked away. I ran to him, he embraced me and, in a low voice, said in my ear:

— Let's forgive each other; our weakness is equal.

When I got home, I woke up my father and told him my story without forgetting a single word. I didn't spare myself.

Doctor Lanze listened to me with the greatest curiosity; from time to time, he felt my pulse, examined me and wrote a note. When I fell silent, he chuckled with satisfaction...

— My dear child," he said, "do you notice that your case is absolutely similar to other invasions of the same disease reported in the Middle Ages, in antiquity, as having been determined by philtres, curses, the absorption of certain infused or distilled plants, such as verbena, for example? Do you also notice that, as early as Herodotus' time, Scythian (i.e. Slavic) women were said to have great talent for witchcraft, and that diseases of amorous insanity came mainly from their country? I urge you to reread the passage by the historian d'Halicarnasse relating to this fact; in your particular position, it can only be of powerful interest to you.

I'll go to the palace tomorrow and have a chat with Her Highness. I urge Madame Countess Tonska not to send for me if she's ever ill! I'd put her out of her misery! On that note, pack your bags; we'll help you.

I left that very night, after embracing my family, my excellent father, my mother and my sister Liliane. The Prince wrote to me in Zurich that the Countess was no longer in Burbach, and allowed me to return. What's happened now? I'll find out

I'm not interested in Madame Tonska. She's made me dizzy, she's made me ill; but, positively, I've never liked her and I don't! If I could get rid of the vision of her eyes that keeps coming back to me, I think I'd hardly think about her at all. All this evil will come to an end. I would, however, be curious to know where the Countess might be at the moment, and whether the Prince has retained his passion for her.

Here ends the story of Conrad Lanze. It was Louis de Laudon's turn to speak. He did so in the following terms:

CHAPTER SEVEN

STORY OF THE THIRD CALENDER SON OF A KING

— My dear friends, however spiritual you may be, you both have one great misfortune: you are foreigners.

— Strangers to what?" says Nore.

— In every country in the world, if you're not French, you're a foreigner," continued Laudon, unperturbed, "and I'll tell you frankly what I believe: this fact certainly doesn't deprive you of any cardinal virtue, but it does make you unfit to ever possess a host of delicacies, small but charming perfections, special refinements to which the French spirit alone can lay claim. I take no pride in this for my compatriots or myself.

But, believe me, what I'm telling you, the experience of the centuries proves it. It was the opinion of Charles V; it was that of Frederick II of Prussia; the Emperor Joseph of Austria thought it and the great Catherine proclaimed it. It's pointless, even childish, to protest against such authorities.

So I won't conceal from you that, all my life, I've had this higher ideal before my eyes, and I've strived to realize it as much as it is in me. I don't pride myself on being a paragon of merit of any kind; but I would be sorry to lack distinction, aptness, tact, measure, and, in the highest sense of the word, what we call common sense, and these are French qualities par excellence. I'm sure you'll find it advantageous enough to make such statements out of the blue; but you want my story, so please allow me to illuminate the stage on which it's about to take place.

My father was a most distinguished man, an excellent officer in his youth, quite fashionable, and the rumor of his adventures lasted a long time. Between us, he had been more than good to the beautiful Duchesse d'Arcueil, and she gave him great proof of her devotion by marrying him, a little late in life, to Mademoiselle Coëffard, daughter of a famous contractor. That's where our fortune comes from, for my poor father had eaten, and eaten well, his inheritance. My parents' union was not a happy one, I must admit. When my mother died (some fifteen years ago), my father went to take his last breath at Plombières, and,

Since then, he's never spoken of her in anything but the most appropriate, indeed the most generous, manner.

As for me, since I was born with a delicate complexion and my health required care, I was entrusted, almost from birth, to an old aunt, my father's sister, Madame Louise de Laudon, canoness, who always spoiled me, from whom I must inherit and whom I love very much.

Then, when I was about nine, I went to secondary school. I think this early contact with practical life is an excellent thing. In our large educational establishments, children first learn to see life as it is. They are there, mingling with peers from all classes of society; they attend, without realizing it, the little show, the comedy of tricks and vices; they are victims, they are deceived, they are beaten... they are victors and oppressors in their turn. They learn to defy themselves, to understand what talking means, and experience (the most precious and necessary science of all), they acquire at their own expense, before they have beards on their chins. I'm telling you things as they are, without rehashing phrases; I'm pointing out the real and invaluable advantages of high school life, and I'll spare you the tirades about childhood friendships, the happy mixing of different castes, etc., etc., all declamations devoid of truth.

But, in order to get to the supreme point, it is certain that it is to public education that we French owe the principal trait of our modern character, the one that follows us from childhood to the grave, the horrible fear of being taken for a fool, and the firm resolve to do everything in the world to avoid such a misfortune.

When I had finished my studies, I must confess that I didn't know much in the way of specifics; I only had a general idea of all the issues, and, which seems to me sufficient for a man of the world, I saw glimmers of everything that enabled me to talk about them and even put me in a position, if my heart so desired, to go into greater depth one day, at my leisure, on this or that point, by reading newspapers and magazines. It doesn't take more than that for a generalizing mind, as mine is, and I must say that after completing my education by the means I have just indicated, I now find myself highly competent in political and social philosophy, and capable of reasoning about the arts with originality.

My father, whom I loved infinitely, was too tactful to interfere with my conduct. He had arranged a delightful apartment for me on the first floor of the hotel, and left me completely free to live there; he had his affairs, I had mine; he never refused me money, and when we were both in Paris, we often dined together.

Although he didn't want to show himself officially in the direction of my life, my father nevertheless played some part in it, by that very fact that he entrusted me to the intelligent care of our cousin de Hautebraye, one of the most serious men I've ever met.

This one tells me:

— You see, Louis, I'm not going to nag you. You have to understand life as it is. You've got a nice fortune. Have fun, but don't eat it. Don't be so foolish as to enter the world of work through the great doors with inscriptions like these on their pediments: *Ecole militaire; Ponts et chaussées; Affaires étrangères; Magistrature*. This would simply lead you to be a captain at forty, crying for the cross and serving as a shuttlecock for a certain number of rackets handled by a greater or lesser number of cowards, your eternal superiors, and, what's more, each new revolution would accuse you of having devoured the sweat of the people. None of that nonsense! I'm going to have you admitted to the Moutards. You'll find people there who'll introduce you to the people you need to know. Have dinner with everyone, eat with everyone. Don't be too wise, it bores; don't be vicious, it frightens; don't be witty about everything, it hurts; immediately impose the idea that you're not easy to catch, it makes you look capable; and then let it come. But don't, for anything in the world, get involved with a political party; you'll break your neck. Be a moderate legitimist; Republicans like that enough.

Hautebraye took me to Madame Olympe Berbier. Her main friend at the time was a huge American called Buffalo. God! we had some good games in that house! One evening, we had to call the patrol to throw out a Japanese prince who wouldn't leave. I was honestly infatuated with the sublime Olympe, especially as it's a fact that she preferred me, and I really don't know where this story could have led me, despite my cousin's warnings, if the lady hadn't come to me one morning in tears, because, she told me, her landlord was threatening to seize her furniture. She wanted fifteen thousand francs.

She claimed that Buffalo had fallen out with her because of me and that I had reduced her to poverty. At first, I admit, I was moved by Madame Berbier's despair, not to mention how adorable she looked in the midst of her tears! Fortunately, I was afraid of being caught, and this thought put me back in my right mind. I consoled her as best I could, promising to think about her request and give her my answer later in the day. She made me swear it and bid me farewell.

Do you know what I thought? I sent her a bouquet of white roses! That evening, I told the club about my adventure, and it was a great success. The next day, poor Olympe received an avalanche of flowers from all her friends. He

that she hadn't lied to me; but how can you tell the difference between what's true and what's false?

Elegant living not only gives the intelligence that sharpness, precision and surety of judgment that only people of the world have, it also provides the means to appreciate things at their true value, and not to overestimate anything. It's by this means that we remove the blindness and drive of passions. You smile and think I'm playing with paradoxes?

By no means, I swear; I'm speaking very seriously, as you'll see from my example. You can pretty much understand the feminine world I was thrown into. Nothing could be more refined. Well, what was the result for me and my peers? That, from our earliest youth, we were bronzed, drenched in the waters of the Styx and made as incapable of undergoing the seductions of love as the most rigid of the desert fathers. The devil who tempted Saint Anthony would lose his Latin, his Greek and even his Hebrew with us, and his staging and his little ballet would, I swear to you, make a most miserable fiasco. Why? Because we know women. Because we know women; all the candor in the world has nothing to seduce us, knowing what lies deep down, and our imagination, enlightened *a giorno*, leads us astray into the darkness of no illusion.

What I say about love, I say about gambling. Very few of our friends play on the green carpet out of passion; I don't even know any of that kind; we play because we have to, because it's accepted; if it were no longer accepted, nobody would play, just as, at necessary times, it's in good taste to fight and in good taste not to fight. You may object that, every year, a certain number of pigeons are plucked. What do you want me to say? They're idiots, there are always idiots; they let themselves be caught; they deserve their fate; what I can tell you is that they don't have a passion for gambling.

I lived, as I tell you, very peacefully for a few years. I don't claim to have been one of the really strong men, who know how to reduce others to serve them; in fact, I didn't need to awaken such great faculties in myself, having no reason to apply them; I don't boast of having held the first rank among the illustrious, but neither have I been relegated to the last; I am counted; at last I am somebody; my opinion carries weight at the club, and a horse of which I speak badly is not rated high in the betting, except by the stubborn. If I had wanted to apply myself to something, to I don't know what, I have a vague idea that I would have succeeded just as well as the average ordinary person. For, you'll notice, I'm absolutely free of enthusiasm for anything in the world! I

considers men, women, things and ideas, as almost equally indifferent, except for the use one wants to make of them, and it is, in my opinion, a great element of triumph to see rightly and coldly. There's no danger of me getting carried away! In short, since I felt no urge to put myself on stage, I did nothing, and nothing has happened to me since I came into this world. I've examined a lot, thought a little, not acted. Going to the club, coming back from it, a few hunting trips, every year a few months at home in the provinces - I can't think of a single incident worthy of memory in the years that preceded this one. I'd never even been out of France; why bother? Doesn't Paris contain everything? The fantasy I'm indulging in at the moment, and which has given me the pleasure of supping with you, is the first of its kind since I've been alive, and I'll tell you in a moment to what cause it owes its birth.

At the beginning of last winter, for the first time in my life, I found myself in an unpleasant situation. First of all, I realized - and on closer examination I was forced to admit it - that my fortune was in disarray. This surprised me; I had done absolutely nothing to prepare myself for this discovery.

You know I have no passions. Nevertheless, I verified that I had lost a few bets, which were quite considerable; that each evening's whist, a very bourgeois and very easy whist, had won me quite a large sum; that, while I was perfectly aware of Flora Mac-Ivor's maneuvering and was in no way her dupe, I had given her much more than I would have suspected over the last three months, and that Hautebraye, from whom I thought I had borrowed some money, actually owed me some.

I spoke to him about it, and the ensuing discussion between us was all the more unpleasant, as I thought I saw that he was exploiting me. It wasn't; I'm sure of it. It was rather I who, in certain respects, had abused his extreme candor in many things, for I am infinitely stronger than he! But you can understand that, as soon as you think you've been deceived, you become furious. So we had a terrible fight, and we stayed at loggerheads!

My life was thus in disarray, when another story happened to me. Without listening to anyone, Jean de Cordes married the *Délassements-Comiques* dancer known throughout Europe as Saute-Ruisseau. Don't imagine that he was in love with her! First of all, she's nothing if not pretty, slightly spoiled by smallpox, and I see her as, hands down, thirty-seven years old; but my poor friend had his habits there, and I believe, without being sure, that she had made him sign tickets for a large sum. These reasons didn't stop Jean's uncle, the duke, from going into a holy fury. They attacked me, as an intimate confidant of the guilty party, because I hadn't turned him away from this foolishness, and above all because I'd

the family. The truth is, the event surprised no one more than me; Jean had confided nothing of her intentions to me, and for more than a month, Saute-Ruisseau had prudently forbidden me, in a bill of the most precious spelling, ever to set foot in her home.

This catastrophe, the trouble it caused me, my quarrel with Hautebraye, the disruption to my business, was still not enough; my father had to die. I felt the greatest grief I'd ever felt in my life. He was the best of men, the most cheerful, the easiest to get along with; always amusing and so little of a poseur! I stayed by his bed for the last three days, without leaving his side for a minute. I can still see him stretched out on his pillows, with that always beautiful head, always intelligent, so fine, and... my goodness! He was a true gentleman!

The day before he died, he beckoned me with his eyes to lean towards him. He hardly spoke anymore, and couldn't raise his voice.

— Louis," he said, "you either have religion or you don't. Send Poinot to find me an abbé of some sort. Send Poinot to find me an abbot of some sort.

When he saw that I was crying, he added:

— Would you like me to end up differently than I did? Am I or am I not a decent man?

I sent Poinot to the parish. Almost immediately, he brought back a young priest of good character, whom I left with my poor father.

After half an hour, the Abbé left the room, and I was content to greet him, thinking we'd have nothing to do together, when, after some hesitation, he stopped, and leading me into a window embrasure:

— Sir," he said, "would you allow me to ask for your help in your father's interest?

I was astonished and suspicious at this start. But I bowed my head.

— Your father," continued the Abbé, "is a better man, and has more heart than he knows. Unfortunately, he doesn't know anything serious, and the moment he arrived...

He looked at me gravely. I lowered my eyes and felt uncomfortable. It's extraordinary how these people don't respect anything and don't want to be simple!

— What can I do about it?" I said a little curtly.

— I'd like you to tell him about your mother," he replied.

It was very delicate, and I was shocked by this intervention by a stranger in our family affairs. He must have found me cold; he saluted me and left.

My father was pretty quiet.

— I believe," he whispered in my ear, "that I have done what is right in the world.

circumstances. The Abbé will be back tonight and I'll be in good standing. I assure you, I'm very happy about that. Now let me give you some advice, Louis. Do you believe me?

— Very gladly," I replied.

— Don't get ahead of yourself," he continued, with a shadow of a smile that still reflected his charming wit. Well then, when you're married, try not to do too much foolishness, eh? because, you see...

He didn't say any more, and from that moment on, he never said another word to me.

I had the pain of losing him. I found myself in a completely new situation, not knowing what to do with myself or my time. I had no desire to return to the club where I'd spent my life until then, and for the first few weeks, when I felt I had to get back to something, I found nothing but emptiness. In the morning, I smoked two or three cigars, read a newspaper or two, got dressed, went out, wandered left and right. I didn't know anyone I wanted to look at.

It was in this sad mood that one day I met Gennevilliers. I'd known him at the club a few years before, but he'd hardly ever been there since he'd married and become a member of parliament. He took me home and introduced me to his wife.

The following week, I dined there. No one was there, so I spent the evening there.

Certainly, a month earlier, I would have been very bored; somehow, the time didn't seem too long, and I was fine. Gennevilliers isn't exactly what you'd call witty, but you can see the goodness in him. Politics is his big business. He claims that, if we're not careful, society will be lost. He's into a lot of things I'd never thought of before. He speaks well and, all in all, is interesting. I think he has the most sincere friendship for me, and I return it. What's also true is that I couldn't live without him and his wife.

As for her, believe me, she's a pearl! I don't know whether or not there are many people in the world who resemble her; you know that I haven't lived there long; it's not the custom among my contemporaries; but if Madame de Gennevilliers isn't unique in her species, we have to admit that our nation is showing itself to be quite admirable! Lucie is ravishingly pretty, white, fresh, delicate as a flower; the most beautiful eyes and the most sincere, the most candid! I don't know how I could say a word to her that she wouldn't want to hear. She unites with everything her husband thinks and is passionate about his ideas, not as a prophetess who leads, which would show a lot of strength and little grace, but as a ravishing disciple! She is very elegant in her habits, in her toilette, in the way she arranges her home.

I've never seen her display any of the pedantry of the housewife. I've never seen her display any of the pedantry of a housewife. Her children are gentle, peaceful and well-behaved, and she never scolds. When I say she never scolds, that doesn't extend to me, whom she scolds often enough, and she would reduce me to despair if her husband didn't come to my aid and defend me.

I'm in love with her, there's no doubt about it; but how angry I'd be if she were in love with me! Poor child! It would be the greatest misfortune that could happen to either of us! I arrange things so that nothing like that happens, and I take the greatest care to avoid seeing her alone, except in circumstances where it would not be at all inconvenient. Besides, with her extreme uprightness, she's cautious, she knows the world, and, I can see, she doesn't want to risk anything. My life has thus taken a new direction.

When I'm in Paris, I spend almost every evening at Gennevilliers'. He and Lucie urge me to prepare for public life, and on this point they see things differently than I did. I thought it was enough to let myself be appointed to any position, either by the voters or by the government. With my natural common sense and general knowledge, I was pretty sure I could get away with anything. They think differently, and when I explained my system, which is universally accepted and practiced, Gennevilliers smiled bitterly and Lucie became indignant.

— Monsieur de Laudon," she said, "it's sophists like you who lose and ruin everything!

— My dear friend," interrupted Gennevilliers, "it's preachers like you who make stubborn heretics.

I held back for a while; but, as my moments are not very precious, as they were pressing me hard, and as I was afraid of falling into Lucie's disdain, I gradually began to examine certain questions more closely; Gennevilliers offered me some rather large books; and, as Lucie smiled when she saw me take them and swore that I wouldn't read them, I made a point of honour; I skimmed through a few pages, and it's a fact that I'm no longer as bored. Here and there, I even find myself studying for the pleasure of doing so, quite apart from the glory of defending my science against the mutinous teasing of Madame de Gennevilliers.

She spent part of her childhood in Naples. Since her marriage, she has made one conjugal trip to Spain, another to the Orient; now she's in Switzerland. I've noticed that having seen many singularities has certainly planted a few original ideas in this little head, and, well

that I'm still convinced that everything is in everything, and that the best brains in the world can have the sum of their merits fully developed without having been warmed by different suns. I'm not angry about putting myself on a par with Lucie and wresting from her the false superiority she imposes on me. In fact, I was happy to accompany her this year for part of the way.

Now I'm going to get to know Milan, I'll go to Durbach and visit this side of Germany on the way there and back; next year I'll be in Egypt, and, without saying anything about it, you see me resolved to push on to India, so as to have the pleasure, for the rest of my days, of offering my persecutor, from time to time, a story that begins with the words: "When I was in Bombay", or else: "The custom of the inhabitants of Ceylon is to...". In this way, I'll at least be on an equal footing with her and live in peace.

I don't know if the rest of you will understand that with this love, such as it is, I consider myself very happy. You should know that of all the peoples in the world, the French are the ones who are content at the lowest cost. The English, the Germans and the Italians are running around the world to make big fortunes. In this kind of turbulence, the Americans are the schoolmasters. These adventurers may succeed, but they often fail, and in either case, the greater part of their existence is spent tossing from uncertainties to perils and from perils to violent shocks. They like it and we hate it. So you see us, in all classes, constantly concerned with arranging a good little hereditary mediocrity. The peasant is much less concerned with improving his lot, by risking a little of what he has, than with finding a safe hiding place to bury and preserve his slender treasure. The middle-class man has vegetated his whole life, in order to become a provincial judge or a mediocre clerk; but he stubbornly prepares his sons to imitate him, with a view to the retirement, as certain as it is miserable, by means of which he and they will end their careers. One good turn is better than two, and that's why you see me delighted with myself and others.

Here Laudon tapped Lanze on the knee in a friendly gesture and declared his story over.

CHAPTER EIGHT

The young English traveller, seeing Laudon regard Lanze with a rather triumphant air, said to him gently:

— Would you mind if I added a little commentary to your biography?

— No one is less susceptible than I am, and I surrender myself hand and foot to your stings.

— My intention is not to martyrize you; only, as I am a foreigner, as you yourself have remarked with infinite truth, it is natural that I consider in a light peculiar to me several facts that you see in another, and from this it follows that what seems pink to you seems black to me.

— Why don't you tell me what you think of me without further preamble, since it's me we're talking about!

— Not at all! It's about the species you belong to, not the individual. I notice that the great pivot of French existence revolves around the fear of being caught; caught by men, caught by feelings, caught by passions. In a word, you all want to be subtle characters that no one or nothing in the world can fool. To this end, you see fit to strip childhood of its candor, youth of its confidence, age of its enthusiasm, and as, naturally, being people of spirit and execution, you succeed in the task you have undertaken, all that is human in your souls is torn away, withered or mutilated, and makes way for a kind of wisdom made of a metal composition of which one cannot tell exactly whether it is alfenide or similar. This explains why you cut off the necks of your natural monarchs and drive out your hereditary princes, in order to piously hand yourselves over to the first person who comes along.

This explains why, being constantly on your guard, you are the country where frauds of all kinds are most successful, provided they are based on the absurd. In addition to the fact that the interesting assembly of the rascals of Europe has no better inn than your capital, I will not remind you that a number of years ago, this same capital, Paris, the enlightened city par excellence, did not doubt for several weeks that men had been discovered in the moon.

was busy examining the authenticity of a number of manuscripts, among which were some in Solomon's hand.

You yourself, and you'll forgive me for quoting you in the company of such illustrious examples to which one cannot be associated without glory, you yourself, what has it served you to believe in neither friendship, nor love, nor anything? It has served you well to be duped by your cousin, duped by Mademoiselle Flora Mac-Yvor, duped by M. Jean de Cordes, and vilified by the amiable Saute-Ruisseau, who is marked by the smallpox. The truth is, you escaped the ridicule of taking seriously the authority of your father, whom you nevertheless loved very much, and the Abbé didn't take you too lightly when he tried to make you come to your senses. You escaped, I say, from these perils with a skill that makes me absolve you for having lost so much money at the club without loving gambling.

— This little speech is worth its weight in persiflage," exclaimed Laudon, laughing out loud, "and it's all the nastier for it; but you're wrong to think that I'm incapable of feeling love. What is my feeling for Madame de Gennevilliers?

— If it were love, you'd start by keeping quiet about it; but here I find another of those irregularities that astonish us foreigners. With you, words no longer have their true meaning. You're not at all in love with your friend's wife, and even, as you explain so well, you'd be sorry to be. What you feel for her is the sweet, tender affection that a kind person creates, and which has every right to be called friendship. But, precisely, you French have issued this axiom: "There is no friendship possible between man and woman. This is tantamount to proclaiming that all the gentlemen you meet in a salon have the most extensive claims on the mistress of the house, provided she is young, or, which is much truer, claim to reserve the right to have them if it suits them; you don't use this prerogative; these formidable seducers are the best people in the world and, often, the most real and solid friends; but, what do you want? You've got to look like a winner, and the good people will repeat the national axiom and approve of it in front of their very emboldened victim, with a naivety they don't enjoy; and that's why and how you're in love with Madame de Gennevilliers.

Laudon raised his shoulders.

— I predicted it!" he exclaimed, "I told you so! There are nuances in all this, extreme delicacies, that only a Frenchman can grasp!

— That's my opinion," replied the inexorable Nore, "and now let's go to bed. It's three o'clock in the morning.

The travelers returned to their beds, where they slept soundly until around nine o'clock. Then they rose. It was a lovely morning. A lukewarm wind ran over the lake waters, puckering them in great waves. Up in the sky, barely a few fluffy white clouds slept in the bosom of the azure, and in all the flowering trees along the shore, the birds led such a train of songs, chirps, precipitous trills and high-pitched cries, everyone was so busy, flying and mingling with the tumultuous flocks, that obviously it was the day of marriage proposals in this little world of wanderers.

After packing their bags, the three calenders took their leave of each other. Nore, having decided to accompany Laudon, set off with him for Milan, while Lanze continued his solitary journey towards Florence. When he found himself alone, his thoughts took their natural course. The attraction that the spirits of his companions had exerted on his own ceased to be felt. He fell back into a gloomy melancholy, and arrived in this wretched city determined to do his duty, taking no pleasure in life, his art or anything else.

He had been at the hotel for two days, trying to attend to his work, when one morning, crossing a street, he heard himself called in a loud voice, and, turning around, saw Prince Ernest de Burbach, his sovereign's brother, ten paces away. As he put his hat in his hand and walked forward with a respectful but constrained smile, His Highness, who was giving his arm to a rather common fat man, called out to him:

— What are you doing here? I don't suppose our despot kicked you out of the country for your liberalism? You don't put yourself or your good man father in situations like this, do you? Here, Franier, do you want an accomplished type of codin, reactionary, ultra, aristocrat, human crayfish, in short, that species, whatever you call it, whose every thought walks backwards? Then let me introduce you to Mr. Conrad Lanze, faithful subject and devoted servant of Jean-Théodore, principule of Wërbeck-Burbach! Conrad, this is Mr. Symphorien Franier, a publicist of the highest merit, whose name is certainly not unfamiliar to you.

It was precisely because this name was not unfamiliar to Conrad that he experienced a particularly unpleasant feeling on seeing the prince in such company. He nevertheless bowed, and took off his hat, for, thank God, so much has been seen and experienced on all sides, holy water has so often found itself without strength, and the flame of hell has so frequently let loose its prey, that each having the conviction of not being able to destroy the other, if the Holy Spirit met with the Evil Spirit, both would greet each other.

M. Symphorien Franier offered a cigar to Lanze, who refused it, and another to the Prince, who accepted it.

and we set off for a walk.

— So, Conrad, when are we going to have a sensible constitution in our poor country? These were the first words spoken by His Highness after lighting his trabucco on Franier's. Will my simpleton brother never understand that parliamentarianism has had its day? that democracy is the only existing force? that what is not with it is against it and will be crushed? that the time of small states is over, archifini, and that the future belongs to large agglomerations of interests? Doesn't he understand anything? Is your honored master a brute?

— My Lord," replied Conrad, "if Your Highness has nothing to command me, I shall ask your permission to withdraw.

— Just one word! Why hasn't my brother replied to the letter I sent him, through the newspapers, in support of workers' societies?

— I didn't ask him and, in any case, the prince wouldn't have told me.

— You hear, Franier, they're all slaves like that in our poor Burbach!

— Neither I nor the gentleman," replied Franier, grumbling, "can understand why you're so upset. Mr. Lanze, Wœrbeck is a warm-hearted and truly humanitarian man; you can't blame him, and besides, he's been educated like a prince, which means that he doesn't know the right way to go about anything.

If Conrad had been hit over the head with a fist, he wouldn't have experienced a more odious sensation than that which overcame him when he heard Mr. Franier use the Prince's first name. The prince didn't seem to mind, and the publicist, as he had called him, continued his conciliatory speech.

— Are you an artist, sir?

— Yes, sir.

— The arts are the religion of the future! When man contemplates himself in his own mind, he sees God, and immediately pours forth magnificent works! I don't know if you agree with me, but I'd love a drink.

— Let's have a drink," says the prince.

Conrad insisted on withdrawing, and despite the efforts of his two associates, he managed to free himself and returned home. Hardly had he arrived when Prince Ernest entered his room.

He was always smiling. However, he paced up and down the apartment, sometimes stopping in front of the clock, sometimes in front of the lithographs or engravings hanging on the wall.

torches: in short, he had something to say and didn't know how to start. In the end, he made up his mind.

— I've come here to talk to you sincerely and from the bottom of my heart! Well, I'm broke! That's the big word! You see, I'm penniless, and whether I like it or not, whether by compulsion or by love, my brother has to open his purse! You can write to him for me, and that's why I'm here.

Conrad didn't reply. Prince Ernest, waddling awkwardly and sneering as he twirled his cigar, continued in a sour voice:

— Do you think, by any chance, it's for my own pleasure that I'm walking around with a Franier citizen? Have you looked at his boots? They've already been worn out by two of his friends and are only his third! But I need money, and when those two syllables *il faut* slip in somewhere, we obey, my poor Conrad!

— I don't see how Mr. Franier's boots could give Your Highness what he lacks.

— Nor do I, but the gentleman's newspaper and the band of rascals at his heels are not allies to be despised; and Conrad, I want the devil to strangle me if I don't run to the last extremity, rather than go on living as I do! Don't take my threats for vain!

Don't despise them!" he added, raising his arm and turning as red as a rooster. I have more powerful connections than you can believe! I'm being made offers from many places, two of them among others, which, if I accept them, will give me a situation far different from that of a petty dynast like my brother!

-So why won't Your Highness accept them?

— You're asking me why I want to exhaust the means of conciliation before resorting to means... means that wouldn't make you people laugh? Well, I answer you that it's because I'm going to put the law and form on my side right up to the last hour. Let's get it over with! Here you are! Write to Theodore right away; it's about time! I want my debts paid... a million! Fifteen hundred thousand francs for me and I'll keep quiet! Otherwise, watch out, you and many others!

Prince Ernest then left the room, banging his fist on the table.

Lanze was indignant, but not surprised. The august personage who had just honored him with a visit, confidences and commissions had always been known to him. He thought it useful to inform his sovereign of what was happening, and thus proved himself a diligent messenger, albeit with quite different intentions from those which his interlocutor would have liked him to understand. But no friendship

could never be re-established between a Lanze and Prince Ernest. The old doctor had long since put this right for himself and his son, by means of a scientific demonstration.

One evening, when in the palace, the unwelcome scion of the reigning house had, in a violent scene, taken his family's servant by the collar and shaken him like a plum tree in fruit season, the scholar, back at home and in full possession of his composure, his robe and his pipe, had said to Conrad:

— I'm delighted with what's just happened! What an irrefragable manifestation of atavism! Unfortunately, the quality of the subject prevents me from making it the subject of a communication to the *Revue Médicale*! While I was wrestling with this young energetic fellow, I was struck by the fact that he had absolutely the same eyes as in the portrait of his infamous maternal great-great-grandfather, Jérôme Weiss, who became landgrave of Hütten during the Thirty Years' War, but who was only a pandour, and, on this precious indication, as I readjusted my dress, I found the contours of the mouth and the shape of the chin of his quadrisaïde, Philippine Hartmann, the cobbler's daughter, so lamentably married for love, and whose husband only legitimized her children by lavishing money on the aldermen!

This doctrine had penetrated the sculptor's mind, and he viewed Prince Ernest in the same light as a tjandala might be viewed by a Hindu. The wretch is from Brahma, no doubt, but from the feet of the God.

BOOK TWO

CHAPTER ONE

After the scene with Conrad, Jean-Théodore had returned to the château through the winding alleys of the English park, his brow lowered, sad and pensive. When he entered the small, Persian-clad salon adjoining his study, he found the Countess. She had just arrived. She was sitting on a sofa. She kept her hat and gloves on and stood with her hands folded, staring straight ahead.

— I was born for my own misfortune and that of others," she murmured, in response to Jean-Théodore's affectionate words.

— What do you mean?

— I'm going to afflict you!

— But what else?

— Let's say goodbye forever! I'm leaving in a few hours.

— Are we thinking about it?

— I think of everything. I love you, Theodore! You know I do. I don't hide it from myself, I don't want to hide it from you.

She held out her hands. He took them and kissed them. She withdrew them at once, and considering him with a painful smile:

— Yes, I love you, my friend, my best, my dearest friend, and if I've never given you any proof other than words, believe me..., yes! believe me! it's because I was warned by an infallible instinct that this dear bond would sooner or later be broken by the fatality that follows me!

— At last! Explain yourself! You frighten me! Is it a whim?

— A whim? I have none! Affection, oh yes, full heart and for you, for you alone and always, always, do you understand? This single feeling will dominate me, drive me, blind me, be both my despair and my happiness, as long as I live!

Jean-Théodore sat down on the sofa and again took a hand, which this time was not withdrawn.

— In heaven's name, Sophie, quickly confess what's troubling you! What powerful obstacle has come between us? What disaster has torn you away from me, just when I was hoping to touch you?

— Duty," replied Madame Tonska, in a firm voice.

— What duty?

— My friend, don't be upset! You're pale,agitated You're killing me! I've got need my strength. I'm more to be pitied than you are!

She hid her head in the sofa cushions, and long sobs burst from her chest. When she stood up again, her beautiful face was flooded with tears. You can imagine the Prince's state of mind. He begged and pleaded.

— I'm going to join my husband," she says.

— Your husband! He was stunned.

— Yes, this word must surprise you. This man, who has spared me no pain, no humiliation, I'm his, though, Theodore, and for him I'll leave the best, the most delicate, the most chivalrous of friends! You, of all people, must value anything that steps out of the common path, and know that the more difficult a task is, the more it imposes itself on consciences like ours.

— I don't understand a word you're saying!" exclaimed the prince at last, "and I beg you to explain. Since when has your husband had any right over your resolutions?

— Since he has reached the bottom of the abyss into which his vices and errors have plunged him. You know that, for reasons I needn't remind you, he was exiled from Petersburg a year ago and sent as a major to the Caucasus army. This punishment did not correct him. He continued his way of life. He gambled, he lost, he forced his regiment's coffers, he dissipated his last resources.

Called before the general to account for his management, he was drunk and insulted his superior. The latter generously tried to hush up the affair. He denied what everyone knew, but the scandal was immense,

Mr. Tonski has been sent, as a private soldier, to the Persian frontier. My friend, that's a dreadful place! Fever rages there all year round. Even the hardest of spirits can barely last two years; then, willy-nilly, you die. Mr. Tonski knows this. He wrote to me; the most bitter repentance, the most poignant sorrow breathe in this letter. Here it is, take it, read it! As for me, I'm off to console the author of my misery.

The prince seized the paper Sophie was holding out to him. What he found there was the despondency, or better said, the prostration of a man without nerves and without

courage who, burdened with the rent of his faults, succumbs under the weight, and cries out to the echoes, asking for thanks and help.

He strove to convey his conviction to his friend's soul. But he didn't succeed to any degree. If Count Tonski had simply been an unfortunate man, only as wronged as necessary to legitimize the rigors of fate, his wife would have cared little for him; it was precisely the excessive perversity of the case that fired her imagination. She was all the more impelled to an extraordinary devotion, the less deserving the one for whom she meditated i t ; so that the more the prince reasoned with her, the more he demonstrated her husband's infamy, the more he strengthened her romantic resolution. A saint could not have done better. She was delighted to surpass the saints.

- Farewell," she said, "don't press me any further. Farewell. It's no use. I am resolved. How astonished the Court will be tomorrow, won't it? What comments! The gossips at the Residence will hardly spare me! Don't worry about it. Let it be said! A sort of melancholy joy results from being misjudged. Always remember that I love you. Yes, Theodore, you were the husband of my soul.

It has to be said: the prince was more astonished and, in truth, more hurt and irritated than he was moved. What the Countess considered superhuman and sublime seemed to him senseless and almost odious. After a quarter of an hour, his anger got the better of him. From pleas and tender reasoning, he moved on to vehement apostrophes and outright sarcasm. On this terrain, he found a worthy adversary. An iron pride collided with his, and the most violent o f altercations erupted like a storm. It was a tournament of blunt iron, in which both sides performed marvelously. Both sides took aim at each other's chests. The prince rudely abused the virtuous actresses, complained about a need for emotion that was satisfied by constant, inappropriate scenes, and denounced a cold coquetry that led to adventures like those of Conrad Lanze.

The lover, pale with fury and caught up in the tightest style of etiquette, no longer speaking to Theodore, the friend or husband of her soul, but to Monseigneur, to His Royal Highness, proclaimed in outrageous terms the well-known baseness of sovereigns, and displayed with refinement the famous anecdote in favor of which God, after creating man, finding a remnant of mud at his disposal, made lackeys of him, then princes. She declared that what was generous was none of Her Royal Highness's business. She confessed that if she had dismissed Conrad, it was for her own honor; but that deep down she loved him and regretted not having followed her inclination for such a creature.

noble; at last, she finished her peroration. Jean-Théodore, reduced to silence, with no other resource than to gnaw at his fists, had fallen sullenly into an armchair.

- My Lord, one more word! Although the most perfect contempt has succeeded a mistake I shall mourn all my life, I beg Your Royal Highness to weigh the last advice of a person who means well. I owe you the truth.

The illusion that made me believe in your qualities never blinded me to the inadequacy of your genius. You don't understand your times, and the way you govern will ruin you and your family. You're running with your eyes shut to a revolution! Oh, don't smile! Don't try to make me understand with that shrug of your shoulders your well-known disdain for female politicians! It's not for me to learn. Every time I've tried, with the gentleness of the most misunderstood but faithful affection, to bring you face to face with the truth, you've closed your eyes even tighter and displayed, with me, airs of superiority and tried taunts that I no longer take offense at. You have no reason to accuse me of playing *Maintenon*, since I'm leaving you never to see you again. You know, you feel all too well, that the frankest conviction is the only thing that tears the words from my mouth. So make an effort; return to yourself; change your system, dismiss your lackeys who serve as your ministers, and see to it that, soon, from the depths of my exile, I can learn that the man who has interested me for a few days, was not unworthy in every way of the sentiment I am abdicating at this hour!

As he listened to these words, Jean-Théodore, offended, regained control of himself for this reason alone. He looked coldly at the pythoness, and when, at the end of her speech, she made a deep curtsy and walked backwards towards the door, he rose, and saluted in his turn, as if ending an ordinary audience.

On the threshold, the Countess stopped; indignation inflamed her eyes, swelled her nostrils, and seeing the Prince impassive and saying nothing to her, she raised both arms as if to curse him, and cried out in a shrill voice:

- You're a wretch!

Then she went out. It's unfortunate for tragic sentiments that the forms of modern life don't lend themselves to them. When Madame Tonska arrived in the waiting room, she found no one there. A smoky lamp provided poor illumination, and she struggled to find her way out. She groped her way through the deserted antechamber. It was three o'clock in the morning. She had to go back and forth, opening doors in the darkness. She had to call out. One can imagine what these various operations were like for a person in her frame of mind who wanted to maintain her dignity. Finally, a footman appeared. The Countess asked for her people; they woke up

some, the others were sought at the office. The very eagerness to hurry made the situation even more prosaic. At last, the carriage arrived on the porch, Madame Tonska got in and drove off, in a confusion of feelings - big, small, annoyed, exasperated - that would be extremely difficult to unravel and describe.

Once Jean-Théodore was alone, he resumed his walk.

When we grieve, when we rejoice, we also examine our conscience. The prince found himself very much to be pitied. Everything he did amounted to saying: I'd like to be loved. But he wasn't. He had given much and received nothing. While he gave away his heart, people played with it. Indignation didn't get him off the hook. No matter how many times he told himself: I'll console myself; in the meantime, he suffered.

Then, what is a prince in the face of the worries of common existence? The most helpless of beings. He can't run after the one he wants to bring home; he can't scream when he's hurt; he can't ask for what he lacks. He must, willy-nilly, bask nobly through life, regulating the cadence of his steps to a majestic tune performed by the orchestra of propriety, and, if he hurries or stops, he distorts his profession, which dishonors him. This is not how Theodoric, King of the Goths, or the Khalifa Mansour reigned in the past; but it is the current fashion, and we must submit to it. The more a prince pleases his entourage, the more we can be convinced that he closely resembles a doll whose admirable springs say: My people and my dignity. You can see his eyes moving too, but under the skin, there's only sound.

Alas, the Prince of Burbach was a man! For an hour, he wrestled with this truth; but he felt it. He endured it.

He took a torch, went into his study, and sitting down at a table, began to read military reports, documents on agriculture, an enlargement project for the promenade, and as he read he annotated. By this method, applied obstinately and with cruel tenacity, he managed to keep his agitation under control, enough so that it didn't show on the outside. But inside, what havoc!

The day had come, and the unhappy lover continued his task; eight o'clock struck. A valet entered discreetly, bringing tea, and informed His Royal Highness that Professor Lanze was on his way. It was the hour of the daily visit, as necessary to the doctor's life, and to that of the sovereign, as the periodic returns of the moon and sun were to the whole of nature.

— Good," says Jean-Théodore, "let him come in.

Professor Lanze introduced himself. Jean-Théodore gave him a friendly wave and

finished writing the sentence he'd started. When he had done so, he turned to his liege.

— Highness," said the latter, "I've gone into town to look for you. I was assured you must have slept here. So I came here. I'm pleased to see you've deigned to take care of our region's happiness tonight, and I thank you for it. Not going to bed at all would be unhealthy for poor devils like me; but I have no hesitation in thinking that it's an admirable precaution for a prince, and one that certainly indicates, in him, an excellent state of physical and moral health, for which I offer you my sincere compliment.

— I don't accept it, Doctor; I didn't go to bed simply because I couldn't sleep.

— It's a galvanic effect, I dare say," replied Lanze. It's hardly possible for a star to move without a shock of electricity.

— This way tends to indicate, no doubt, that to your knowledge Countess Tonska left last night?

— You've guessed me perfectly, Your Highness. This lady is of particular interest to me. Precious subject! She has failed to make a fool of my son and is causing my sovereign to exaggerate his duties to his humble subjects to the point of ruining his health! I recognize its influence as greater than that of the turntables.

— How did you know she'd left?

— My God, I'm ashamed to confess it. You seem to think of me, at the moment, as a familiar face in the Council of Ten. Good heavens, no! The milkmaid told my wife, who just told me about it when she gave me my morning cup of coffee. It's prosaic, and I'm terribly sorry.

— I've got something important to tell you. My ministry no longer has a majority in the chambers. It no longer has it, because they want Baron de Storch dismissed.

— Pure nonsense!" exclaimed the doctor. The baron is a worthy man and a man of merit. I consider him to be the best educated person and the best administrator you have. He uses his great fortune for foundations t h a t benefit the lower classes. Finally, he is adored by the peasants, and I see no reason why you should give him the boot.

— I give him leave, because the bailiwick lawyer Strumpf has stirred up all the useless people in our Diet, and, as this is the greatest number, he has with him this greatest number to declare that Storch no longer has the confidence of the country.

— What has this unfortunate Storch done?

— There are no allegations against him of having done anything precisely

reprehensible; but they say it's worn out.

— I wouldn't mind learning what it's like to be worn out. Because, as far as I understand the meaning of words, this way of expressing oneself doesn't indicate a reason, it's a comparison. If Storch were eighty, I'd say: Storch is worn out, because his faculties have diminished with age. But Storch is forty-five, doing just fine, and has just written a big book that passes for a masterpiece in its genre.

— You may be right, but that doesn't mean it can't be used. If that word doesn't suit you, I'll say another and tell you that Storch is no longer the man for the job. If you still object that you don't know what it means to be the right man for the job, and that, without being a reason, it no longer even has the merit of being a comparison, I'll push condescension to the limit and assure you that Storch doesn't meet the aspirations and needs of the times.

— I'm giving my tongue to the dogs, admitting my inadequacy and stubbornly refusing to understand why Baron de Storch, who has administered the country for fifteen years, who for fifteen years has created a host of useful establishments and brought about a prosperity of which everyone is aware, is worn out, no longer has the country's confidence, is no longer the right man for the job, and does not respond to the aspirations and needs of the times. If he has all these mysterious faults, is there anyone who doesn't?

— Of course!

— And who is this fortunate mortal?

— Strumpf. How can you not see that Storch is everything I've just explained to you only because Strumpf wants to take his place?

— And you're going to put at the head of our interests and yours a rascal, lost in debt, separated from his wife whom he beat ignominiously, a gambler, a...

— No... no... Calm down, I won't give Strumpf that pleasure; but if he's not strong enough to force my hand to that extent, he's strong enough to open it and force me to let go of the excellent servant I'd like to keep. I must therefore form a new cabinet, and I have chosen a man who is perfectly suited to fill the leading role.

— Who was it?

— You.

The doctor jumped up from his seat. Consternation and surprise painted themselves on his features so eloquently that Jean-Théodore couldn't help but smile.

CHAPTER TWO

— I see," continued His Royal Highness, "that my proposal surprises you more than it pleases you, and, I confess, I was somewhat expecting it. So I'm going to explain to you what you don't seem to understand clearly.

Regardless of Strumpf's particular aims, what he calls his party, I imagine that an outsider to the Court has become indispensable. Well, you're a stranger to the Court. You belong to the bourgeoisie, you're a professor at the University, one of the country's notabilities, to use the adopted language, and even I've sometimes read in the newspapers that you're remarkable for the liberalism of your ideas.

— The origin of this compliment is, incidentally, rather curious," replied the doctor. I prevented the dismissal from the military hospital of an intern who was a good worker and really very well-educated, but nourished by socialist ideas. I insisted on this, because they wanted to replace him with a very wise young man, who could not be entrusted with the cure of a panarititis without imprudence. Since then, I've become a proven friend of the people. That's an axiom. The fact is, I despise politics.

— You see, you admit it yourself, you're popular. So you'll be Minister of the Interior and President of the Council.

— Your Highness, I beg you to think twice: if I ever put my finger into the machinery of government, I'd probably break every spring before it was an hour old. In my opinion, no one is as wrong today as governments, which pretend to imagine that riots are calmed with good manners, that jokers are disarmed by opposing them with paper machines, and that villains give up their projects when you give them speeches. You should know, Your Highness, that in 1674, the whole staff of a good and true revolution was on its feet in France. There was nothing lacking; there was a theorist, Van den Enden; a boastful man, Sieur Latréaumont; a schemer, my goodness, very active and of classical race, Sardan, the nephew of a bailiff; and finally a great lord to set things in motion and be hanged afterwards, named the Chevalier de Rohan. The *Gazette de Hollande*, and many other gazettes, supported the whole thing with the help of very nice libels, in which the French Grand Turk was not spared, and even regicide was openly preached in terms like these: "God will not delay in breaking a head so laden with enormous crimes."

— Why did it take another century to break out? Only

because in those days, society didn't give in to scoundrels. If he raised his head, he was heeled over. If they stretched out a hand, we cut it off. No government is possible under any other conditions, and it is a chimera, and the most inept of chimeras, to believe in a future state of affairs in which there will exist only governed people who are gentle, patient, moderate, full of common sense, reason and education, and who know the truth of things in order to embrace those who govern with integrity. As for me, I refuse to spend my days combining dangerous or sterile nonsense, and you certainly wouldn't allow me to follow the course of action mapped out by my convictions.

— My poor Lanze, if that's the way you think, you're fit to be locked up! Let's suppose for a moment that I had the slightest temptation to set fire to the principality by applying doctrines like yours; would the neighboring states let me? I'd receive advice after advice, injunction after injunction, and if I persisted, I'd be garrisoned. Every age has its problems; ours is to place at the top what was once at the bottom; to entrust strength to the weak, and to unravel or, according to what I see in your eyes, to pretend to unravel awkward situations with puns. What do you want? We must resign ourselves, and that's why Dr. Lanze, professor at the University, friend of the people and coryphaeus of the liberal conservative party, Dr. Lanze, I say, the advocate of a wise liberty, based on the loyal maintenance of our institutions and our rights, is going to appear this evening in the official gazette as head of the new cabinet.

— Your Highness, I promise you that one hour later, Strumpf is arrested, two hours later interrogated by a star chamber, and, at dawn, hanged on the citadel's glacis! If that suits you, I accept; if not, I refuse.

— You're joking, aren't you?

— I've never been so serious in my life, and what I'm doing about it is only to demonstrate to Your Highness the impropriety of entrusting great affairs to a being who is not a donkey, nor a snake, nor a goose, and who has two failings: to love the truth and his master. But don't get depressed, Your Highness! If I'm not right for the job, it's right for others, and I've got just the man.

— Who was it?

— Councillor Martélius.

— He has strong ties with the opposition.

— That's his main merit. You'll have no difficulty in moderating his zeal for your service, and he'll play head-to-head with all parties.

— If this is so, your opinion is worth pondering.

— Consider the question carefully from every angle. Martélius speaks well, not too well; he's intelligent, not too intelligent, and will only wear, for these two

to anyone. Since he doesn't really know anything about any issue, he hasn't formulated one of those stubborn opinions on anything that are embarrassing. With any colleague, he'll get on well enough, and by establishing things on such a footing that he's well convinced of gaining more by serving you than by following another interest, I believe that by keeping an eye on him you'll be able to have limited confidence in him.

— What you're telling me makes a lot of sense, and since you don't want to pay for it yourself...

— How, Your Highness, just when I'm about to enrich my country with a statesman, you call me a useless citizen!

— It's good, it's good, but I expected better from you. Just then, the cabinet door opened and a new interlocutor appeared on the threshold. He hesitated a minute, looked at the sovereign and Lanze, then entered. It was His Royal Highness's younger brother, Prince Maurice. A charming young man! He had pretty, head-set blue eyes, a slightly fat forehead, a slightly fat nose, slightly fat cheeks, but all of them deliciously rosy, fresh and velvety! And pretty blond whiskers, and a pretty blond beard, and pretty blond hair, with such pretty curls! His average height, well set, looked as if it would soon thicken, but was still at a very pleasing roundness.

Monseigneur le prince Maurice wore a jaquette of blue cloth, a white vest, gray pants, a sky-blue cravat, patent boots with gaiters, a white hat; on the cravat, a gold horseshoe pin; on the vest, a double gold chain holding the watch with some exquisitely tasteful charms, and, on the hand, a pair of fancy gloves, as befits the morning.

Prince Maurice walked over to the table before which His Royal Highness had returned to sit, so that the piece of furniture was between them. He looked embarrassed, and, seeing that his august brother said nothing to him, he decided to speak:

— You asked for me, so here I am. That doesn't make it any less annoying, because this morning I went to the photographer's to have my picture taken in this outfit. Well, if it doesn't take you long...

— I'll be a long time!" replied the Prince, throwing back his head with a commanding expression. I've warned you twice already to break habits that displease me. You thought you had to persist; you'll do six weeks' hard labor.

— Do you think it's fair, Lanze?" said the young prince, turning to the doctor.

He fixed his eyes on the carpet and followed the contours of the flowers with the tip of his cane.

— What kind of behavior is this?" continued His Royal Highness. You bring an absurdly luxurious carriage from Vienna... I say absurd because you haven't got a penny to your name! It's hardly if, putting everything together, you find yourself with fifteen thousand pounds of income! I give you, as aide-de-camp general, twenty thousand francs out of my cassette, but that's only thirty-five thousand francs, and I can stop tomorrow. What's all this nonsense about? A car! But a month ago, you were receiving two from Berlin! Three weeks ago, one from Paris! Do you think I don't see that you're spreading your debts too thin to make them bigger? And what about this tailor's bill sent to me from London? And what's this note from a manufacturer of necessities? And this jeweler who sells you a dozen bracelets, then I don't know how many medallions? Do you wear medallions and bracelets? Why all this business?

Monseigneur had seized the accusing memoirs from the table in turn, and as he did so, he presented them to Prince Maurice, who, seeming to take no pleasure w h a t s o e v e r i n the sight, bowed his head in contrition. As he made no comment and breathed no word, Monseigneur detached his stern, inquisitive gaze from him and, throwing the creditors' briefs back on his desk, began to walk around the cabinet, continuing his speech:

— I might admit the debts, but I don't admit the foolishness that caused them. I don't want to see my brother, to see a man of my blood, a prince! who eats what he has and what he hasn't, and who, one fine day, will have recourse to usurers, or will indulge in indelicacy for the beautiful purpose of harnessing himself in rags and appearing in public view in the outfit of a tailor's boy! You painted yourself into a corner with the first word you uttered on entering: you were going to have your photograph taken in a new suit! And that's how you spend your days!

— I need to distract myself, this country is boring and you don't want me to travel.

— Would you like to travel for some useful purpose? I'll send you off tomorrow!

— I'm not a laborer.

— No, but you're... I'm getting carried away and I'm wrong. Just one word! I forbid you to ever again see the woman you had dinner with yesterday at the Café Suisse after giggling at the theater.

— I knew I'd see this coming! I'll let you be the judge of that, Lanze; Miss Turtle and I went to the show, had our supper, didn't make a sound, didn't say a word to anyone, and went home. If anyone saw us, it's not our fault, but I defy anyone to accuse us of being conspicuous!

Jean-Théodore gave his desk a sharp blow and blew up what was on it.

— I don't know which to admire more, your baseness or your ineptitude! There's nothing to hope for from you. You're under arrest, give yourself up!

Prince Maurice became a little excited, and with a kind of animation that made him flush:

— This is tyranny!" he exclaimed; "you can't complain about me! I don't behave like Ernest. If I go to see Isabella Turtle, it's absolutely like you go to see Countess Tonska. What you do, I can do!

Dr. Lanze rose to his feet in a hurry, and only had time to step between the two brothers. Jean-Théodore, as pale as death, was seized by one of those fits of fury quite common among the best princes of his family, and of which it was said that, in this state, a Woerbeck was capable of anything. Indeed, he seemed on the verge of unleashing the last of his violence on the clumsy child who had unknowingly, unwillingly and without the slightest pretence of doing so, stuck his finger in the most sensitive spot of his wound.

The doctor said to him half aloud and with clasped hands:

— Take a good look at him, my lord! Such a runt!

At this word, Jean-Théodore stopped and showed the door to Prince Maurice, who left contritely, without realizing the storm he had just stirred up, or even trying to understand its cause.

He returned to the residence palace, took the stops like the good child he was, wrote Miss Isabella Turtle a break-off letter, and ringing his valet, set about studying with this trusted man the following problem:

— What clothing is appropriate to wear when under arrest?

After turning this question on its head, and at the discreet insinuation of his advisor, he couldn't resist the temptation to write a long and reasoned memoir to his tailor, in order to show him the most appropriate cuts and choice of colors to make him recognize at first glance that the unfortunate man covered in them could only be in the deplorable position he was in.

When the Prince was alone again with his confidant, he didn't go back over what had just happened, but in his busiest tone, he told him about Martélius, the trade advisor, and instructed Lanze to visit the indispensable figure immediately.

barracks.

Ten o'clock struck precisely when the professor returned home, having had no difficulty in persuading the great Martélius to accept the ministry and to run to the sovereign. Once this eminent service to the public had been rendered, the negotiator asked for his robe, which Dr. Lanze hastened to bring him, helping him to pull on the sleeves. This done, he unhooked one of his pipes, the one used on Wednesdays (it was, indeed, that day), filled it, lit it, opened the third volume of a new work on nervous diseases to page 549, and sank countless feet deep into meditative reading.

Meanwhile, her daughter Liliane, having finished putting away the cups and saucers and weighing out the sugar on the stove, had taken off her housewife's apron, folded it and packed it in her room, put on her hat and gloves, her parasol and a small shawl on her arm, and headed for the door, when her mother, who had put on her glasses and knitting and glanced from time to time at the double mirror placed in front of her outside the window, which showed her, without her bothering, the spectacle of both ends of the street, when her mother said to her with indifferent gentleness:

— Will you be back for dinner, Liliane?

— The truth is, I don't know. It depends on where I go, and I may accept an invitation.

With that, the mother added nothing, and thinking no more of it, Miss Liliane Lanze climbed out of her cage and flew away.

Mademoiselle Lanze was one of the prettiest little birds you could ever see. She was seventeen years old, slim, fine and light as a fairy; her beautiful, candid brown eyes, her serious mouth, her wavy, frizzy chestnut hair - everything about her was delicate, cute and exuded grace. She walked up Rue Frédéric, admiring the blossoming vegetation. Rue Frédéric, in Burbach, has many attractive houses, most of which have double-window facades painted pink or light blue; in addition, opposite the railroad, you can still admire the Hôtel de Bellevue, so favorably known throughout Europe as a veritable palace, and, next door, the Petit Parc, an admirable succession of lawns dotted with bunches of beech and birch trees, whose slender, spindly leaves produce the most ravishing effect above the flower beds.

The weather was warm; not a cloud could be seen in the sky. The finches in the trees showed their joy; on the ground, little store girls carrying their packages ran, employees on their way to their departments walked gravely, ladies passed by with dignity whom Liliane greeted, without

Finally, the lieutenants of the guard, dressed in small clothes and dressed to the nines, circulated unhurriedly, as people in charge of examining humanity in its various manifestations.

At the sight of these belligerent groups, Mademoiselle Lanze put on all her seriousness. It turned out to be a good, little, gentle gravity that made her even more adorable, so that the lieutenants were pierced through their breastplates and didn't know how to behave. Some turned red, others paled slightly, a few took on a victorious air; but these were not the best subjects of the weapon. There **w e r e** some, and more than one, who vowed to spend the night writing verses, and only two kept their word, because the others could never find anything but the first hemistiche: "O Liliane!" Among these exalted admirers, Mademoiselle Lanze wanted to single out just one, and her choice fell on Schorn's lieutenant. She responded to his profound greeting with a barely marked inclination of the head, but accompanied by a look charged with something solemn. He seemed to understand this, for he immediately **a s s u m e d** an air of penetration, and when the young marvel had turned the corner of the Rue du Commerce, he stopped, looked at his watch, took out his wallet and wrote: "June 26, 185... 11 hours 40 minutes in the morning! to be!"

Whether she had it or not, it's no less true that, when she arrived in front of the palace, Mademoiselle Lanze crossed the street, passed through the gate above which, amidst an interlacing of gilded iron foliage, could be seen the escutcheon of the sovereign coat of arms, and made her way towards the entrance on the left. A chasseur and two valets de pied rose, saluted deeply, and the chasseur, preceding Liliane with a noble and dignified step, climbed a staircase, passed an anteroom, crossed a salon, and, opening the door of a boudoir, announced: Mademoiselle Lanze!

Immediately a tall girl, dressed in black, who was reading from a black book, stood up briskly, and, throwing herself around Liliane's neck, cried out:

— A thousand welcomes!

This tall girl was Her Highness Princess Amélie-Auguste, only daughter of Jean-Théodore.

She was pretty, nineteen years old, dressed as shabbily as she could, always in black, nasturtium or dark lilac, and, when her father wasn't around, wore blue glasses. She prided herself on belonging, and it's distressing to have to admit that Liliane, the lovely Liliane, also belonged to a rather peculiar Protestant sect.

This sect had been imported to Burbach by a rascal called Schmidt. In some countries, those who belong to it are called "gay Christians", because they shout like scalded men about anything and everything, under the pretext of singing psalms. They insist that the heart alone and the love of God are necessary for salvation. Science is only good for developing pride, and as a consequence of this maxim, the police had once caught, according to the malicious tongues, Sieur Schmidt in the middle of a band of his followers, all holding hands, dancing, frolicking and singing around a pile of school books which they had set on fire.

Naturally, the gay Christians recoiled, calling the allegation a fable. What is indisputable is that Schmidt had eloquence and unction. He was as thin as a nail, as black as a mole, with big, beady eyes; but somehow, he appealed to women, especially young girls. His adherents, and especially his female adherents, compared him to the venerable figures of the primitive Church; the most zealous of the latter did not mince their words, equating him with St. John the Evangelist, to whom, in their opinion, he bore a striking resemblance. It's a shame to have to admit that Princess Amélie-Auguste and Liliane were perfectly of this opinion. As the exaltation of some and the uncertainty of others could not but result in a certain turmoil in the families, justice had several times deliberated to politely ask Saint John to return to Pathmos or to any other place of his choice, outside the limits of the principality; but the sovereign, whose mind was as moderate as his heart was vehement, still ordered to wait.

Nevertheless, the evening before, he had severely forbidden the young princess to attend Schmidt's sermons, and even more severely to let him appear in the palace. It was to weep over this tyranny that His Highness had written to Liliane in the morning to come and see her; she wanted to consult with her on how to obey God rather than men.

The two young neophytes had a very long conversation about this, and, unfortunately, could think of no resources. Their two little heads, in as flagrant a theoretical revolt as possible, provided them with absolutely nothing to get them out of their predicament; for the prince was giving them, both of them, a horrible fright, and, all the more, an intolerable additional penalty, as he had required poor Princess Amélie-Auguste, to dress in the future in a completely different way to Saint Paul or Saint Monica.

When Her Highness and her confidante had wept much and railed against the injustice and blindness of minds committed to the ways of the century, they resolved to dine together, and gave each other the pleasure of a meal quite

doctrines, in that nothing that had any life to it appeared. They modestly popped into their little mouths an astonishing quantity of butter cakes, and jams with streams of tea and milk. And still they talked about the well-known habits of true Christians, who lived, as we know, in the depths of the deserts, the only possible abode for a pious soul. At last, they had the ineffable joy of feeling themselves in such a state of holiness, that they were weeping with tenderness over each other, when the reigning princess entered her daughter's house and found the two friends in tears and embracing each other to their hearts' content. Her appearance had the effect of a glass of ice water thrown over the heads of the young enthusiasts.

Her Royal Highness, the reigning Princess of Wørbeck-Burbach, née Duchess of Comorn, resembled an incarnation of the Almanach de Gotha. It wasn't that she knew this excellent book by heart; it wasn't that she was too vain of her origin, which, naturally, she put above all comparison; it was that she knew only ranks and saw in people only their alliances. She was quite benevolent towards Liliane and her entire family, regarding them as palace furniture; only, it didn't occur to her that this furniture, speaking and moving, was, for these reasons, more precious or to be considered differently than other furniture. Her degree of interest in mortals was measured by their position at Court, and her natural history was classified as follows: emperors and kings represented the great mammals; gentlemen were associated with the lesser quadrupeds; non-noble officials in the State were naturally assimilated to birds and fish, and everything else was inert. The dear princess meant no harm to any of God's creatures, nor did she mean them any good; nevertheless, it never occurred to her to incriminate a merchant because he was an ant, or an artist because he was the equivalent of a cockchafer. It was not she who had arranged things in this way; she merely adored the ordinances of divine Providence and admired its works. For the rest, she didn't think about anything and spent most of the day indulging her passion for tapestry and crochet embroidery. She didn't dislike the Opéra or grand receptions, since lots of lights and gilded apartments and theaters seemed to her the most natural environments for the development of her large mammals and quadrupeds; she had never suspected that it might be useful to look for a meaning, and as for the people introduced, when she had asked them for news of their health or made some observation on the state of the temperature, and finally accorded the marks of attention legitimately due to their rank on the ladder, she had never thought that it might be useful to look for a meaning.

of beings, she fell into a smiling silence that seemed to her a just reward for the conscientious way in which she discharged her duties. She was a soul perfectly in tune with herself, a soul exactly balanced; she was a happy woman.

She had never felt anything but repulsion for her husband. Jean-Théodore worried her; she couldn't understand a word he said or did. She didn't fit in anywhere with his ideas. She liked peace, or rather torpor; and she felt a sensible relief when she saw this turbulent character detach himself from her and take his flames elsewhere. She didn't suffer at all from his infidelities; quite the contrary, for she had a revelation that many people pitied her, and, certainly, to unite with the benefits of insensitivity those of sympathy for a misfortune that causes you no suffering, there is nothing more completely pleasant.

She didn't love her daughter, but she didn't hate her either; in short, she suspected that the young princess had shocking affinities with Jean-Theodore. Of all the family, the one who pleased her most and bothered her least was Prince Maurice, because he sometimes spent an hour or two with her reeling wool.

Her Royal Highness, finally, to complete a portrait that cannot be done with too much care, due to the respect owed to the august model, possessed a unique, but very powerful and precious means of communicating with the thinking universe; she was extremely gossipy.

On entering her daughter's home, she deigned to respond to Liliane's deep bow by kissing the doctor's daughter on the forehead.

— Hello, little one," she said with a faded smile. "They told me you were at Auguste's, and I've come to talk to you.

Liliane adopted an attitude of passive obedience.

— My goodness, I'm not the least bit interested in what I'm about to ask you. Still, it's nice to know what's going on.

On these assurances of detachment, the princess began an interrogation, while continuing to move her hook.

CHAPTER THREE

— Could you tell me if it's true that your brother went to London to buy horses for the prince?

— No, Royal Highness. Monseigneur sent it to Florence. I think it's to make studies for the Museum's new hall.

— I'll tell you, little one, it was the Countess Dalburg who came to me with this gossip. I was sure there couldn't be a word of truth in it, because your brother can't get along with horses. I told the Countess this and told her it's quite true. But tell me, what is the meaning of Madame Tonska's sudden departure in the middle of the night? It's rumored that a postillion almost ran over a sentry in the dark, and I wouldn't be surprised. Is it true that the countess was hurried to Petersburg to become governess to one of the young grand duchesses? I'd rather believe that she's set off for Italy, following in your brother's footsteps; for, between us, well-informed people assure us that he's not displeased.

Liliane's pride was wounded. The little soul sensed that she had been given a rather misplaced confidence. Princess Amélie-Auguste turned red, and a spark that resembled the fire of anger ignited in her eyes. But she bit her lip hard and said nothing. Mademoiselle Lanze, after a moment's silence, replied to Her Royal Highness in a respectful but rather dry tone:

— Highness, I don't believe such things; in any case, no one has told me anything like this.

— If you don't want to talk, I won't force you; I'm only warning you that this is the talk of the town, and we're not talking about anything else.

— It's late," replied Liliane, with a redoubling of her stiffness, "and I must go home. I'll ask Your Royal Highness for permission to retire.

— Do as you please, dear girl, and don't forget to give my regards to Dr. Lanze. I know she has chosen a new cook from Countess Dalburg. May she be more satisfied than this one was!

Liliane had put on her hat, taken her shawl and parasol. She kissed the princess's hand, and Amélie-Auguste clasped it tightly to her heart.

went out.

She was incensed, and regarded her brother as a victim of the most odious calumny. She bitterly regretted, at that moment, that religious principles like her own were not present in Conrad's heart, to support him in what she considered a terrible ordeal. She imagined, in fact, that the whole town was busy, as the princess had told her, reasoning over the adventure of the young sculptor and the Polish countess, and she saw in advance the poor young man blamed by everyone and disgraced by the prince. As she crossed the Rue du Château, she saw Professor Lanze from afar, drinking beer and talking science with several of his serious friends in the large café under the trees and in the middle of the gardens. She also recognized the Prince, accompanied by an aide-de-camp and wearing, as usual, the uniform of his hussar regiment; he had just sat down at a table to drink coffee. She then met some of her friends, with whom she strolled for a while, and from whom she expected to hear some hint, more or less covert, of the sad things she was so preoccupied with. But none of the ladies breathed a word of it to her, which consoled her a little, and she thought, then, that the reigning princess had probably exaggerated, a phenomenon quite ordinary in the habits of the august lady.

Finally, Liliane returned home. She helped her mother prepare and serve supper. It wasn't difficult, as Dr. Lanze considered it a sacred dogma to light a fire in the kitchen only for dinner, so the evening meal invariably consisted of cold things. As she went back and forth, Liliane resolved not to say anything to her mother about the princess's remarks, half so as not to distress her, half, above all, because she would have found it very difficult to talk about such things herself.

Soon the professor returned. We dined in semi-silence. Old Lanze took his pipe, poured himself a large glass of Moselle wine, had his daughter play a few favorite pieces of music, read one or two pieces of Lenau's poetry with unction, declared it admirable and the product of a deeply human soul, and, at ten o'clock, gave the signal for retirement. Liliane retired to her room.

There, once alone and completely in control of herself, and having taken care to push the lock, Miss Lanze, instead of going to bed, sat down in front of her desk, loaded with photographs and flowers, souvenirs of all shapes and sizes, and small volumes artistically gilded; she opened a drawer by means of a cute key suspended from the chain of her watch, and brought to light a rather large notebook.

tied with dead-leaf ribbons. It was her diary. It will suffice to reproduce here the first lines of what she wrote that evening. Mademoiselle Lanze expressed herself as follows:

"O my soul! your impetus towards heaven is stopped! Impiety is unleashed around you, and, to top it all off, the devil, by his artifices, enlists the best of sovereigns in the name of the cruellest persecutors! And that's not all! ! An implacable destiny, relentless against you, shows you your beloved brother on the slope of an abyss; but, what am I saying? at this hour, he may have rolled to the bottom, and, then, he's lost forever!!!! ! Why so much pain? Wasn't that enough of my sorrows? I'm very young, alas! and yet I have a deep conviction in my heart: happiness wasn't made for me! ! ! "

This sad conclusion was unfortunately probable. Mademoiselle Lanze had only thrown herself into the most exalted religion because her most cherished wishes seemed impossible to realize. She was seventeen years old, as mentioned above, and her experience showed her that the men of this century were not worthy of absorbing sentiments she wanted to give without sharing, but in return for which she claimed, with justice, to receive the boundless devotion of the most sublime human nature. She had ascertained, by thoughtful examination, that such nature, it must be confessed, did not exist; for Schorn's lieutenant, himself! she had witnessed it! had chatted and laughed with one of his comrades, one day, at the theater, during the most beautiful scene from Schiller's *Marie Stuart*, and at the moment when, her eyes full of tears, she had turned to him and looked at him, in order to find a friendly emotion to match her own, hadn't Schorn's lieutenant leaned towards her and said, with the accent of the most vulgar joviality: "Look, mademoiselle, at the nose of that gentleman in the box opposite!" - No! that's it! men have no heart!

Unbeknownst to her, mademoiselle Liliane had an ideal of an irreproachable hero who looked rather like the candy-coated knights on display in the court confectioner's store. Probably, the habit of seeing these masterpieces of art every time she and her father or one of her friends went to the Swiss for chocolate, had gradually influenced her imagination. It's certain that the admirable turns of these statuettes, their caramel hair, their sugar-coated faces, their proud attitude, which in no way detracted from what was deliciously sweet and fundamentally fragrant in their person, did not fail to express, for a high intelligence and an elite soul, a quantity of superior perfections, and so far above the proprieties of humanity, that one could not even begin to imagine them.

It's hardly surprising that they don't more often emerge from the jam mold and take on the form of a real man. M. de Florian has noted their existence during the reign of Numa Pompilius, and even, not so long ago, during **t h e r e i g n** of Gonsalve of Cordoba. Unfortunately, Niebuhr and Prescott did not agree with him on such interesting matters, and there will always be some doubt as to the likeness of the portraits drawn by the Duc de Penthièvre's former page. All in all, and this is the most important point, if Mademoiselle Liliane had known Némorin personally, she had reason to believe that her soul would have been better off. From now on, she was condemned to solitude for the rest of her life. She would not have minded if Némorin had been called Schorn's lieutenant in this century, but that was something she had to forget, and Liliane was incapable of budging on a matter of principle. That's why she kept writing her diary until one o'clock in the morning.

At that moment, and as she heard the night watchman's rattle in the distance, shouting from the top of the cathedral, she resigned herself to seeking rest. She untied her hair, arranged it, twisted it and enclosed it in its white net. She lay down, pulled the sheet up to her chin and put her left hand under her cheek. A tiny tear (poor little thing!) slipped between her lashes, pressed together. She fell asleep; it's true! She fell deeply asleep, and, seeing how things were going, her guardian angel came down from heaven, looked at her for a while with a smile, drew the curtains a little tighter over her, bent down, kissed her on the forehead and flew home, having nothing to do.

Now that we know how things are going in Burbach, let's take a quick look at what Wilfrid Nore and Laudon are up to in Milan; we won't stop there, as the two friends do absolutely nothing **w o r t h** reporting. They visit museums, go to the theater, spend their evenings at the café, talk about Italy, fulfill all the duties of their profession as idle travelers, and take an ever-increasing liking for each other.

Laudon sensed that, despite having some, an efficient nature was stirring in this character so different from himself. At every turn, he felt that he was resistant to the hand and of a different temperament to his own; but, at the same time, he had a **g r o w i n g** impression of his solidity. When Nore expressed an idea, Louis rarely saw its source or its scope; generally, the idea seemed more strange than right; for what he called rightness necessarily had to be short, begin in the known and end in the banal. This sterility, which the French call precision, outraged Wilfrid.

did not blind him to the loyalty and uprightness that a sad upbringing and a false practice of life had not diminished in his fellow traveler. What's more, he liked his gaiety and valued his wit. So one reacted on the other, and Laudon was the one who gained more. Let's leave him in this situation and go back to the time when, a few years ago, Wilfrid Nore, leaving Baghdad, had left Harriet there, determined to break with him and so nobly perfidious in the midst of the tenderness of their last farewells. When she found herself alone, the pain of losing Nore had occupied Coxe's daughter and absorbed her first moments, days and weeks. She had been strong and resolute all her life, poor Harriet; yet she couldn't help thinking every minute: this was the time he came; yesterday he was here; a month ago, at this very moment, he said such and such to me.... He sat there...

One morning, while disturbing a piece of furniture, she found a glove of his. This was too much; she seized the relic, pressed it to her lips with both hands and burst into tears. However, her letter, which we read in the first part of this story, had been written and was gone. The resolution of which it was the pledge, this resolution to break with Nore and not to squint at the freedom, the future of this young man, had come to Harriet one evening when happy near her he had spoken to her, with excessive enthusiasm about the honor of serving his fellow citizens. He had given himself up to dreaming aloud before her. He had struck her with the exaltation of his young courage, with the nobility and elevation of his desires, and, as he spoke, and she listened with a tenderness whose greatness he himself could never have glimpsed, she said to herself:

- And I would attach myself to him like a fatal stone destined to ensure the death of his hopes? This being, so beautiful, so valiant, so full of fire, joy, strength and hope, I would force him to drag painfully through his triumphs an aged woman, who has never had any beauty, who hasn't lived in the world and who would be found out of place there, not without reason! I'd love him as I love him, and I'd see him blushing at me!... No! No! Never! That child mustn't accuse me and, once the first moment of illusion has passed, recognizing my self-interest and guilt, have the right to curse me!

Then she wanted to break up; then she wanted to devote herself to her lover; she found immense pleasure, albeit sad, in seeing him intoxicate himself with his love for her; she offered herself, as it were, as a holocaust, in all her best qualities - her soul, her spirit, her reason, her goodness, the wisdom that suffering and long sorrows had given her - to this adolescent who was entering life crowned with all the flowers, all the buds, all the hope, and she would have considered it a crime to disabuse him of this, when it was not yet useful to him.

remove the first of his congratulations.

She, however, was not quite as firm as she wanted to believe. She enjoyed the respite she gave Wilfrid; oh, how she savored this freshness of affection, this surge of tenderness so true, so sincere, so new, flowing like the milky streams of an idyll in the depths of a soul whose limpidity had not yet been disturbed by anything! It was not only for Wilfrid's sake that she was in no hurry to carry out her heroic deed; it was certainly for her own sake. She was so well loved! She was so completely cherished! She felt it, she understood it, she devoured it so avidly, this love! But, poor girl, it was the first flower of her life.

When the time came, and Nore had left for Europe, we had to make up our minds. Day by day, she had put off drinking the chalice. She had to drink it. When the time came to write her first letter, as she had promised, she had to choose: continue or break. She broke. She broke love, but held on to affection; she said to herself:

"How I cause him suffering! If he feels even the thousandth part of my anguish, how cruel he must find me, and how cruel I am! He's saved from me, no doubt, but what a hard rock I'm throwing him on! My Wilfrid! my only possession!"

She fell into such poignant grief, having cut the only golden thread that had ever shone in the weave of her days, that, sick, exhausted, her mind troubled, she lost, for a few weeks, possession of herself, and as it were transformed, became like another Harriet, quite different from the real one.

She would return relentlessly to her shattered happiness, that happiness which, in the end, had never taken on any reality; she would say: "Come! come back!" she would return to the dream and stretch out her arms in despair. In the night, in the darkness, in the silence, she would cry out to herself:

"No! No! No! I want to be happy! Why should I alone, in all of nature, in this vast, appalling nature, why should I alone not be loved? But I am, I am, vain shadows, wretched phantoms of false and mad ideas that slip between him and me! I do! He loves me! So let me cry out to him that I'm dying in my passion for him! What do you care if I die in his arms, on his heart, or on the tear-soaked folds of an abandoned bed, since I'm willing to die? Why should I be forced to reject the one who gives himself to me? Have I taken him from someone? Have I led him astray? He came, he begged me, he pressed me, he wants me, and I said no!

Fool! I said no! I tore the heart that loved me and mine, and if I had asked Wilfrid, before hitting him: Tell me! Listen to me!

Answer me! Speak to me in all the sincerity of your soul; do you want me to love you? But we'll die right away, because I don't want abandonment! Yes, Wilfrid would have cried out, as I do: "Well, love me and let's die!"

The shy, pure, chaste Harriet was struck with madness, and with that sacred madness which the goddess of Cyprus sent down in vengeful flames in the bosom of the daughters of Minos. This innocent, sweet creature was thinking what she would never have dared to hear, and what she would never have been able to express. Sick, really sick, she found it hard to get up, hard to support herself, even harder to come to terms with reality, and to fulfill the daily duties imposed on her by her father's care and her domestic duties; yet the first was never neglected, and the others were carried out as usual, in the right way, at the right time.

Not a word, not a monosyllable, not a complaint, not a gesture at any time betrayed the martyr's torture. She lost none of her dignity; the tumults of her soul could not lift a line, in their most extreme violence, from the weight of her wisdom, and so she was not a daughter of Minos, nor did she resemble in any way the turbulent, violent, expansive women who, in times gone by, made the woods, peaks and gorges of the Cithéron or the Hémus resound with the lamentations of their loves, or the arabesque-encased vaults of the palaces of Sardis or Miletus. She was a Saxon girl, made to conquer herself and others, and she did so; not without suffering, without claiming, complaining to herself, without experiencing the baking of all the prickles of the revolting imagination, but without wavering for a second in her resolve not to make others witness her failings.

She became seriously ill, and, as she was careful not to write to Nore, was seized by a gradual annihilation that seemed to unravel her limbs and dissolve her strength. The Resident's physician attributed this deplorable state to the influence of the season, and promised to reduce the worrying symptoms to nothing with a little quinine. Mr. Coxe, consumed with worry at seeing his beloved daughter in such a state, and fearing even worse, threw himself fervently into believing in medicine, and convinced himself that much could be expected of it. Quinine is indeed a good thing, but it is not a universal panacea, and it's hardly surprising that Harriet's recovery by this sole means has made little progress.

Better said, the progress was nil. Harriet's health was destroyed. In all temperaments, there's a kind of climacteric hour, when, depending on the action

circumstances, they are fortified or lost. Harriet had reached this fatal revolution when Wilfrid's love came to her. She was twenty-six years and a few months old. Having lived for many years in those unhealthy regions beyond the Ganges, where the strongest natures wear down over time like iron under the patient application of a file, she had, on the surface, defended herself quite well. But, in reality, fatigue had overtaken her; she needed rest, calm, happiness. She had glimpsed such a sweet state, even possessed it at times, when Nore was beside her and, closing her eyes to the future, she was content with the present, which could not last. Now she had lost everything.

Then, in the course of her life, what worries! She had had worries for her father; she had often seen him in danger in a thousand ways; she had had worries for her brother, whose youth had caused her so many worries! And yet, how much work the upbringing of this child had imposed on her! What fruitless studies to guide him and make him capable of practicing his trade! She had spent long evenings pining over dry books! Poor, poor Harriet! She had been an exile, an overburdened housewife, an anxious schoolmistress! How she needed love! How it would have lifted her, consoled her, healed her! She had broken it under the fingers of reason and honor.

After a year and more, she gathered what was left of her life and taste for life. It wasn't much. Nevertheless, she was able to get up, move around and do what she normally did. Her father, overjoyed to see her up and dressed, presiding over meals, concluded that soon his child's pallor and emaciation would give way to the beautiful colors and plumpness he had known her for, and, always saying to himself: she's better, she'll get better! he waited patiently and got used to seeing her as she was: beautiful big eyes, a waxen whiteness, an expression of celestial sweetness, something noble, yes, divine in her person. It was the seal of victory placed on one who had fought well. He could only secretly admire his daughter as God had left her to him.

Greek sculptors knew Beauty. They saw her sometimes moved, but by simple passions like her. They contemplated in this sublime image an upright intelligence, seeking little, finding what it wanted; the low foreheads, with powerfully developed temples of statues and of all those ligatures walked along the bas-reliefs, show no more. The thought of those times provided artists with an admirable, short theme. There were few ways of varying it; by reproducing it over and over again, they perfected the few details that were all the easier to render, and this is how ancient art reached perfection.

But we, less accomplished, less elevated, occupy more points, we see more ideas, we know more, and what we half guess extends infinitely further. Neither passions, nor feelings, nor needs, nor instincts, nor desires, nor fears have remained crouched on the humble degree where Plato's philosophy found them. Everything has risen, everything has multiplied. This people of winged geniuses, who lead us, direct us or lead us astray, are now called legions, and it is they who, kneading souls, reflect expressions and meanings on the human face that neither Praxiteles nor Phidias could have known. These masters would not have looked at Harriet's face if it had passed in front of them; for them, it would not have been Beauty.

It was Beauty, however, the Beauty of an era that is not that of joy, but that of life doubled and redoubled:

"A long cry of hope crossed the earth."

And this hope is that of escaping triumphantly from the embrace of evil, by enclosing oneself within the solidly built walls of a dominating will. This is what Harriet was doing, and this is why, no longer young, never having been beautiful in the classical sense of the word, she had become, through the exercise of thought, through the effect of suffering, through the vigor of resolution, this is why she had become more than beautiful.

CHAPTER FOUR

In time, indomitable necessity imposed a kind of peace on Harriet's heart. The missionary's daughter stopped going back over what she'd done and discussing it. She approved, without listening to herself, of having taken the only course reconcilable with what she considered her duty to Nore. However, she found it harder to accept the separation. We give up trying to increase happiness, to make it something other than it is, to say to destiny: you're not giving me enough! I want more! We make do with little, and we still take it upon ourselves to live with that little; but separation! but absence! What a land of emptiness, filled with ghosts!

If Nore had been there, Harriet, no doubt, would have been content never to marry him, an action her uprightness told her was absurd and sinful; he would have been there at least. She thought, and perhaps she was right, that she would have consented even to see him involved with another woman. In her solitary existence, with such a tormented heart, she dreamed a lot, detaching herself from reality as much as she could, and, under the various images she never tired of conjuring up and changing, she often pictured a state of affairs in which she would have been allowed to live with a married Nore, and she told herself that she would have adored his children.

But that he wasn't there, that she might never see him again, or at the very most, in a time so distant that hope would wear itself out walking that road, she could hardly resign herself to it. She wanted nothing more from him than to see him, and, unable to and unable to foresee when that might be, her heart, though tamed, clenched again, tears filled her eyes, and she underwent, in the sad hours when her thoughts attached themselves to this new truth, a slow, dull, prolonged torment, which almost equalled in pain her terrible despairs of the previous months.

Wilfrid's letters hadn't brought her much relief. The angry, violent, accusatory language of this disappointed child had rather nourished his passion, authorized his revolts than satisfied his soul. When more calm appeared in these less frequent messages, Harriet sometimes took it badly, suspecting an incipient indifference and taking offense as if she hadn't ordered it herself. Then Nore's way of writing became that of a tender, attached friend, and no flame burst forth in the words; poor Harriet then said to herself that Wilfrid no longer loved her. She shuddered to see a sad correspondence that already failed to satisfy her cease altogether.

the only light that could still shine in his life.

I'm wrong in saying, so absolutely, that her friend's letters didn't satisfy her. Sometimes a word, a single word, suddenly discovered, vividly grasped, illuminated the four pages. What Nore was saying always interested her infinitely less than what she thought she was discovering by the use of certain expressions, by the arrangement of certain sentences, by the more or less hurried, more or less slow progress of the writing. Between the lines, she read things that were often distressing, sometimes conscientious and, here and there, poignant in the happiness they caused her. No doubt she no longer wanted to be loved by Nore as she had been; no doubt, no doubt; but what did she want? They didn't say what they said; they didn't contain what they seemed to contain; they carried joy or pain in their folds. During the night, the cold, calm, stern Harriet clutched the thin paper passionately to her heart and lips. She wouldn't have dared do it in broad daylight.

But then a great event happened. She had never foreseen anything like it; indeed, she had never given it much thought, believing it to be impossible. Her father, though in no way guessing the feelings that absorbed her, had understood that the stay in Asia had become more and more unbearable for her, and the Resident's doctor, at his wits' end, was repeating emphatically that Baghdad was killing her, and that a trip to her native country was a real necessity for her. At first, Coxe was appalled by this decision. He had been sent to Asia to distribute Bibles; he distributed Bibles and lived; but if he interrupted his distribution for a single day, it was clear that neither he nor any of his people would live. On the other hand, Coxe found it hard to let his daughter die of languor or starve to death with her.

In an embarrassment which, for this affectionate and loving nature, was becoming a real torment, Coxe took a violent decision, and one of which he himself would never have believed himself capable. He was shy beyond expression, and had never asked anyone for anything; the poor man never imagined such an indiscretion possible. Yet he did it; his tenderness for Harriet overcame everything, and elevated him to the point of heroism. Without saying a word at home, like a confessor of the primitive Church who had gone alone to the amphitheater with the deliberate intention of being devoured by a tiger, Coxe, flushed, pale, disproportionately disturbed, went to pay a visit to the Resident.

The latter knew little of the missionary, but knew him to be worthy of esteem. He received him warmly, and showed a willingness to listen to him with

benevolence. Coxe summoned his courage and explained that unfortunate family circumstances made him wish to spend some time in England. He had at first resolved not to enter into the details of his thoughts, nor even to say the cause of them, confining himself to hinting at them; for what appearance was there that a Resident of His Britannic Majesty, so great a personage, could condescend to take an interest in the illness of the poor daughter of a simple missionary? However, he didn't keep his word; he became emotional as he spoke, and confessed that he was afraid his Harriet would die if he didn't take her away. He was sorry; for he had nothing to live for but his profession, and if he left, what would become of him? And yet, what could be resolved?

The Resident had listened with genuine interest:

— You'll need to ask your company's directors for a leave of absence.

How long have you been in Asia?

— Eighteen years, sir.

— And you never interrupted your duties?

— No, sir," replied Coxe, "and I can assure you that I would continue them to the best of my ability, as I have done hitherto, were it not for the misfortune under which I am succumbing.

The Resident understood that Coxe considered it monstrous to apply for leave after serving only eighteen continuous years.

— I'll take care of it," he says, "I'll write to London myself and send you the reply.

Coxe thanked him very badly, because gratitude choked him and cut off his speech, then he went home, kept his approach a secret and waited anxiously for the results. There were times when he saw everything as rosy, when he flattered himself that he'd get nine months' leave, including the time it took to get there and back, with half pay. Four months would be quite enough, provided Harriet used them conscientiously to look after herself.

After three months, the Resident sent for him. Coxe guessed what it was all about. He felt as if he were about to faint, and had the greatest difficulty in reaching the lounge where he was expected. The Resident handed him a dispatch.

He was granted a three-year leave of absence with full pay. All he could do was shake hands with his protector who, understanding what was happening, pushed him into an armchair where Coxe fell rather than sat, seeing the sky wide open, where, angel-like, the Resident and the directors and shareholders of his Company were fluttering on clouds. Hearts of this kind never perceive that the good they receive and immediately pay for in

blessings and gratitude, without seeking either the manner or the motives. At last Coxé came to, found a few words to say to his benefactor, more than paid already by the expression on that venerable old face, and went home.

Now the big job was to get the news to Harriet.

Was it necessary to reveal it to her all of a sudden, there and then? Oh, heavens, no! He might kill her! Judge the emotion! What a surprise! She didn't even know her father thought of anything like this. And such success again! No, it was necessary to find a clever way, to proceed with moderation and caution, not to confess too much at once, to drag out the confidence for eight days, and to arrange it in such a way that, when it was made, it would cause only calm pleasure, so skillfully would the transitions have been spared.

Coxé, having thus prepared himself, entered Harriet's sitting room and came to sit beside her.

— What's the matter, Father?" she said. You seem very cheerful, and I've never seen you like this.

But Coxé, sinking into his dissimulation, replied with depth:

— No! Harriet, I'm not very cheerful. I just wanted to tell you that three months ago I thought of asking for leave to spend some time in England.

— And you received a favorable response today? Coxé remained dismayed.

— Who told you?" he exclaimed.

— But you, Father," she replied, smiling. You tell me what you did three months ago, and I see you're very happy. I take it you've been granted what you asked for.

Coxé muttered to himself the title of an old Spanish comedy: "A woman is a devil," and he remained pensive, unsure whether to advance or retreat.

— Please speak!" cried Harriet in turn, actually quite moved; "what have you been told?

— Three years' leave and full pay!" said Coxé despondently, as he expected Harriet to turn pale and faint.

She didn't lose consciousness; she clasped her father's hand and didn't utter a word. In her mind, she had run straight to the altar of her dreams: I'm going to see him, she thought. Outside, nothing appeared; she was hemming a napkin; she continued.

Coxé, reassured, made plans; Coxé, for the first time, thought of having fun! He expressed his desire to stop off in Italy to visit the masterpieces of the arts; he wanted to see them all! He would go to the Vatican; he would also go to the Ambrosian; he would

would certainly not forget Laurentian, and, God forbid, he would not take, with a hand trembling with emotion, a few notes on Saint-Marc's own manuscripts! As he spoke, he looked at Harriet, trying to make sure she wasn't suffering more than usual. Poor excellent man! He didn't know himself at such things; he remained worried and blind; his daughter answered him with her lips; his heart was far away, and so these two beings who cherished each other were not together, although next to each other, and treated almost as a misfortune the greatest subject of joy that heaven had yet granted them.

When she found herself alone, Harriet tried to understand her situation and to plan ahead. It was now six years since she had been separated from Nore. He was in America; but he was going back to London. She would see him. Was this a good thing? Was it bad? Was it happiness? Was it, on the contrary, a preparation for new suffering? Surely, whatever it was, it was not pleasure, but a solemn situation of violent, strong, serious impression that she was entering. She didn't think for a moment of going back over the past, of trying to change anything in the position she had chosen for herself, nor of modifying the passive, unattached affection she had asked of Wilfrid and was accepting from him alone. There was no question of expecting more. But how would she feel?

Thoughtful and prudent, she knew the full extent of the peril; she was afraid. At times, she would have preferred never to see her lover again, and to be content with living with the past, and what the young traveler's letters still brought her, cherished perfumes. At other times, she would say to herself:

— Well, I'll suffer; what else can I do? A little more, a little less... I'll see him again! He'll be indifferent; not cold... less than cold... indifferent! He won't even wonder if, by chance, I haven't deceived him; if this heart doesn't still love him, faithfully, without expectations! without desires, without the will to receive anything, oh! but always!... He won't ask himself anything like that! He will speak to me of other people, of people who are more important to him than I am, as he does in his letters... Lady Gwendolen is so pretty!... Poor Harriet! Yes, but he'll be in front of me, sitting there... in front of me... he'll talk to me... I'll hear the sound of his voice... I'll see his gestures... That the man who succeeded the teenager must be... Oh, what a fool I am!

And indeed, she saw him in advance; eyes fixed, head bowed, she saw him, looked at him, heard him. The way she had lived for six years... lived!... ah! rather, the way she was dying, was a kind of ecstasy which, at this moment, was redoubling in intensity.

In the end, however she took what her father had just told her, she couldn't change anything, and it would have been neither reasonable nor natural to make a

opposition to what she must have considered, in everyone's judgment, the happiest event for her family and herself.

She therefore accepted the compliments of her compatriots. Coxe wrote to his son, then stationed in Poulo-Pinang, to inform him of her new situation, and as soon as an opportunity to travel without too much fatigue had been arranged, Harriet and her father left Baghdad and headed for Europe.

There are many different ingredients and complicated springs in human nature. Harriet was keenly interested in her first contacts with this Europe, abandoned for so many years. When she arrived in Italy, she experienced some charming emotions. Whenever her father was not afraid of tiring her, he would take her to the museums and under the vaults of those marvellous churches whose walls still speak of the genius of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, and with what voices, and to spread the effusions of what geniuses! She was less enthusiastic about these walks and visits than Coxe, but she was nonetheless moved by them too, and besides, seeing her father so happy meant a lot to her. So she lent herself to whatever excursions and studies he wanted, as much as her strength would allow.

They also visited the southern cities of the Peninsula, and at about the same time as Nore returned from Mexico and landed in Southampton, they arrived in Rome.

One morning, they finished breakfast. The gardens stretched as far as the eye could see, with their cypress trees, and the domes of the churches and the majestic walls of a few ruins drew the eye to the reddish horizons of the Roman countryside criss-crossed by aqueducts. Newspapers and letters were brought in, and among them was one from Wilfrid with an English stamp. Harriet took it and read the following:

"Well, dear Harriet, you've made up your mind to get out of your Asian cave, just as I'm getting out of my American swamp. It's well done to you, certainly; I hardly expected it; but I'm not allowed to doubt it, for I find here a package, and, waiting for me for six months, the whole series of your missives relating to this great event. I have the complete development of the story: first opinion from Baghdad; second opinion from the same place with critical considerations on this problem: wouldn't it be better not to leave at all, out of respect for habits already established and fear of habits to be established; letter from Beirut, letter from Malta, finally letter from Bologna. I'm writing to you now in the eternal city, since you must be there as well.

be, and I like to think that Mr. Coxe, faithful to his wanderings, which must have become as imperious in him as the other movements of nature, will not have failed to offer an English Bible to the Holy Father.

"Mexico, I assure you, is a pleasant country; one is almost certain to be murdered there within a reasonable time. I'll come back when I'm tired of life. In the meantime, I'm very cheerful. I'm going to spend a fortnight at Wildenham with a cousin, and then, if you'll allow me, I'll pay you a little visit. Is that agreed? Farewell, then.

" W. N. "

This was one of the letters that caused Harriet the most grief. She did not like the tone of persiflage that had developed in Wilfrid, and had taken the place of the bursts of exaltation to which he used to give himself up at every opportunity. She didn't understand that her friend had suffered the effects of the surrounding world; that he had suffered a great deal and no longer cared to expose what he felt in contact with fools and villains, and that, hiding his individuality within himself, he held it securely under a rough, stinging shell of irony and aggression.

Harriet was especially hurt when, in her lightness of language, Nore seemed to step out of the deep respect she herself had for her father, and not only suffered for herself, she then secretly accused the one she loved of having lost the power to understand and venerate virtue.

Lastly, and we should not swear that this last grievance was not the most considerable, she suffered to see Nore go to Wildenham, instead of asking him (which she would have found inappropriate, had he done it) to come and see her at once, in Italy, and this fault, this fault? no! this fault? no, not even this fault; well, this action, which she didn't qualify, was aggravated by the fact that Nore didn't say a word about Lady Gwendolen and didn't seem to give her a thought, whereas on the contrary, it was obvious that it was her whom he and wanted to see again immediately. Here was a woman who had no pretensions to being loved, who had declared it, imposed it, and who, for the sake of her life, would never have consented to confess a single movement of this heart which, for seven years, had been slavishly acquired for Nore and put on the fast track to cease beating in despair of love. But of all that makes up the human mechanism, the most perfected part is surely the one responsible for confusing and disappointing the rest.

Harriet didn't want to go out that day. Her father, finding her paler and more concentrated than usual, refrained from pressing her, and, sighing, went away.

Then, seeing herself alone, Harriet sat down at a table and replied, as follows, to Nore's letter:

"I am very pleased, dear Wilfrid, that your first thought on returning to England was to see your parents again. I have always urged you to have your main affections there; my heart, which has never deceived me when it comes to you, tells me: your future happiness will come from this side. I wouldn't want you to be too hasty in coming here. My father would undoubtedly enjoy it, and so would I, as you know. But, also, you have better things to do than to change your plans and disturb your life, to meet people surely outside your existence. An old and fleeting affection is their only right to your memory. You don't owe us much, remember that. We'll probably meet again. It doesn't have to be tomorrow, or the next day, or in a month, or later. Since we have to stay in Europe for three years, there's no need to hurry. My father is finishing his great work on the Burmese; he will go to London next winter to publish it. If you're not on the continent by then, you're welcome to stay with us. Drop me a line sometime. We'll be leaving for Florence in a few weeks. I'd like to think that I'm still with you on something. I don't ask for much, but I wouldn't want to be forgotten altogether. Farewell, dear Wilfrid; perhaps I'm boring you by writing at such length. Forgive such a talkative old friend.

"HARRIET."

This letter was mailed and did not find Nore in England; he had only passed through, had not gone to Wildenham, and had immediately set off for Italy. Then, all of a sudden, he had changed his mind; being in Turin, he had turned back towards Paris, and, barely in Paris, had left for Naples; but he had not stopped there and had headed for Corfu; there, he had again found himself ill at ease probably, for he had conceived the project of visiting Venice, and from Venice he had come to the lakes where we met him. It was in Milan that Harriet's letter reached him.

One morning, with Laudon, having asked for his correspondence at the post office, he found his friend's lines and yet another missive. His companion got one too. They sat down on a bench under some trees and began to read independently.

When Nore had finished what Harriet had told him, he remained thoughtful for quite a long time; then he put the letter back in its envelope, enclosed it in his wallet and placed the whole thing in his side pocket. This done, he looked at the second

and recognized her cousin Lady Gwendoline's large, imperious and messy handwriting.

The moment he opened it, an exasperated scent of thirty-eight thousand extraordinary perfumes wafted out like a legion of pink devils. The paper bore a figure two inches high, red, blue, green, gold, silver, and was itself only three inches long. The total composition of the masterpiece formed a ten-page manuscript:

"Well, my august and wise cousin, what is Your Grandeur up to? Know that since your kind declaration that you would not come to Wildenham to tell us of your Mexican misdeeds, I have been amused beyond all possible expression. Lacking your affected originality, we've been compensated by an invasion of the truest originalities. We've got everything: first-class elegance, artists, soldiers, politicians and a poet who's a pretty good whist player. Every evening, in my respectable mother's salon, there's a concert of platitudes to die for. The winner of this year's Derby has asked for my hand! I think he's good enough to flirt with, but I have every reason to believe that, in the end, I'll decide on another of our guests, whose name I won't mention in order to intrigue you. He's quite honestly in love with your maid, that one!

But before I say "yes" to your proposal, it's not out of the question for me to present you with the state of the question, so that you can enlighten me with your incomparable insights. Just don't count on it. Do you think it's absolutely necessary to make someone else happy, when you're determined above all to make your own? It's subtle what I'm asking of you, but, at the same time, as practical as anything you should expect from a person as perfectly distinguished and well-bred as the one who has the honor of calling herself, my dear Wilfrid, your devoted cousin,

"GWENDOLINE NORE."

The reader of this epistle remained pensive for a few moments. He was so absorbed in his meditations that he certainly didn't notice his fingers at work. This work consisted in tearing his beautiful cousin's confidences so small, so small, that the monument to modern papermaking littered the earth in atoms. Nore's deep reflections may not have been about Lady Gwendolen. Laudon called his friend back to this world, exclaiming with conviction:

— She's an angel worthy of adoration!

— Who?" says Nore.

— Madame Genneville, "said Louis, showing her the letter he had just finished reading.

— Would you allow me to read you what is most delicate in the mind and most lovable in the heart?

— You don't turn down good fortune like that," replied Wilfrid. Let's hear it.

— This is what that lovely woman wrote to me," murmured Laudon:

"Sir,

"We really miss you. M. de Genneville doesn't know who to talk to and I don't have anyone to help us choose our walks. We talk about you and that comforts us. M. de Genneville claims that if you follow his advice, he'll be responsible for your future. Please do. You know how much we shall enjoy seeing you in the world, occupying the place to which you are entitled. A man in your position is made to render the greatest services to society, and it's certainly not you who would want to refuse it once you've given it some serious thought, which I'm afraid you haven't yet done. But how we'll make you do penance this winter! We're counting on you, sir. And, by the way, Madame de Longueuil asks me what's become of you. Did you know that she's lost her aunt and now has a hundred thousand francs in annuities and the beautiful Château de Longueuil to boot? That's a consolation for a lot of little afflictions?

What do you say? Farewell then, and think sometimes of true friends, among whom you will allow me to count myself.

"BLANCHEFORT DE GENNEVILLE."

— How do you like that?" exclaimed Laudon, closing his letter.

— Delicious!" replied Nore. I'll have to leave you for a few days.

— Any business?...

— Yes, a business deal. But I'll be here... let's see!... yes!... by the end of the week.

— Nothing unpleasant, I hope?

— Not at all.

— Well then, when are you leaving?

— Right away.

— What do you mean, right now? Right this minute? Stand there on that bench, peacefully rereading that letter that seems to charm you; not the one you tore up, the other one!

— No, thank you very much! I haven't got the time. I'm off. Bye, guys!

With that, Nore shook hands with a slightly surprised Laudon, and left.

CHAPTER FIVE

Mr. Coxe and his daughter had been in Florence for two days when, one morning, the door opened and Nore entered.

— Hello Harriet," he said, "how are you?

She didn't answer; she gave her hand to the newcomer and imperceptibly squeezed his, then, after a few seconds, smiled gently and said:

— How you've grown, Wilfrid, and become strong! The child has disappeared.

— It's about time," Wilfrid replied, sitting down beside his friend. He was still holding her hand and looking at her with deep attention. There was complete silence. The steady beat of the clock could be heard.

— How's Mr. Coxe doing?" asked Nore.

— Oh, very good. He went to visit some museum.

— Is he interested?

— A lot.

— I'm delighted. Will you be staying in Europe for three years?

— I suppose so, Wilfrid.

— And then you'll go back to your old life?

— Certainly.

— Are you happy with this prospect? Do you accept this life that isn't a life at all, this perpetual break with everything that could please you and tie you down, this lack of familiarity with what's worth staying for in this world?

— We live as we can, where we can; the important thing is to submit to what we must.

Wilfrid approached the window and looked out over the square.

Harriet thought: He hasn't even kept a friendship. Why did he come? As if he'd heard the question, Nore returned to his place beside Harriet, and, assuming the disinterested air that had become his habit, he said to her with the utmost calm:

— I've come, Harriet, to find out if you're anything like your letters. These are of the most absolute placidity. They seem written by a deity dwelling above the region of clouds, and therefore of storms; what they contain is wisdom, and of this wisdom, if it could be distilled, an elixir would be made capable of transforming the whole race of men into impeccable and infallible philosophers. Allow me to

confess that I do find you pale and changed, and if you had used some of the time you spent perfecting your mind to defend your health, I'd congratulate you.

This little speech made a singular impression on the woman to whom it was addressed. It turned the tables. She felt strength in it, and Northern women, in particular, adore strength in those they love. This tall boy, sitting before her at this hour, not only looked resolute, he also had a purpose. Until then, she'd thought of him as a child in need of her help; she'd written to him in that tone; he'd never asked for it; she understood her mistake; he was a man and she a woman. In her heart of hearts, this remark pleased her, and she willingly abdicated; looking up with a sort of shyness, she thus replied:

— It's true, I've been a bit ill, Wilfrid. But I'll be back on my feet in no time. All I need is a little care.

— You'll have plenty," said Wilfrid, "and I'll take care of it. She laughed:

— How nice for you! For how many days?

— For the rest of your life and mine.

— What meaning do you expect me to attach to such exaggerated words?

— They are not exaggerated in the least; I intend to obtain your hand in marriage, and it seems natural to me that a husband should be perpetually concerned with your personal happiness, which has been too neglected until now.

As she spoke, Nore looked into Harriet's eyes; she understood that it was serious and decided in advance, and that a refusal would not find easy submission. Troubled in every way, at the very moment when she believed herself certain of no longer having even the slightest shred of Wilfrid's heart; no longer having expected to see him, seeing him other than she had known him ; at bottom, seized in the fullness of her being by an irresistible transport of happiness, she knew at first only to bow her head, and, unable to articulate a word about what she wanted or thought, never was a human creature thrown further and further outside her own possession.

However, at the end, she put her hands over her eyes, leaned her elbows on the small table in front of her and murmured in an almost indistinct voice:

— Wilfrid, let's not go back over what's finished.

— Nothing's over, and I'm not going back to what I never left. Do you like reason, Harriet? Then I'll talk reason with you.

He took her hand again, which she defended weakly; she was too moved. For his part, he had blushed slightly, his eyes shone, his soul was all in his gaze and would vibrate in his language.

— Why don't you love me anymore?" he said, "why don't you love me? I've never loved anyone but you, never thought of anyone but you. For years, I've left you; I've looked the world over to see if I could find another woman ready to give me only half of what I've seen and desired in you. I've looked in good faith, but I haven't found her; I know she doesn't exist, this nature so desired of mine and which can bring me up to the only kind of happiness created for me. What do you want me to do but repeat: I want to live with you.

— I don't love you," Harriet murmured, still holding her head low and with the accent that repels an untenable allegation.

— Yes, you love me; but I see you, I understand you, I know you! Misplaced generosity and thoughtless devotion reduce you to a sacrifice that saddens you. Because you suffer, you think you're doing the right thing. Don't persist! Your misfortune and mine, yes, mine forever, would be the only result of your miserable heroism. You're older than me, in a few years, you think (perhaps you even go so far as to say in a few months), the young husband would feel no more for his too serious wife than the concern resulting from an ill-proportioned union. Do you think, then, that I am looking for honeymoon pleasures in you, that I have a whim for you, that resistance excites my fantasy? I don't need such childishness; I can't do without a friend. I need a friend! someone with a heart of gold, sure, pure, tested like gold! I've found Harriet; she has that heart; I know it, I guessed it, I understood it years ago. How blind I would be to leave such a treasure buried in her cruel self-denial, when I cannot do without it! My Harriet, my beloved, do you want words of reason? You can see that I'm giving it to you. Let yourself be persuaded; you defied the child whose character, changing with the years, could take away love; character has changed, no doubt, and man has let many a reverie fall by the wayside; but, you feel it, don't you? love has remained. For me, it's like the holy ark was for the Hebrews. The generations of believers died successively around it; the divine house, carried everywhere among the travelling tents, in the deserts, stored at random in the huts, saw the landscapes around it change; yes! but it didn't change, and one day it found itself placed in the most beautiful temple that ever was! Well then! Harriet, you can rest assured that it's the same for you! My holy ark is my affection for you. I've always kept it, I've always venerated it; it has guided me in everything; it's the star of my life. I want to rest forever under its rays, the sweetest, the most beautiful.

caressing light! And if you love me, and if you're fair, you can't oppose me with suspicions I don't deserve.

Harriet dared not answer directly; her heart was too full. She felt so weak before Wilfrid's language, and the penetrating sound of that voice, which filled her with emotion and drew her out of all her wills!

— How romantic you've remained, Wilfrid!

— Romanesque! Why do you ask? Am I less of a man because I seem different from the model on which my contemporaries are modelled? What do they have in common with me? Romanesque! Because I don't care about their greatness, or their lowliness, or their distinctions, or their humiliations, or their elections, or their means of making a fortune, or even their fortunes, or their setbacks! I'd be a romantic if, conceiving my desires according to a childish imitation, I mingled them with the things of common life, constantly prepared to abandon what would only be dreams for banal realities, from which I'd neither know nor want to detach myself; but, thank heavens! nothing like that exists, and you know it well! It may be that creation, which throws many disparate seeds into the mix, was mistaken about me, and, having prepared me for an entirely different environment, inadvertently dropped me into this one; but, in any case, here I am! I am me and not someone else, feeling in my own way, understanding things with my own intelligence, and as incapable of giving up what I once wanted, of abandoning the pursuit of what I once desired, as incapable of proving myself wrong as I am of giving up an hour's breath of air! Surely, Harriet, if I wanted to forget you, I couldn't, and I'd have to return, repentant, obstinate, to the trail I never had the power to abandon! Is that what you call a romantic trait? I'd have thought that a virile character should be especially marked by it, but I won't argue about the words; romantic, yes; let's admit that I am; at least, I'm permanently so, and that's certainly no more frightening for those to whom I commit myself than if I had the unbridled passion to play the Stock Exchange or to select my future companion from among the heiresses. Take me as I am, assured of the uprightness of my intention; I can't deceive you, I never will, and... don't cry, my darling, and answer me that you want me!

It was true; tears rolled gently down Harriet's cheeks, but they were no longer painful tears. The poor girl felt overwhelmed by a happiness she'd never thought possible. It was a powerful, strong, ravishing sensation, surely the same as that with which the demigods were penetrated, when, seized by the celestial eagle of Olympus, they saw before them eternal Youth pouring ambrosia, the sacred beverage, into their veins,

divinized their being. To be loved! What a word for a living soul! She felt strong and answered:

— I believe you; we believe what pleases us, and besides, how can I distrust you? But, my friend, I assure you, happiness comes too late; I have neither the strength nor the will to take it. I wouldn't know what to do with it; I'm so overwhelmed by the one you give me that in truth I couldn't receive any more. Think of who I am and what I am; how could I ever become Wilfrid Nore's wife? I hope, it's true, that my heart has kept a little out of the pettiness of the existence to which I've had to submit; but, nevertheless, my habits have yielded to it; I'm quite naturally the daughter of a poor missionary from India; I have, in everyday life, both the ideas, and the morals, and the precautions, and the prudences, and the parsimonies. But when I act, then, Wilfrid, I know too well, I'm meticulous, timid, and I can't, despite my good will, stop practicing what I've had to learn and put into practice for so many years, so that my father, Georges and I could live. I deplore my shortcoming and judge it all the more because, for some time now, it has become useless, even harmful to myself and others; yet the fold persists and I can't manage to undo it. No! first in this, then in a thousand other things, we don't suit each other. Believe me, don't seek the impossible, don't pursue what is worthless to you. You've made me very happy! I may be wrong to admit it, but I'm even more wrong to feel it. Let's stop, Wilfrid, and fear to go any further.

— Have you made up your mind?" exclaimed Nore.

He looked so glum, and his face showed such obvious sorrow, that Harriet was startled:

— Have you made up your mind?" he continued as she stared at him; "in that case, I won't press you any further, but I can't take a wound without giving it back.

— Give it back? To me?

— To anyone who touches me. Here, understand your punishment: I swear to you, by what is most sacred in the world, that, considering you as my wife, in spite of your insane refusals, I will never, no, never, ask any other...

— No oaths!" she said, putting her hand over his mouth, "no oaths! You're subjecting me to a strange punishment. I'd never have supposed that such a test could be imposed on me. Come on, Wilfrid, do you want this? Do you want it with a strength you show me only too well?

— I certainly do.

— Don't ever accuse me of giving in! I just won't leave my father; what would become of him? He can't go back to Asia on his own. We've got to give him time to sort out his affairs and get a pension.

— All this tends towards detours; but, if I were too insistent, you'd say... What wouldn't you say? So, you want to wait some more? Let's wait! How many more months?

— Do I know?

— Right! I'll take care of your father's business, and when I've finished, will everything be in order?

— We'll see!" replied Harriet, smiling; "you haven't become much more reasonable than you were in Baghdad.

— No, but by some strange phenomenon, I've become much less patient. At least you gave in, in good faith, didn't you, if not willingly?

Harriet held out her forehead and shook his hand; all was said.

Just then, Coxe entered. He was in one of the most agreeable moods a man could be in. He had just admired some beautiful paintings and carefully measured the proportions of an antique statue; in addition, he had read the newspapers and even the *Times*. His faculties were in perfect working order. As he opened the door, convinced that he would find his daughter alone, and ready to tell her of the joys of his day, he saw Wilfrid, and not only saw him, but saw him holding Harriet in his arms and kissing the dear girl.

It would have been far easier for a camel to wander up and down the eye of a needle, than for poor Coxe to let the shadow of an evil thought enter his candid soul; so he stopped on the threshold, surprised, but by no means scandalized. However, the lovers had not expected to be interrupted in this way, and they remained undecided for a moment. It was Nore who said to Harriet:

— Don't you want to tell your father anything, darling?

— My father, Mr. Nore and I are committed.

Coxe opened inordinate eyes, gazed rapturously at his daughter, did the same of Wilfrid, and exclaimed:

— Oh!

Then, without adding a word, he crossed his hands over his chest and raised his eyes to heaven. Clearly, the poor man's first thought was to thank God. Nore shook his hand; Harriet kissed him and rested her head on his shoulder; but Coxe gently disengaged himself and retreated with slow strides to his

room. There, having closed the door, he knelt down in front of a chair, hid his large head in his hands, and what he said to someone, it's not too easy to know, since he was all alone; but if it was a meditation full of tenderness on the eighth verse of Psalm 86: "Lord! there is none among the gods like you, and there are no such works as yours", there's little cause for surprise.

Nore left Harriet and walked along the Arno. He looked around him and found the spectacle unfurled before his eyes by nature sublime. Florence is beautiful, it's true, but he saw less Florence than the environment illuminated by his joy, and had he found himself in the Beauce countryside, he would surely have lent their vulgar monotony a supreme charm and majesty. Nore repeated to himself:

— To be happy is not much, but to feel that you are the happiness of those you love! To be sure that what they want is you, and that you are everything to them! What strange machines men are! They look like so many closed, isolated boxes, and there's not a feeling in them that isn't clinging to someone else's inside. If I broke my neck or fell into the river, I wouldn't just kill myself!

He set off in search of Lanze, and found his home without too much trouble. The meeting was a pleasant one for both of them, but Nore soon became aware of the dark melancholy that dominated the artist.

— What kind of life do you lead here?

— I don't see anyone and I work.

— It's a bad system. Solitude produces fever and gloom; these two ladies, in turn, give birth to ghosts. Who ever had a more vigorous temperament than Michelangelo? In the end, all he ever conceived were flayed creatures, titans kicking their feet into the void and reviling the spectators who had never done anything to them. I prefer Raphael and his sociability; I prefer the serenity of the masters of the Middle Ages; they didn't isolate themselves like owls, and you wouldn't dare condemn Phidias and Praxiteles; they spent their lives under the porticoes, in the stadium, in the gymnasiums or on the Sacred Way, chatting and laughing with philosophers, ephebes, young girls, flower girls, donkey drivers and herb merchants. A book that is not a manual of joviality has pronounced this judgment: "It is not good for man to be alone." Tomorrow I'll take you to one of my best friends, Dr. Coxe. He's a good man; he has a daughter. I'm sure you'll hold her in high esteem and respect. Besides...

And here Nore confided to the sculptor his relationship with the people he wanted to introduce him to. From then on, Conrad, who had

showed repugnance, resisted no longer, and the next day he was presented. But it's time to leave Florence and transport the reader to Lucerne, where a whole section of this story awaits the architect's decision.

CHAPTER SIX

Henry de Gennevilliers, Laudon's close friend and mentor, was of a very honorable character. He belonged to the Conservative party; moreover, he was a liberal and attached extreme importance, as all wise people do, to being able to say to each contradicter, with an attractive smile: "We're not as far apart as you seem to think!" In this way, he had affinities with the legitimists; he had no less with the democrats, and thus balanced himself by tilting alternately on all sides, and seeking to prove everyone a little right.

He spent his life seeking solutions to social problems. He was concerned with statistics, political economy and charitable institutions, on which he spent heavily. He organized workers' societies to educate the lower classes, and promoted laundries, workhouses and savings banks. He was an active member of the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul and that of Saint François Régis for the regularization of marriages; but, above all, he preached the moral transformation of proletarians who, with the help of sound doctrines, renunciation and self-denial resulting from religious principles as solid as they were enlightened, would one day become sober, chaste, patient, disinterested, utterly disillusioned about public balls and irreconcilable enemies of the cabaret. He didn't believe these things as bluntly as they need to be said to be understood. He hoped for them, he worked for them, he strived for them; it's another modern word for wanting something without wanting it, because it's impossible. Moreover, in politics, I repeat, he would have liked to reconcile everything.

To suppose that he aspired to a government based on force would have been to do him an injustice; he didn't want in the least what was yesterday; indeed, he rejected what might be tomorrow; above all, he energetically proclaimed the dangers, the misery, the odiousness of what is today. This way of looking at things, general among reasonable people, is called being conservative.

Gennevilliers was entirely on this side; its convictions were unshakeable. The whole thing rested on a sandy foundation of great gentleness of soul, timid honesty, the pious cult of the phrase, a great deal of weakness, and a few doubts poorly buried under a layer of sharp dogmatism; Gennevilliers was mayor of his village, general councillor of his canton and deputy of his arrondissement.

In the world, he was held in high esteem; his name naturally drew praise. We

Nowhere does it like fiery temperaments, madly in love with the truth, seeking it in unbeaten paths. Such characters seem to believe that commonplaces don't satisfy them; they hurt their own feelings. Gennevilliers hurt no one. He only walked on the main roads, and only pointed out places that everyone knew about. His wife felt an affectionate sympathy for him. As he consistently upheld, on good terms, the undisputed opinions of the milieu in which he lived, she was convinced of his value and proud of it. His way of reducing to well-constructed axioms what was in everyone's mouth seemed to her to be erudition, and she felt happy to be united with a man who was not contradicted.

But one would be mistaken if one were to believe that love existed here. They had never shown anything like it, either before or since their marriage. They had combined their fortunes and situations with the full consent, advice and encouragement of both families. It would have been very wrong of them to repent, and they were very careful not to; all the combinations they had planned had so far worked out admirably. Gennevilliers had inherited from an uncle and Lucie from an aunt, and both sides were still preparing to inherit without any probable hindrance. The two spouses didn't get in each other's way; they didn't tease each other. They had the same tastes, the most inoffensive in the world. To visit, to receive visitors, to be in Paris in the winter, in the summer in one of their lands, then on a journey, they could imagine nothing else; from then on, they found themselves well together, and preferred each other to all the men and women of their acquaintance, who, moreover, lived exactly as they did, enclosed within the same horizons. Passion, anger, too much of anything, they didn't know what it was in this virtuous house, and love is too much.

On the other hand, it has to be said, we were sometimes bored. This is the lot of modern happiness, and nothing can be done about it. Something loud and noisy has to be mixed in with life, if it's not to become listless. When the Romans had to guard against the Samnites, the Sabines, the Oscians and the Umbres, and defended not their lives, not their possessions, but their national existence and the gods of their homeland against these conspirators, neither the Fabiuses, nor the Marcelluses, nor the Serviliuses, nor the people of Marciennene were bored or languished. When the Middle Ages, mounting their heads, went to play for blood and fortune in the distant deserts of the Asian coast, neither languor nor boredom touched the imagination of knights, and when, in our civil wars, the Montmorencies and the Châtillons, the Guises and those of Navarre pushed each other, sword and dagger at each other's throats, to try to become the first, we didn't languish either, and we didn't have to go to the trouble of becoming the first.

boredom had no place between the hope of triumph and the fury of defeat. Let's go further down; when, for want of love of the city, radiant faith, ambition for the first rank, the fallen, but not completely enervated, generations let themselves roll into the sullied amusements and mad hopes of the last century, there was violence, expiring strength, in these excesses of suppers, in these philosophical turbulences; but, nowadays, the rich have nothing left to want; They have no religious fanaticism, they're too honest for wild ambition, too justly timorous for debauchery; it's not passion to periodically fear the lighted torch of the scoundrel; they fidget a little between the upholsterer, the linen maid, the carriage maker, the fashion merchant, pay notes and get bored. There's no theory, no matter how spiritualist, that can pull them out of it.

As women are more sensitive than their husbands, they also suffer the consequences of this situation more completely. Lucie was therefore especially bored, and, without understanding it, suffered from the emptiness in which she was immersed. She had no enthusiasm for anything, and could hardly admit such a state of mind. It's a great misfortune when such ennui becomes commonplace in the upper classes of a nation, for women generally resist it last; if they succumb to it, all is lost. T h e y veil everything in the impalpable gauze of a modest religion, where there's no risk of being led astray, since all they do is obey, and, in this quiet nest, they cradle, impregnate and lull to sleep men who are already dozing and who want nothing better than to be more so.

Lucie, after her husband and children, wanted to do good for her friends, and among them, she was particularly fond of Laudon. While Gennevilliers was flattered to find in him a pupil, she, for her part, was no less flattered to know she had an admirer following in her footsteps, from whom she was certain she would never have anything to fear. It's well known that he had never told her anything about a feeling she would have strongly rejected admitting; but, in her heart of hearts, she asserted to herself that she had nothing to fear from him. that some very lively worship existed on that side. She wasn't angry about it. As she was well aware that her husband had never loved her more than she loved him, she had no qualms about it. On the contrary, she was secretly delighted to have given birth to, and therefore deserved, a cult that respect would eternally keep silent, but which was highly exalted!

On the one hand, she reigned over the soul of a gallant man and ruled it as an idol, which meant she was pretty, lovable, seductive and endowed with everything that could inspire folly; on the other, she contained the waves, tempered the flames, broke the breath of storms by the authority of her immaculate appearance. And that wasn't all. There was an underbelly, a secret underbelly, whose every nook and cranny you didn't know yourself.

In this underside, innocently ironic, or better, ironically innocent, a tiny instinct was amusing itself, whose features, like those of a charming baby, were not clearly formed. This little instinct, gracious, a little cruel, but so young, so weak, in truth, deserved, for these reasons, no reprimand. Lucie smiled to herself that Henri didn't realize the love she inspired; Lucie especially enjoyed this imperceptible perfidy, when she heard her husband ordering in advance what Laudon would or wouldn't do according to her wise advice.

- If I want to!" she murmured quietly.

In just a few encounters, she had set her authority against that of the cautious Gennevilliers, without seeming to do so, and, to his astonishment and her triumph, Laudon had not moved from his position.

As a result of all this, Lucie quite liked the man she considered her victim, and, in order to kill two birds with one stone, she had conceived the project of marrying him off to one of her cousins in whom she had a certain interest. This cousin was a good little person, not very pretty, not very witty, well-born, rich, able to read, write and count, having learned by heart an arranged holy history, a composed history of France and a few chastened extracts from poets and prose writers, which she understood nothing about, the excellent child, except that these things, necessary to constitute a good education, could not claim to be taken care of once they were no longer required.

Lucie, contemplating so many virtues with which her good little cousin was armed, thought, with some semblance of reason, that after the wedding as before, there was not the slightest reason why she herself should cease to exercise over Laudon that salutary authority, of which virtue, beauty and peerless merit constitute the irrefragable privilege. But that's enough of our wandering through the subterranean, unenlightened corridors of such a kind heart as Lucie's. We'll stop here, in a moment of reflection. We must stop here, and confine ourselves to saying that Madame de Gennevilliers had been persuaded by her husband to desire Laudon's marriage to Jeanne de Blanchefort, and, as the submissive wife of such a great man, she had consented to initiate the matter as soon as winter had brought everyone back to Paris; for it was not until Lucerne, and after Louis had left, that Gennevilliers,

He discovered his true intentions and communicated them to his astonished wife.

CHAPTER SEVEN

After visiting the forested cantons, chatting extensively with a host of landammans and taking copious notes on madhouses and prisons, Henry de Gennevilliers and his wife continued their journey, heading north and arriving in St. Gallen. The couple planned to stay in the town for at least a week. It was necessary to visit the remains of the abbey, which would probably provide material for an article on the economic merits of the monks' administration; it was also necessary to examine in detail the manufacture of embroidered muslin, find out the cost price and be in a position to explain the moral and physical situation of the workers; other articles. As a result, the Gennevilliers settled comfortably into the *Hôtel du Poisson*, which the innkeeper was delighted with.

They had been there three days when, one night, they heard a rather loud commotion in the hotel. Servants were running up and down the stairs; foreign voices mingled with the noise, ordering, arguing, calling. Gennevilliers woke up and went to the window. He saw a mail coach stopped in front of the door. The carriage had just arrived; the postilions were still in the saddle. The maître de l'hôtel was standing by the door, in the most humble attitude and with that deep conviction of the power of flattery that only innkeepers possess to a higher degree. He assured His Excellency that the apartment was all ready, and, on a question that Gennevilliers did not hear, he replied with a new greeting:

— Yes, Excellency! There's a letter. This letter arrived yesterday and was sent back from Burbach; it bears the Caucasus stamp.

At that moment, a valet announced loudly that everything was ready in the apartment, and Henri saw a tall, slender woman, wrapped in a shawl, get out of the carriage; another woman was following her.

— Don't forget my cassette, Lucile," said the first lady, turning around.

— No, Madame Countess, I've got her!

And, as they both entered the hotel, Gennevilliers was about to go back to bed, convinced that a high power was now living under the same roof as him, and he promised himself he'd ask for its name the next day. Suddenly, a terrible, high-pitched scream penetrated the entire house. One clamor followed another. Henry rushed to the door, half-opened it and saw in the corridor the servants, the host, the chambermaid, carrying the lady, and, at the top of the stairs, the lady.

Amidst the "ah! mon Dieu!... quel malheur!... qu'est-il arrivé?... soutenez la tête!...", the procession entered the hotel's grand apartment, and Henry saw it close up.

His first impulse was to go to the news. But he wisely decided it was none of his business. He went back to bed and slept. In the morning, as soon as he was dressed, he left his room and looked for the host. After talking to him for a few moments, he entered Lucie's house.

— My dear," he said, "here's something rather curious and perhaps rather sad. Do you remember the Countess Tonska?"

— Not in the least," replied Lucie.

— Don't you remember that two years ago, we went to a ball at her place in Paris? She had a delightful apartment on the Avenue de l'Impératrice. Your aunt, Madame de Lanlay, introduced us.

— Ah, yes, I remember now. What's up?

— Well, Countess Tonska arrived here last night. She first asked if there were any letters for her. She was handed one from the Caucasus, which had been sent from Burbach to this hotel. She opened it hastily, and after looking through it with her eyes, she fell unconscious and convulsed. From that moment on, the fever took hold of her; she is said to be very ill.

— Poor woman!" replied Lucie. She had beautiful lace.

— Don't you think," said Henry, "that we could give her some sign of sympathy? She was very polite to us, and I think I even remember that after her ball, you two exchanged visits.

— She came to my house and couldn't find me. I saw her at the races. What do you want us to tell her?

— I don't know, maybe there's some good to be done here.

— But, my friend, think about it: I admit I don't much like foreigners. Going to the ball at their place, nothing simpler; but seeing them, that's pretty serious!

Gennevilliers began to hesitate. Just then, there was a discreet knock on the door.

— Come in," says Henry.

It was the butler, followed at a distance by a chambermaid who remained in the corridor.

— What's up?

— Monsieur le Comte, Madame la Comtesse Tonska, having learned that you were here with Madame la Comtesse, has asked me to find out if you have any homœopathic globules of belladonna?

— I have some," Lucie replied eagerly. If you'd like to come in, mademoiselle," she continued, addressing the chambermaid, "I'll give you the bottle.

Lucie was full of thanks, and while Madame de Gennevilliers searched, opened her portable pharmacy and alternately looked at the labels on the small glass cylinders, she asked:

— How is Madame la Comtesse? I learned, with much sorrow, that she was unwell when she arrived!

— Madame la comtesse has been in great pain all night; she's calmed down a little. She learned, so suddenly and unprepared, of the death of Monsieur le Comte!

— Oh, my God! What are you saying to me? What a terrible misfortune! Henry, do you hear? Count Tonski is dead! This news is the cause of Madame Tonska's condition.

— I'm sorry," replied Gennevilliers. Please, mademoiselle, express to Madame la Comtesse our sympathy for her situation, and add that Madame de Gennevilliers and I would be happy to be of service to her in any way we can.

Lucie thanked them and left. The couple had lunch and then got into the car to drive to Appenzell, Outer Rhodes, to visit a village where almost all the inhabitants make embroidery for the St. Gallen merchants. This was another great opportunity for the politician. He questioned everyone who came near him, and explained his theories to them, to their great amusement. As for Lucie, she bought a ravishing embroidered dress and a host of other pretty things, which were sold to her at a very high price.

When night came, they set off again, through some of the most picturesque little roads in the world, but also some of the rockiest, whose constant ups and downs are no fun for horses. It was quite dark when they got out of the carriage, and first they were warned that Madame Tonska would be very grateful to Madame de Gennevilliers if she would come to see her.

Lucie, with her usual caution, showed little inclination to welcome anything that took her out of her usual routine; she looked at her husband with some anxiety. For him, responding immediately to her thought:

— But, my dear, you can hardly do otherwise, it seems to me. What's wrong with that?

— I wouldn't know what to tell you," replied Lucie, and, raising her shoulders slightly like someone annoyed, she headed for the Countess's apartment.

She remained absent for a long hour, and Gennevilliers, somewhat hungry, didn't know how to explain the length of this conference and was getting impatient, when Lucie reappeared. The meal was served immediately. The young woman kept a concentrated air; she was visibly affected. Henry exclaimed, as soon as they were alone:

— In heaven's name! My dear, tell me what's the matter with you! You're not in your usual state.

— What I've just seen and heard isn't ordinary either. I arrived at Madame Tonska's house. Her maid introduced me. I found a pale person, her eyes sparkling, burnt with fever, her black hair - admirable hair! undone and rolling all around her head, giving her features something strange. Henry, I've never seen anything so beautiful in my life! On seeing me, Madame Tonska struggled up onto her pillows and said to me in the most melodious and touching voice in the world:

— How good you are!

She held out her hands to me, Henry, but with a gesture so gentle, so charming, so sympathetic, that tears came to my eyes. Realizing that she was getting tired, I put my arm behind her head to support her; then she seized me forcefully and kissed me with a kind of enthusiasm, saying:

— You're my good angel!

I was stunned, because, Henry, I don't know her very well.

She made me sit on the edge of her bed, which didn't please me very much; but she wanted me close to her, and so she asked me to listen to her with great attention. Here's what she told me:

She is going to die, and she has only a few days, perhaps a few hours, left on this earth. She would like you to seal her apartment; she will give you a paper appointing you as her executor, and in it you will find her last wishes. She urges you not to let her remove from her neck a small gold chain from which hangs a locket containing her husband's hair. I couldn't calm her down until I swore her complete obedience on this point in your name. Then she told me things, but things! You can't imagine what Madame Tonska is like! I don't think there's a more angelic creature in the world! As you know, I don't generally like strangers, and strangers even less; but this one is as kind, as tender, as devoted as you could ever imagine! She's heavenly in her piety, and I must confess she makes me feel like a saint!

— It's possible," replied Gennevilliers, with an air of annoyance, "but you're

a great embarrassment. How can I be the executor of a Polish woman's will? The whole thing doesn't make sense, and the least inconvenience I can see is for us to spend all our time in St. Gallen.

— What do you want? I think the same; but could I say to an unfortunate creature, ready to expire alone in an inn from the mortal blow that her husband's death has just dealt her, that you don't want to be the Good Samaritan?

— Is it her husband's death that's killing her?" asked Gennevilliers without a hint of malice.

— She was already very ill," Lucie shrugged, "but this blow finishes her off. She had plenty to complain about, but she told me, weeping, that all she remembered in him were the years of her youth. You know how romantic these women are.

— All I know is that it's very boring," sighed Gennevilliers, and picked up a newspaper. Just then, a hotel servant entered and handed Lucie a triangularly folded bill. It read:

"I managed to get myself carried onto the sofa. If you like me a little, bring your husband to me. As you know, I don't have much time left.

" SOPHIE T. "

— Poor woman!" murmured Lucie, wiping her almost wet eyes.

Gennevilliers, more upset than ever, was very uncertain.

— What are we going to do?" he said to his wife.

— How can you hesitate?" she replied.

— Well, let's go, since we have to!

The Countess was lying on a sofa between two windows; she had had her marvellous hair up and was dressed in a long white muslin bathrobe. Undeniably, she was of the rarest beauty, and her pallor added a truly supernatural expression. Gennevilliers, bewildered, sat down in an armchair, which she showed him with her hand, while she drew Lucie into the chair next to his head.

— You have an angel for a wife, Monsieur de Gennevilliers," she told him. You like him, don't you? You'll never give up on him, will you? Forgive a dying woman for speaking to you like this. I wasn't loved; I was abandoned, and you see what happens.

Henry was extremely uncomfortable; but he found the Countess beautiful beyond expression and felt thrown out of his habits.

Madame Tonska took a paper from under the cushion:

— These are my last wishes," she says in a soft, firm voice. I regret having known you both so late. But may God's plans be blessed! Madame de Gennevilliers must have told you, sir, what is the thing I hold most dear?

Gennevilliers couldn't find the strength to speak and nodded his assent.

— Thank you, sir; you are good; you are worthy of her!... (and shook Lucie's hand). You'll find ten thousand francs in bills in this cassette. Please give them to M. le curé de Sainte-Clotilde; he knows me; he'll use the money to say masses for the repose of my poor husband's soul. I know too well... But God's mercy is so great, and perhaps, at the last moment, Boleslas thought it over!... Forgive me for prolonging this conversation, which is of little interest to you... I know you better than you think; you're one of those courageous, useful men whom the world doesn't venerate enough. I've read your admirable work... You will take from my estate a sum of one hundred thousand francs for your *Asile de l'Enfant prodigue*... Moreover, you will find the expression of my wishes in this paper. And now, farewell, don't forget me... Lucie, pray for me...

Sir, think of me!... I won't bother you anymore!

She shook hands with both of them and beckoned them to leave. They obeyed and found themselves in the corridor, in tears, confused, beside themselves, and having never imagined anything like what they had just seen and heard. They were now perfectly agreed that Countess Tonska was an incomparable being who had descended from a higher sphere; that she was about to ascend, and that this was a great misfortune for our planet. At last they said good night to each other, and went to bed, their souls in a sad state.

In the middle of the night, at around 3am, Gennevilliers was jolted awake. He sat up and listened, not quite sure what had roused him from his slumber. It was brilliant music. A voice of prodigious strength and brilliance, directed by the most consummate science, was singing a psalm by Marcello, accompanying itself on the piano in a way that would have done credit to a master.

— Is it conceivable," thought Gennevilliers mentally, "that there are people capable of such whims at such times? It must be an Englishman! And that poor woman, who needs nothing more than rest and silence! I'm going to talk to that man!

He dressed hastily and set off down to the common room, but as he passed the door to Madame Tonska's apartment, he heard that it was there that they were playing and singing.

— What does this mean?

For a moment he was stunned; then he said to himself:

— She's wearing out what's left of her nerve. I mustn't suffer. He knocked on the door. Lucile opened it for him.

— Who's at the piano?" he asked with the authority of an executor.

— It's Madame la Comtesse," replied the young girl.

— She's in terrible pain!

— She's killing herself," Lucile replied.

— Let me in! I must stop this madness.

He entered. Sophie was seated in front of the instrument; in her white dress, falling from all sides, with large folds, she looked like a spectre; she was singing and had never had such a voice. When she caught sight of Gennevilliers, she commanded him, to the letter, she commanded him with an imperious gesture not to interrupt her, and, admirably, Henry obediently sat down. She finished her piece, then stood up straight:

— You did well to come! I've been waiting for you! I knew God would send you to me! I'm not what you think! I've been very unhappy; but I've also been very guilty! I have a lot to atone for; I have to suffer a lot! Listen to me! I beg you, I beseech you by all that is most sacred on this earth; listen to me, advise me, and I will do exactly as you have ordered, because you are an upright, pure man, and I want no other judge than you.

Gennevilliers repented having got out of bed; but, deep down, he was flattered to be recognized for what he was worth; at the same time, he was curious to know what could have been the wrongs of such a beautiful person who loved her husband so much, and, besides, how could one say no to a dying woman? So he stayed, and the Countess, leaning her elbow on the piano table, explained the following.

CHAPTER EIGHT

— Monsieur de Gennevilliers, the most serious demerits in others only seem so to us because they stem from causes of which we are never sufficiently aware. If I had been what I should have been towards my poor husband, I would have been less scandalized at first, more indulgent, and many misfortunes would not have happened. Poor Boleslas wasn't a bad man. He was weak; he had been handsome, sought-after, spoiled. He'd picked up some annoying habits. It would have been my role, that of a brave and loving woman, to put up with some of his faults; I would have been able to contain them, and I would have prevented others from developing in him.

I did nothing that it was at least my duty to try. The Count, drawn into bad company, had taken to drinking to excess. The first time he appeared to me in this state, I was horrified by him, and I told him so. He loved me; I should have used this feeling to draw him into a more regular life. But, no! I humiliated him; I offended him. I amused myself maliciously by stepping on his self-esteem. He was patient for a while and then, all too naturally, he walked away from me. I feel it now, I tell you, with more gentleness, returning tenderness for tenderness, generously taking his hand, I'm convinced! I would have pulled him out of the abyss. I pushed him further into it with my guilty contempt. I made him spend several evenings bitterly reproaching himself for his wrongdoings. Then he walked away forever. Wives are not good; hardly one in a hundred understands that she has nothing else to do but to keep her husband close to her by all means; to be his confidante, his friend, his mistress... No! most women have a completely different ideal of grandeur and even duty. They want to be judges; they want to command, to lead, to be feared, and, going against what is preached to them, they pretend to dominate the master, to break visor to the lord, and are never so proud and so happy as when they have sent away the ashamed and insulted lover.

This game never lasts long. It ended quickly for me. My husband didn't mistreat me, which happens to others; he openly preferred the first dancer that came along; once again, it was my fault. Seeing the one I'd rejected throw off his chain in his turn, I was struck with pride; I wanted to get rid of him, but I wouldn't let him leave me. But it had happened.

and I was courted. I took an unhealthy pleasure in it; I didn't love anyone, I didn't give in to anyone; in this you must believe me! But I wanted to hurt the one who abandoned me. I compromised as much as I could. Then, from drunkenness and disorder, Boleslas fell into gambling; gambling led him to worse... Now he's dead, in despair. This is what I'm responsible for. Illusions have long since left me; I'm deeply unhappy; I understand everything: I've deserved the blows of divine justice, and I'd like to use what's left of my strength to preserve myself from them at least in eternal life.

— Madame," replied Genneville, "when you analyze yourself in this way, you certainly have great courage and equal insight; but you do yourself a disservice. I don't want to investigate whether, by any chance, you're exaggerating your wrongs. I assume, to please you, that they are great; but, since you do me the honor of placing your trust in me, where do you want to end up?

— To this very question," replied the Countess. Here we are on the ground. I want to leave the past for what it is, having recognized that responsibility for it lies with me, and devote myself to seeking serious means, not of repairing an irreparable wrong, but of creating compensations for it. Which way do you think I should go? At the very moment I learned of poor Boleslas' death, I was on my way to join him, determined never to leave him again. That's all there is to it: I had broken with my former existence, and I wanted to become a new woman. What I had in mind is no longer possible; what can I put in its place?

Genneville gazed at her in amazement. Madame Tonska was turning his thoughts upside down. He had become accustomed to the thought that she would die the next day, or at least not last the week; now she was asking him to settle her fate. Deep down, he was happy to accept the hope that such an accomplished creature of mind, heart and body would not be lost, and he replied:

— It's a serious question, and I'm not really qualified to discuss it. But if I take a closer look at what's going on inside you, it seems to me that you're attracted to convent life.

The Countess shook her head:

— That's already been decided," she replied, "what am I going to do in the world from now on? What I want from you is to help me decide which kind of religious life suits me best. Should I devote the talents Heaven has given me to spreading education, by entering the Ursulines or any other teaching order? Do you think I wouldn't better serve the designs of Providence by caring for the sick among the worthy daughters of Saint Vincent? May I end up on the bed of yellow fever in Spanish America, or cholera in some even more distant land! There is a

the contemplative life! physical and moral austerities! I've gone astray by abusing my willpower; isn't that proof that my vocation is to bury that willpower under the mantle of Carmelite or Trappistine?

Gennevilliers couldn't help but shudder to think what would become of this charming person in the midst of the dreaded renunciations whose sad image she so resolutely evoked.

— But, Madame," he exclaimed, "why leave the world? Isn't that where the most good can be done today? You seem like a soldier who, in search of skirmishes, would abandon the battle!

— My friend," said the Countess, resting her slender fingers on Henry's hand, "I no longer have the strength of great battles; at most, I have the strength of suffering!

Gennevilliers supported her in his arms and called out loudly to Lucile, who arrived half-asleep and helped him carry the Countess to bed. Sophie was unconscious. While the next lady administered salts, Gennevilliers, beside himself, ran to wake his wife.

— Come, my dear," he said, "if you want to see her again! She's expiring!

Lucie rushed out of bed and, hastily wrapped in a robe, followed her husband.

For three-quarters of an hour, all help was useless, and Gennevilliers was agonizing over the question of whether the time had come for the sacraments, when at last the Countess opened her eyes. She looked around her with a bewildered expression; then she hid her face under her two folded arms. Finally, she unfolded them, caught sight of Lucie, and said to her in a hushed voice and with a faint smile:

— I was hoping it was over! It's you, it's your husband who's holding me back!

It's never a bad thing to be credited with the virtue of raising the dead, so Lucie and Henry, greatly impressed, began to hope that the Countess would not die, and that their care and tender sympathy would prolong the days of this interesting woman. So they took up permanent residence, one at the bedside, the other at the foot of the bed, and magazine and newspaper articles on the working classes and charitable institutions fell into oblivion. From then on, and for about eight days, there was nothing but talk of Countess Tonska, suspended, like Mohammed's tomb, not between heaven and earth, but between life and death.

Finally, the energetic solicitude of his friends prevailed.

— You saved me," she said, "from a very painful end; now save me from myself!

Lucie had never had a feeling for anyone comparable to the one she felt for her beautiful patient. As for Gennevilliers, um! That's all that needs to be said about the state of mind of a man so perfectly peaceful and usually so level-headed. His brain was flooded with ideas, puffs of singular impressions.

Madame Tonska, however, began to spend part of her time on a chaise longue. She would sit by the window and absorb herself, she would say with a melancholy smile, in the contemplation of this great nature which no longer had any caresses or hopes for her. To her great regret, she had not succeeded in dying physically, but morally there was nothing left of her. Her soul, so often martyred, did not retain a single fiber that still vibrated; she now understood only devotion and imagined some joy only in sacrifice.

During this time, she spoke little to Lucie and Gennevilliers other than about her suffering and her husband. When she was better, she no doubt continued to detail her sorrows, but paid less and less attention to the unfortunate Boleslas. Then, from the depths of her fully won confidence, came at first a few bitter allusions to her deluded affection for men who had failed to understand her ; and as Lucie, in particular, while maintaining a discreet and austere appearance, was burning with desire to know about the extraordinary adventures of a person so completely different from the ordinary, and whose curiosity, under the incognito of a pious sympathy, did not let her be easily recognized, One fine evening, when Gennevilliers had gone to bed early because he had been dismissed on the pretext of fatigue, the sick woman, after making music and singing for two hours, told her incomparable friend about her life, her whole life with its struggles and victories, each more painful than the last. Lucie had read very few novels and was petrified with admiration.

Sophie told him what she had tried to do to bring the Prince of Deux-Ponts back to virtue, and how she had failed miserably. So, without hesitation, she had driven away from her an unprincipled man who, under the mask of affection, dared to flatter himself with the most sinful schemes. For a moment, the Duc d'Olivarès, with his well-known chivalrous exterior, coppery complexion and black hair that made him look like an Abencerage, had caused her some illusion. Alas, the prestige had quickly dissipated! The Castilian had been sent away by the same route as the Bavarian. Finally, Sophie had met Jean-Theodore, reigning prince of Wørbeck-Burbach. Nothing could be more seductive than this sovereign. He is capable of conceiving the good and even of executing it; why should such beautiful women be able to do so?

qualities be nullified by this strange fancy of approaching women only to lose them? His Royal Highness's unfortunate situation, as regards his inner life, with an absurd person, had at first struck the Countess painfully, and she had taken a keen interest in Jean-Theodore.

— You can't imagine, dear Lucie," she would say, "what kind of companion we've had the courage to associate her with. She's a well-born porter, that's the most indulgent thing you can say about her. The hereditary princess, for her part, gave herself the ideas and manners of a Waldensian governess; between these two women the poor prince was like a rudderless ship, turning on itself in the middle of an inert sea. To escape this misery, at various times he formed liaisons quite unworthy of him. First there was a petite bourgeoisie from Burbach, Mademoiselle Caroline Schmidt, now married to a wealthy industrialist; then came an extravagant actress, Mademoiselle Lippold, in whom he found genius; finally, a Marquise Coppoli, schemer to the supreme degree, not very pretty and without the shadow of a quality.

I wanted to pull him out of that abyss... Never do good, my dear, never do it!... if you're afraid of suffering!

As she spoke these words, Madame Tonska turned a reproachful gaze to heaven and shook her friend's hand, then continued:

— The prince couldn't resist falling in love with me. I told you, he's seductive, eloquent, lovable, as much as that word has any meaning. I had the weakness to allow him to confess everything to me, on condition that he would never ask for a return. He promised, but couldn't keep his word. He was demanding, he was jealous; continual scenes threw me into the most dreadful despair, and I, who only need rest and couldn't live in an agitated atmosphere, had to lose even the hope of spending a single day without a quarrel. I would have liked to make him happy; I would have liked above all to enlighten his beautiful intelligence, constantly obscured by the vain and false theories of irrelevant ministers and unworthy advisors. I spent my days begging him to study the rights of the suffering classes, to abandon outdated erring ways, to take the lead in reforms, to guide, while there was still time, the crowds all ready to march behind him, but also to overthrow him if he resisted; it was impossible for me to control his attention. He painted for me in insane speeches the excess of his feelings for me, he hit his head, he put himself at my feet... Ah, Lucie, how extravagant men are, and how little the best are!

Finally, a few days ago, we had some intolerable scenes about a young artist, Mr. Conrad Lanze, which His Royal Highness deigned to concern himself with.

my subject. This young man, whom I hardly knew, is gifted with the rarest of talents. He's a sculptor. No doubt you've heard his name?

— Never that I know of, but I can't hear myself in these things.

— I forbade him to come back to my place, and I'm afraid I wasn't gentle enough at the time with a deeply sensitive, impressionable and delicate nature. But, I confess, I needed peace at all costs. Around the same time, I received news of Mr. Tonski's illness. The Prince behaved with the rarest ingratitude. He forbade me to leave; no matter how gently, patiently and with unrivalled affection I tried to point out to him how precise my duty was, I didn't let him ignore the fact that it was a question of saving not only a body, but a soul, an immortal soul, and that I was responsible for it before God! Poor prince! Where I sought to arouse a hero, a man alone answered me! A weak, pusillanimous man, incapable of renunciation and greatness! I left him, blessing him. You'll never know, Lucie, you whose husband is an angel of goodness who is at the same time a colossus of strength! You'll never know how tenderized one feels by these poor beings who live off you and tear you apart as they embrace you! That, I imagine, is the supreme pleasure of motherhood! Finally, I left. But it was my turn to be weak. I'd let myself be held back one day; I should have walked away the very hour I'd received the first news of Mr. Tonski's miserable state. Heaven punished me cruelly! Now you know everything. I'll never see him again... never! The friend of my youth! The only one I ever loved! I still love him, Lucie! And, wretch that I am, I can't die! I didn't know how to be a strong, determined woman! I won't be forgiven!

And so this beautiful soul finished confessing. Lucie was in tears. She had never imagined that such a sublime creature could exist on earth. She was stunned by so much beauty, so much eloquence, so much fire, so many virtues, so many repentances, so many perfections, and such a collapse of misfortunes and injustices of fate and men heaped one on top of the other! And you, heavens and lands, oceans and rivers, wood divinities, nymphs, Egyptians, sylvans and satyrs, don't doubt it for a minute, Sophie Tonska believed to the letter that everything she had just told about herself was rigorously true, and even that she had modestly diminished the magnanimity of her deeds and words! And had she been read a materially accurate account of her last interview with the Prince of Burbach, attested by four witnesses and initialed by two notaries, she would have immediately argued that it was false. Everyone is more or less like that. Goethe wrote the story of his life under the apt title :

Fiction and truth. He had a clear sense of things and knew for a science that he was going to paint himself beautiful. Madame Tonska was not a philosopher, and she saw herself as it was pleasant for her to see herself. As the Prince de Deux-Ponts and the Duc d'Olivarès were not characters in this story, it is difficult to know exactly what they themselves thought of the Countess and how well-founded their opinion was. However, Gregory Smiloff, who, by the way, is not a good speaker, was often heard to say that His Serene Highness, who had known Madame Tonska when she was only twenty-one, still shuddered with horror when he remembered that Sophie had been kidnapped by him on his way back from a ball in Petersburg, and had forced him to take the road to Warsaw on pain of never seeing her again; but she had left him there at the first station, under the pretext that he wanted to lose her reputation, and had had an attack of nerves; oh! what an attack of nerves! Once again, what Gregory Smiloff says and the exact truth rarely have features in common, and no confidence can be placed in such an uncertain anecdote. As for the Duc d'Olivarès, he got married, and the duchess is witty to a fault, but she's no good either; she claims that Madame Tonska made her husband lose weight and forced him to read *the Works of Saint Theresa* aloud. In any case, it would have been an occupation from which it would have been up to him to derive great benefit. What Madame de Gennevilliers could not deny was that her friend was an angel.

CHAPTER NINE

The day after these confidences, which had lasted until three o'clock in the morning and had put Lucie in a nervous state very new to her, Henry had his turn. Madame Tonska asked the young woman to leave her alone with M. de Gennevilliers, so that she could make the final and indispensable arrangements before entering religion. Nothing could have been more natural, so that around midnight, the Countess, having awakened from a sort of lethargy into which she had been plunged since three o'clock in the afternoon, and having consented to take a broth, declared herself strong enough again to be master of her ideas, and seated Henry, with paper, quill and ink, beside her bed, from which it had been impossible for her to get out.

To begin with, she thanked M. de Gennevilliers for the undeserved affection he and his wife had shown her, and expressed her gratitude in her usual charming, touching and flattering way. It was the tender abandon and insistence of a sister, almost a mother. She was astonished that such a fresh, pure, delicious flower could have blossomed in the midst of the frivolities of the world. She showed infinite tact and divination in the analysis she presented to the imagination of the happy, flattered husband. She dangled before Henry's eyes all the virtues and charms of the companion of his existence. Of course, he didn't need to be shown them; he knew them. He could not, however, resist considering them again with pleasure, all the more so as, from the way they were offered, he conceived the secret and very caressing thought that he was himself, if not the creator, at least the educator of such rare marvels, and that, in less skilful, less sure hands, many nuances, many perfections would have been erased or never come to fruition. He understood his own value in matters of feeling, and although the enchantress didn't tell him precisely what it was all about, he found that Lucia's apotheosis was much more his own, and he couldn't help feeling infinitely grateful to someone who divined him in such a sure and, at the same time, veiled way.

This naturally led Madame Tonska to ask Gennevilliers for his life story. Henry had never hitherto supposed that his life had a story; but, in the moral situation in which he found himself, in the slightly overexcited intellectual state in which he felt himself, he understood that one must

He had a story, even a legend, and a novel to boot. The incidents of his life, hitherto very simple in his eyes, presented themselves in a whole new light. He didn't find himself as prosaic as he had previously resigned himself to admitting. Far from it! a highly acceptable poetry rose from his heart to his head; he recognized a dreamy childhood, a melancholy adolescence, a contemplative youth, a heart filled with an unconscious love, and, what's more, both the taste and the habit of gossiping about the working classes appeared to him transfigured into two geniuses ascending to heaven with equal flight, to appropriate the portion of celestial fire forgotten by Prometheus. If such a thing happened to the wise, cold and methodical Gennevilliers, only because he was sitting at night by the bedside of a very beautiful sick lady, who had intoxicated him by revealing her virtues, we can well excuse this beautiful lady for losing quite completely **h e r** appreciation of reality whenever she spoke or thought about herself.

When two interlocutors are on the same subject - that is, when each of them explains himself, rises, rises, rises, and, with each word, gives another turn to the jack that directs him towards the sky - the conversation is passionate and not ready to end. So it was not until around five in the morning that the two angels, placed opposite each other, could attend to the purpose of their meeting, and Gennevilliers said to Madame de Tonska:

— If you believe me...

— Don't ever use that phrase with me again, my friend," interrupted the Countess. Let's be true to each other, nothing but true, always true, in little things as in big! You know very well that I believe you in everything; so never seem to assume what you are assured is not. Tell me: "This is what I think is right for you", and I'll do it without hesitation. Souls like yours are never wrong.

— Well then, listen to me. I don't approve of you going into religion, for the moment at least.

— I beg you, don't throw me back into the world, I've suffered too much there!

— You won't be returning to the world as you wish, but not to a convent! Solitude and absolute retirement won't do you any good.

— Is this really your opinion?" asked the Countess with an air of interest, resting her elbow on her pillow and looking into the face of her wise advisor.

— Unquestionably," he replied peremptorily, "and I'm only giving it to you after careful consideration. And not only do I not believe that the complete repose of the cloister is suitable for a nature as ardent as the

yours; I'll go further! You don't have a serious vocation. Oh, I know that! Like all elite souls, you're persuaded of the nothingness of so many things that master the vulgar imagination and conquer its reverence; but that's not enough; you'd have to be dead to many impressions, even the noblest, and *perindè ac cadaver* wouldn't apply to you.

— I'll bend that which resists and I'll kill it, if I have to," cried Sophie, throwing herself back on her pillows and crossing her arms over her eyes.

— It's not necessary," Gennevilliers retorted sternly, "if you can do more good by staying in the century than by leaving it.

— It's a pretext for exercising, even glorifying, languor and cowardice!

— It won't be like that for you, and true sages and heroes of charity, like Anatole de Bosse, for example, and several of our friends, will tell you enough about what to do.

— I only want your directions! I place myself in your hands; I surrender everything to you! This vow of obedience, which you won't allow me to make solemnly at the foot of the altar, I am addressing to you, confidentially, secretly, at this hour, and, believe me, my holy, my worthy, my noble friend, it will no less be kept to be made and remain between us two.

— Thank you," Henry replied with unction. I have not earned such a favor from heaven, such glory, dare I say, and yet I accept it from you.

The conversation became extremely elevated, and went on ad infinitum on this theme. Corrupt times, it was said, give rise to special natures, fit to fight all depravities as the Lord's messengers fight all devils. Madame Tonska, beautiful, eloquent, accomplished, equal to all that was most considerable in Europe and possessing an enormous fortune, was henceforth to count in the first ranks of those celestial powers, happily worldlyized, whose salons to day replace, with so many advantages, the grotto of Saint Jerome, and even the ancient rock of Pathmos. Around the Countess, under her direction, her inspiration, her influence and her authority, a precious militia was to emerge from among the young people of society, who had hitherto had no definite use for their leisure time. Meanwhile, as daylight began to dawn, the prophet and the initiate parted after exchanging final words of peace and hope. Gennevilliers went to his room. It was impossible for him to go to bed. He threw himself into an armchair, dreaming of what he had just heard and, above all, said himself - a singular state, totally without analog in his previous life.

Positively, Madame Tonska was an absolutely exceptional creature,

moving within a luminous, radiant nimbus, and, as there is little admiration possible without comparison, all the women he had approached and more or less known, including his own, seemed to him little better than insignificant dolls compared to this marvel he had discovered. As far as he was concerned, he felt different from what he had ever felt. Until then, he had suffered from a kind of secret shyness; that cowardice was gone. He was a man out of line, he no longer doubted it, and Sophie certainly hadn't told him so, or anything close to it: she'd demonstrated it to him, and he'd just explained it to her and to his own conscience. Sophie was sublime, he was superior, since she submitted to him and begged him to lead her; she was strong, he was stronger, since she leaned on him; and, finally, it was he who had just traced the magnificent road where he would henceforth lead the steps of this adorable woman. Gennevilliers thus refreshed himself from his sleepless night, by immersing himself over his head in the most unctuous bath that ever was: a full vat of virtues perfumed with the contents of several flasks of distilled vanity.

Meanwhile, things weren't going so well for Madame Tonska. When Gennevilliers had gone out, she tossed and turned in bed for a while, trying to sleep. She succeeded for a moment and dozed off; but, under the action of an over-active head, she awoke with a start, and so completely that she realized the futility of any further attempt to obtain rest. So she got up, put on a robe, opened her window and gazed at the mountains, already tinged purple at their base and pink and white on the cloudy peaks caressed by the first breath of daylight.

— It's impossible," she said to herself, "to put more good will, more resolution, more obstinacy even, and above all good faith, into the efforts I keep making to get to grips with the things of life. Impossible! Everything leaves me cold and completely, hopelessly indifferent. I've never managed to fall in love with anyone; I think I'd have left Mr Tonski standing there on the fourth day of my devotion test, if he hadn't decided in advance to die, and now here's this idiot, to whom I've done everything right, and who has neither been able to throw me into a convent nor win me over to his philanthropy. Tonight, I made him fall in love with himself; tomorrow, he'll fall in love with me, if he isn't already, and it'll always have to start all over again! My God! Why can't I love anything? I've got to live, I've got to act! I'm not a brute, I'm not a nobody; I've got ideas, I've got energy, I've got qualities of all kinds! But, in heaven's name, what can I spend them on? If I must attach myself to someone, it would be better the prince than the others; he has spirit, heart, a high rank; yes, but precisely for that reason.

Monseigneur, by dint of hearing himself say it, is convinced of his infallibility; moreover, deep down, he is equally convinced of the immense honor he is bestowing on me by deigning to take care of me! And I would accept these miseries; but what a bore, what torture, to feel frozen and hard as marble and to yawn in advance at an exhibition of feelings always the same in every heart and lending, almost literally, the same words to every mouth!

How is it, then, that I, who am neither spiteful nor snarky, who am not, thank God! systematically incredulous, can, even more than love, curse and abhor this absurd language I've been drinking to my heart's content for the past fortnight? How hollow and false all this litany sounds! How much of a charlatan is poor M. de Gennevilliers, and what is most incriminating is that he is one, the wretch, without knowing it! At most, I bet, if, in the half-lucid minutes that his debility of temperament and mind allows him, a revelation passes through his head, a poor rocket extinguished at once by an avalanche of ready-made phrases, which he didn't even have the poor merit of inventing! God! I wish I could be like him! I wish I'd become a nun! I wish I could make him, give him the salon he dreams of! We'd discuss the merits of candidates for vacant bishoprics; we'd invent preachers of genius; we'd do matrimonial transplants, to serve the propagation of the good cause, by uniting a young pied-plat, a schemer without fortune, with a young millionaire goose. No, I mustn't go down that road! I wouldn't know how to get out of it, and, all in all, here I am, at the end of my rope, dying of boredom and unable to see what to hold on to, and me, pride, audacity, spending my life playing the most adventurous comedies, because I understand everything and manage to be sincere in nothing! I've been

I don't want to! I believe in everything and remain indifferent! I feel incapable of doing anything vile, base, vulgar, of dreaming up distractions that are unworthy in reality, I am virtue, and yet I cannot value anything that furnishes the sphere from which I would not like to leave.

While she was making this bitter confession - for she was in a moment of crisis, and not usually so sincere, even face-to-face with her conscience - Madame Tonska was aware of the need to get out of the impasse she had got herself into. This situation, with a character like hers, sometimes recurred; then she invariably went through three states: firstly, a violent revolt, like the one the reader has just witnessed; complete insurrection, shouts, fury, breaking the yoke; secondly, a firm resolution to throw in the face of the repudiated tyranny all the debris of the embarrassments put out of order; thirdly, and under the refreshing impression

a gradual, hesitant but finally complete return to prudence and moderation.

Because what can we do? If we destroy everything, what will be left? What will we want? Where will we go? Life is, in short, enclosed in a circle, and if the ring is broken, how can we exist? where? of what? by what? Freedom is good; it comforts and relaxes. But pushing things to the limit is not for natures that suffer from skepticism. She refused to go too far. Sad, horribly sad, she remained penetrated by her powerlessness and humiliation, and possessed more than ever by the desire to change. She took up a pen and wrote:

"My friend,

"You've predicted right twice again. I'm worthless, neither to others nor to myself; I'm afraid you're right all the way. So I'll never love anyone, and the ice of my imagination will remain frozen around my heart? But I want to fight.

"Farewell.

"Countess SOPHIE TONSKA."

The inscription on the letter read:

*To Mr. Casimir BULLET, in
Wilna.*

The next day, Sophie left, leaving M. de Gennevilliers with a farewell bill that told him nothing at all, and plunged him into consternation.

BOOK THREE

CHAPTER ONE

The person Madame Tonska addressed in her letter from St. Gallen could be considered an original. The name Casimir Bullet belonged to him only because he had taken it, and he had put up with it because, after considering it for a long time, he had found it ridiculous. In reality, he should have borne the very fine name he'd received from his father, and instead of living in a cramped little wooden house in one of Wilna's suburbs, it would have been up to him to occupy a hotel in the Faubourg Saint-Honoré; he didn't even think about it.

He may or may not have been gifted by nature with an upright and judicious mind; it's a difficult point to decide; in any case, he was certainly gifted with a singular power of obstinacy, and could bend his moral person to anything he set his mind to; he was quite enlightened, having read widely, especially history, and, by dint of examining the series of human facts, had become disgusted with those who fabricate them. When something appeared to him in a light that was true or false, but admirable to him, he had this power, this virtue of not deviating, for any seduction whatsoever, from the conclusions he drew and the line of conduct to which he was attached. Having come to Russia at the very time when Countess Tonska had stopped having the works of Saint Theresa read to her by the Duc d'Olivarès, Casimir Bullet had been introduced to her at a ball, and, following a discussion, she had found him singular and had admitted him to her home. For a month, she made him her most intimate companion.

At the end of this time, it seemed inexplicable to him that Casimir, amiable, elegant and intelligent, had not yet made any declaration or even hint of love. In truth, had he ventured to do so, he would certainly not have been pleased. However, Sophie was astonished to see him remain perfectly at rest and within the bounds of the most exact discretion, and it was only a short step from being astonished to wanting to find out why.

She wanted to get to the bottom of Casimir's soul using the most sophisticated methods.

regular. She multiplied the occasions when he found her alone; she talked a lot about him; she showed, in the most flattering way, an interest in his opinions, and affected to agree with him in all things when she hadn't sensed it. Then she agreed to have troubled and worried airs with him, and very significant moments of taciturnity. He didn't seem to notice; when she remained silent, he imitated her, and long moments passed thus; when she spoke of him, he began another subject; when she showed him affection, he thanked her for it; but she couldn't discover whether he was moved or not.

Seeing that she couldn't draw him out of his reserve, she couldn't stand it any longer:

— I'd like to ask you a question.

— Ask, and it will be answered.

— Will you be completely sincere?

— Is it really useful?

— Absolutely necessary; I appeal to your feelings of honor.

— As long as you take it in that tone, my veracity will be absolute.

— I want to believe you. Why aren't you in love with me?

— Why am I not in love with you?

— Yes, say a little.

— I am.

— You're in love with me! What a joke!

— I'm not joking. The evil began three months ago; I love you to bits.

— You're telling me this as if you were telling me the gazette.

— That's because it's news, since you don't know about it.

— So why didn't you tell me?

— That's because you didn't ask me.

— So we ask you these things?

— Any other woman than the one whose interrogation I now have the honor of undergoing would not have needed to resort to such an uncommon means, I agree; but with you, there's no other way. I've tried my best to find other ways, but I haven't found any.

— I don't understand you at all.

— Now that the ice is broken, I'll explain everything.

At this, Madame Tonska, interested but also irritated and waiting for the moment to explode, looked her interlocutor in the face. The latter moved his chair back instead of forward, put down his hat, which he had hitherto held between his knees, and, assuming the attitude of a solicitor explaining a case :

— Madam," he said, "from the day I felt my heart being taken, I was

allowed me to study you carefully. You are too much admired not to be much talked about; I had been unimpressed by the common commentaries on your doings, and I am in the habit of creating opinions from my own remarks, so that, like my clothes, they fit me as well as possible.

— And what were the results of your examination?

— Madam, I had fallen into the greatest misfortune that could have befallen me.

— In what way, please?

— I doubt you could love anyone, and for my part, I'm certain you'll never love me. Like all people more inclined to exercise domination than tenderness, if I give myself up, you'll trample me incessantly. Always on the ground, I'll have an existence I couldn't possibly want, and that's why I never intended to tell you what you mean to me.

— If I understand you, and if you know what you're saying, you're entrusting me with your weakness only to see your energy?

— Not quite.

Casimir rose to his feet and continued his explanation with a kind of solemnity that seemed to the Countess to indicate a certain agitation.

— You're far from being an ordinary person," he says, "you're a sterile person. The great qualities with which your soul is endowed resemble that prince of the *Thousand and One Nights*, man to the waist, and from there, marble to the feet. So he couldn't walk! Your passions don't work. I repeat, you'll never love anyone and you'll never have anything but beginnings. However, since your brain hasn't been touched by the wand of the evil fairy, and your heart is big, I'm going to tell you my secret and ask you a favor. In this way, I'll have proved that I love you, and only asked of you what you're capable of.

Madame Tonska had this singular feeling of being understood.

Casimir's attitude, facial expression and accent were serious, and she was convinced of his sincerity. Curiosity also held her. She remained silent.

— Madame la Comtesse, this is what it's all about. I had the misfortune foreseen by Montaigne, who undoubtedly knew something about it from experience, of mistrusting my natural religion. I remain a good Catholic, but convinced that this doctrine, which is a truer opinion than all the others, is just as powerless to change men's feelings and actions. When they are morally humpbacked, it leaves them that way. Like everyone else, like you, like our young man earlier, she's marble from the waist down.

It theorizes and doesn't work. I still have the misfortune, the great misfortune, to have the most absolute contempt and the most open hatred for this part of Europe where I was born. It does not please me to see a people once so great, now lying on the ground, impotent, paralyzed, half-rotten, decomposing, given over to the nonsense, misery, meanness, ferocity, cowardice and failings of a senile childhood, fit for nothing but death, which I sincerely wish for it, so that it falls out of the disgrace in which it wallows, cackling with imbecility.

Having such unfortunate ideas about my religion and my country, but which hold me, I could still be attached to the habits of common life: it would be to embrace a profession of some kind or to exercise a trade.

Unfortunately, you'll notice that I don't need it. Not only do the material necessities of life not impose it on me, but having no desire to achieve what is called distinction, I lack any stimulus. I'd even hate to become a soldier and have my head broken, or worse, crippled, only to hear my chiefs referred to as the intrepid colonel such-and-such, the skilful general such-and-such, and the astonishing minister such-and-such, the most extraordinary organizer of this incomparable era, or, on the contrary, the cowardly colonel such-and-such, the inept general such-and-such, and the traitorous minister, depending on the newspaper or the political aims of the moment. So I won't go out of my comfort zone.

Perhaps a woman's love would have taken the place of what I lack. It's possible that the mysticism of a devoted attachment replaces everything, takes the place of everything, and fills all the gaps. I'll never know. You can't love me, and even you can't love. I've never felt in love with anyone but you, but marble, marble, that's the great obstacle!

I can't get rid of it, I can't break it! I can't delude myself about that. A little sooner, a little later, I'd have to come back to the abandonment, the solitude where I am today; you'll agree that such a backward journey is not the place to start.

— Well, let's admit everything. No religion, no homeland, no profession, no love. The void is made. The table is wiped clean. Absolutely nothing left. What do you conclude?

— I conclude that he's still the man, and if he's had the strength to look his own will in the face, and find it solid, we're entitled to say he's got something.

— And what, may I ask?

— Stoicism. This is not a vision, nor even an oddity. Times like these have always produced this stern authority. Marcus Aurelius, for example

He was a stoic. He didn't believe in the Pantheon; he didn't believe in the salvation of Rome; he had a tenderly loved wife who preferred, by far, the first grimaker who came along, provided he had no heart. His great misfortune, which I'm spared, so I'm comparatively happy, was to be emperor. As such, he had to spend his life in the swamps of the Marcomans, killing people more honest than his soldiers. When he returned victorious, he was asked for a drink, as a reward for the trouble he'd taken; when he kissed Faustina, he knew he was disturbing an appointment with the grimace-maker. If I were like Marcus Aurelius, bound by a positive duty, I'd fulfill it; but I'm not, and that's what I like.

My intention is to give up the name I bear. It's no longer a value, only a vanity. It doesn't touch me. You're going to tell me that by taking such a firm stand on this point I'm destroying myself; that's what I intend to do. I don't know what to do with my fortune. I beg you to accept it, and I place here, on this table, the notarized deed that I've been carrying with me for the past few weeks, in the expectation that an explanation will eventually take place between us.

— What kind of paper is this?

— A donation of my property.

— You're losing your touch!

— Not at all. You're too rich for me to presume to give you a present. This one won't do you any good. As for me, I need to free myself of what I don't value, and only know you to fulfill the sole condition imposed on my legatee. This is to have the extreme goodness to give me a perpetual annuity of three thousand francs in Wilna, where I'm going to settle and never leave. Should you fail to do so, your heirs will be under the same obligation.

— You're out of your mind. Please take back this paper and don't mention it again.

— Allow me! You're not making a sound judgment of my intentions. As I've had the honor of telling you, I love you. So it's only natural that I should take pleasure in putting myself in your hands and depending on you alone. In moving to Wilna, I'm making a reasonable decision. I don't know this town at all; when I thought of choosing a residence, I had only one object in mind: to establish myself somewhere where I could be sure of being unknown. I wrote the names of seven different towns on as many tickets; I mixed them up and drew one at random. So I'm going to stay in Wilna, since Wilna fell into my lap. For the pension I'm asking you for, I've put a figure

probably more than I need, but you have to foresee everything; there are years when foodstuffs increase in price; besides, diseases can come; in short, when I want money, I'll ask you what I'll need. Usually, very little is enough,

— But suppose for a moment that I'm your accomplice in this frenzy, for it can't be called anything else, what are you going to do in Wilna? How will you arrange your life? You'll go mad in such solitude!

— I'll live quietly, without the trouble of disappointments, without the sickening distractions of the near and far from which I distance myself. I venerate the Brahmins accustomed to leading their existence under the shadows of a lost forest, doing without anything. I'd even go and join them, if I didn't feel an invincible horror for imitations and pastiches; but I'll observe the essentials of their doctrine and be very much at home in Wilna...

Madame Tonska refused the donation, and after some harsh words, sent Casimir away. He returned three or four days later, but was refused entry. His exile lasted a month. At first, Sophie was indignant, almost humiliated. She considered this intractable lover a madman, but as he was no ordinary madman, she thought about him; thinking about him, she became interested in him; becoming interested in him, she thought she loved him. It was a natural progression. When she admitted him after his period of ostracism, she showed him sensitivity, and without, moreover, betraying what her imagination made her believe to be true, she begged him to renounce the plan of conduct he had outlined to her and to stay with her, if only as a test.

— I know what I need to know, and I'd be wrong not to stick to it. Allowing, allow me to remonstrate, that certain feminine feelings, brought into play because my situation may be unusual, make me interesting enough to lead you to favorable impressions, nothing would last and I would soon become too unhappy, You are not capable of maintaining the same willpower for long. If you feel any friendship for me, give me proof of it by consenting to what I desire.

In the end, Madame Tonska relented. She became Casimir's anticipated heiress; and he, having arranged his departure for Wilna, came to take his leave. She was troubled. She couldn't help showing it. He kissed her hand, left and she never saw him again.

This separation was more painful than she could have imagined, not that she couldn't easily do without an admirer. Moreover, she was so surrounded, thrown into such a whirlwind, that, if half of her

She would have missed the world, too much of it would have remained. However, more often than she would have expected, she saw Casimir's dark figure pass through her memory. Whenever she felt bored or sad, she immediately thought of him, and it became a habit. Later, everything faded a little; when she was drawn into one of her great enterprises, when she was weaving one of those plots from which she expected amusement, she forgot him; but one day, amidst the rubble, the image of the fanatic would reappear in her mind. Sometimes she would write to him, as we've seen she did at the Saint-Gall inn; he never replied; no matter how much she begged him, he would not break his silence. She had too much insight into his character not to understand the despair deep down. She resigned herself, and from then on, when she wrote, it was only to cry out to someone: "I'm suffering", and to tell the truth about herself. No, he never wrote to her, but once a year or so, at indeterminate times, she'd receive an absolutely blank letter. She recognized his handwriting on the address. She begged him to explain this whim. He did not. She then convinced herself that this blank page, sent so rarely, was the philosopher's unique sacrifice to succumbing human nature; she believed that when he was at his wits' end and sadness overpowered him, or at least overtook him, he allowed himself, with a stingy yet constrained hand, the poor pleasure of tracing the letters of his name.

She, the woman who was always cold, but always bubbling, always in revolt, always in search of what she didn't flatter herself to find, took in esteem and almost veneration this resolute nature that managed to dominate itself without ceasing to feel; she gradually set it up before her own feelings, as a model that, in some way, it would be beautiful, it would be good to imitate.

For him, he lived like an ascetic, on almost nothing, both physically and mentally. He ate what he needed, nothing but what he needed, and served himself.

Seeing no one of his class, he sometimes chatted with commoners or travelers, but formed no bonds, and no one entered his home. He read a lot, wrote, then burned his manuscripts, without anyone ever seeing them.

He once met a wise man who was traveling the world. This wise man's name was John. He was not the light, but he believed he was a precursor to the light.

This John said to him:

— Sir, I agree with you that many things of this time are odious, but their destructive work is necessary to prepare the way for the perfections that will come next. In other words, and to use a common phrase, we are in a period of transition.

— I want to believe you, but I don't care what comes out of your havoc, especially if it's new. I don't know future mores to approve of them, future costumes to admire them, future institutions to respect them, and I stick to knowing that what I approve of, what I admire, what I love is gone. I have nothing to do with what will follow. Consequently, you do not console me by announcing the triumph of parvenus that I do not want to know.

CHAPTER TWO

— Since you wish to know, mademoiselle," said Conrad to Harriet, "what I started this morning was a statue of Ossian.

— Really? Why take on such a subject? Ossian has fallen out of fashion.

-I don't really care. I realize that the form of his poems has aged and that their phraseology now seems outdated. But the character charms me.

— What! A cloud man?

— Clouds, no doubt, and sunset clouds! Don't you see this unhappy heart, filled with the image of heroes and times that are no more, filled with piety for a past that is fading away; pursuing with a sad look and a painful affection a sun that is already fading and that is going to be extinguished in the bosom of the wicked waves of a merciless sea? Don't you find in him all the nobility, all the grandeur of invincible loyalty? He loves and loses everything; he loves and will be left alone! He loves and will never forget! He loves and he will not cling to what triumphs! He loves and he wants to know nothing of the qualities, virtues, merits, graces, seductions of what will reign, because the new master will have taken the place of the one he served! He loves at last, and will die loving forever! At the very least, such a nature will interest a select few, and it's to them that I speak. I don't picture Kingal's poet as an old man; old age is cold, and not having much longer to live, is only concerned with disputing with the fingers of death already stretched out over it the scattered threads of a broken existence that it will soon sever. I'll make him a man in the prime of life, still with a lot to suffer, knowing it, accepting it, and unshakeable.

Harriet looked at Conrad. She shivered at the memory of her own past.

— Are you in pain?

He had spoken without design. He was surprised at the words he had spoken and the warmth he had put into them, and, by a natural effect of having spoken them as well as having thought them, he found himself disarmed. The ardor of his grief overcame him. Pale, indecisive, he leaned his elbows on the table, and looked at Harriet with an expression she had never seen before, but which she understood at first:

— You are," he told her, "Nore's fiancée. Will you do for me what the noblest, most revered sister could do?

— If I may, right away!

— Make me cry; I don't know how to cry. For weeks, for months, it seems to me that if I could manage to draw a torrent of tears from my breast, these burning, bitter, bloody tears, once out, I would heal.

— What are you saying, my friend?" cried Harriet. She was overcome by the truest pity, and wished she could console the man standing before her. Such an instinct, such a movement, even when only imperfectly expressed, is enough to act on a miserable being. Conrad felt this beneficent commiseration, and when Harriet took his hand, tears began to flow slowly down his face, thick and troubled; but instead of doing him good, it only served to increase the intensity of his pain. He reached the point where he could no longer control himself. Until then he had done it, his strength had barely been enough, but at last it had been enough. He had always had this vision in his mind: If I cry, the constant anguish that clutches my throat, that suffocates me, will cease. The claws in my brain will stop. All this agony comes from tears that won't come out. And he added: "They'll come out once, and I'll be delivered; I'll still be sad, but in this state I'll at least be able to live, and I don't even know if I'll want to get better.

Well, not at all. The tears came out and brought only the tyranny of his pain; they laid bare his torture and destroyed his resistance; then he was humiliated; humiliated, he gave up, he could do no more; he let go pride, dignity, fear of blame, what! Like a beaten slave, he lay down on the ground and begged for mercy.

— I lied to myself," he said, "lied! Shame! I swore I didn't love her... I loved her! Why did I love her? I don't know why! I'll tell you how it happened. It's all there in my mind. It's all engraved in my being, and under every stroke of this fatal story is one of my bruised and throbbing nerves. The first time I saw her, I saw her badly. She was against the light, with her veil down... I should have realized... I didn't!... that an electric flame was enveloping me. I didn't realize it until later. She wanted me, I gave myself; I gave myself while resisting, or rather believing I was resisting... but she's so clever! She was never mistaken! I gave myself. So... she... how shall I put it? Well! she made me jealous; she told me not to love her; she told me to run away from her; she told me she was dangerous, and as she spoke she sealed me at her feet. And then, well, then she told me she had a great friendship for me, and... how shall I put it?... Well, yes, she chased me away!

— Is it possible?" exclaimed Harriet, clasping her hands together.

— I say she drove me out. She told me that... I mean, she chased me away! I convince myself of all sorts of things! I convince myself that I don't love her, that I've never loved her, that I'll never love her!... I tell myself that I'm very happy that the story ended like that; that my wounded pride must serve me well as a shield; I tell myself that in any case there is no such thing as eternal suffering, and that the sorrows of love are fragile; I tell myself that we don't suffer when we don't consent to suffer, and that a pain well denied is no pain at all. From morning to night, from night to morning, I lavish myself with the firmest maxims. I take myself apart, I reason with myself... I stop myself from thinking of laughter... I do what I can... and... here I am!

Saying this, he got up, went to the back of the room, and throwing his figure into a cushion, sobbed bitterly.

Harriet remembered herself. If the story of her sensations didn't absolutely resemble what she'd just heard, one point was the same: pain. She knew it as well as Conrad did; she had suffered, albeit from very different causes, and the very difference in those causes made the unfortunate man more sympathetic to her.

— This much-loved woman has been too harsh, she thought, and yet he doesn't accuse her!

She leaned over him and, with gentle words, tried to calm his excitement. Little by little, he recovered.

— I had never loved anyone, for I can no longer use that word, now that I know too well what it is, to describe the sympathy, the drive that may have carried me towards this or that woman. I didn't think much of love, I confess, and even regarded it as one of those weaknesses to which it's wrong to give in; I called those who do it cowards. Perhaps I wasn't wrong; it's just that I despised those I called cowards. Now the coward par excellence is me, and I pity myself deeply, and despise myself no more for my prostration than I would a poor man crushed under the weight of a rock. Love is too strong! Love is too hard, love is too sad, love is too bitter; ah! love is a torture too refined for the frail human machine, seized by such terrible power, to succeed in fighting it with its own energy! Now I love, I love for good, completely; I'm not loved; what are you pretending? Will you tell me to forget? Or to change? Do we change? Do we forget at will? The day it happens, you have no consolation to ask of anyone; you've become another man, a stranger from head to toe to the one who suffered, and whose heart, above all, is quite different.

— Look at me," said Harriet, "and listen.

Conrad obeyed.

— Get inside yourself as far as you can. Contemplate yourself. Question your feelings, your motives, and ask yourself what your passion means. Are you sure there isn't some vanity involved? Yes, when you were attracted to this woman, didn't she seduce you with her rank, her elegance, her beauty, her wit, insofar as she was noticed by others? Were you not especially charmed by the attentions she paid to your self-esteem? And when the enchantress withdrew from you, do you seriously ask yourself if the wound didn't mainly affect your pride?

— No, a thousand times no! I don't care about her in any way. I just love her.

— You love her, and that's all there is to it! Are you also certain that, in the face of her indifference, a certain stubbornness, a stiffness that refuses to bend, is not the cause of your grief?

— I'm sure of it too; for, speaking frankly to you, convinced of not being loved, to what hope would I tie the thread of my stubbornness?

— So you love her purely, absolutely, with your heart, your head, your imagination, not with the vices or foibles of your mind?

— I love it with myself and couldn't say more.

— Then recognize the most consoling truth to be found on this earth. Continue to love freely, without dispute, without fighting, without asking yourself if you should. You won't see it; time will pass between you like a swift stream, and this passion it flows through will indeed suffer some disturbances on its banks; barren at this hour, but bathed by the flow, greenery will grow on its banks and flowers in the middle. I know there's idolatry in what I'm advising you, but idolatry, even for a theologian, is better than despair. Love her, believe me, love her well, with all your strength, all your soul, all your abandon. If you're going to be cured, this condescension will disarm and soften your passion far more than furious resistance ever could; if you're going to stay what you are, then stay what you are! Well, Conrad, I confess I've known what you're suffering, and I pity you from the bottom of my soul; well, I would have loved you to death, and never wanted to change! But that's not all! To love, you need hope, just as religious piety requires faith. If you're well resolved, the very grace of your resolution advises you to hope!

— What?" says Conrad.

— I don't know what, but hope! It's a lot to want. Have you ever read the story of don Pierre de Luna, as told some twenty years ago by a certain Lord Feeling?

— Never," replied Conrad, shaking his head in concern.

— Sit here, I don't want you to ignore it.

Harriet tried to distract her patient, to shake him out of his torpor.

— Don Pierre de Luna," she says, "was a gentleman in the time of Philip III, whom his family wanted to marry advantageously. He refused for a long time, but finally, tired of many adventures, he gave in and accepted in advance the wife he would be offered. Are you listening to me, Conrad?

— I'm listening," he replied, running a hand over his forehead.

— You'll soon be more attentive. Don Pedro solicited doña Isabelle's hand in marriage and was granted it. The King appointed him governor of Alhama, and the wedding took place there. I'm in a hurry, Conrad, I'm in a hurry to get to what's going to interest you.

— Would you believe that the sound of your voice alone does me more good than I've felt in months?

— Sound is music, and music expresses affection; words must also be welcomed. Among the festivities was a bullfight. The groom, the bride, the guests, the nobility, the burghers, the peasants and the people occupied the perimeter of the square, where brilliant scaffolds were erected. The grandstands collapsed, precipitating a frightful mass of wounded and dead amidst billows of dust.

Don Pierre threw himself under the crumbling beams and floors at the height of the tumult. Amid the cries of distress, he found a woman and carried her away. He hadn't looked at her; he hadn't seen her; as he set her down, out of danger, at the corner of an alleyway, half unconscious, she threw her arms around his neck and said, "Save me!"

Don Pierre, contemplating her, felt himself seized, at the same time as by these two arms, by a strange power that enveloped him entirely. A flame entered his heart and head, and a veil fell over his mind. Everything within him became confused and transformed. It seemed to him that a new gift Pierre was taking the place of the old one, and as he gazed intently at the divinity that unconsciously mastered him, and dazzled at the sight of that face, he heard a voice crying out to him:

— Lord Governor! I owe you my daughter!

An old lady, with tears in her eyes, kissed his hands; he disengaged himself without saying a word and walked away. He was out of his mind. He returned to the disaster,

a few more people out of the way, then headed for home.

It was the last day of the wedding. The guests understood that her gloom and silence were the result of public misfortune. His sensitivity was praised, and the new bride took reason to love him more. The next day, everyone left. Don Pierre remained immersed in a singular torpor, and it's hard to say that he remembered clearly the features of the woman he had held in his arms. It seems to me you're beginning to listen to me!

— Go on. What did Don Pedro do?

— He was left with no desires, no ideas, except that his wife was good and that he should devote himself to her. At the end of the week, he set out to scour the town in all directions. He was given the names of various families and the number of people in them. One morning, at mass, he spotted the old lady and, beside her, her daughter. He was dazzled. He almost fell over.

However, when the service was over, he approached and asked about his protégée.

They thanked him effusively. He learned that the lady's name was doña Pilar de Menezès, and she lived in one of the suburbs. The young woman, Carmen, he hardly dared look at. All his blood was rushing back and swelling his heart. After a day and a night of anguish, he arrived at doña Pilar's house and explained that, having understood from various clues the honorable discomfort of a poorly rewarded military family, he was offering his services.

Doña Pilar began a long account of her embarrassments. Meanwhile, Don Luis gazed at Carmen, who smiled innocently at him. He understood the meaning of this candor and said to himself: she'll never love me! She doesn't even suspect that I adore her! Suddenly, a word brought him back to reality.

— It would be all the more fortunate for us," continued the lady, "to obtain your protection, as Carmen is to be married in two months' time to a lieutenant in the Alcala regiment.

It was like lightning falling on Don Pedro. He pretended to have a violent headache and withdrew, promising to return the next day.

The ladies, a little surprised, let him go, then congratulated themselves on having found such a worthy and zealous friend.

As for Don Pierre, he ran around the countryside, stopping, walking and looking for himself.

- What am I doing? What am I thinking? My God! What do I want? Well... let's see!... Let's reason! Where am I? Am I myself?

Am I crazy? My wife, my poor wife!... And she, she, Carmen!... What do I want? To lose her! To make her an object of shame! You wretch!

Come back to yourself! Recognize yourself! What do you think? No! I'm sick, I've got the

fever, I have visions... I can't stop at such infamies!

He returned home, walked around his room all night again, and resolved to control himself. With all the strength of his reason, his righteousness and his virtue, he held fast to the imperious duty of no longer thinking about Carmen, and, determined not to give in, suddenly found himself in her home.

Her madness became lucid and continuous. It had become fixed and reasoned with the logic of madness. By chance, which can neither be said to be fortunate nor unfortunate, for sooner or later it would have happened, doña Pilar was in church, and Don Pedro found himself alone with Carmen.

— I'm going to say a prayer; don't take it the wrong way... I beg you not to get married.

— Why?" asked Carmen, opening her beautiful eyes wide.

— I love you in adoration.

And, as the girl rose red-faced and indignant to leave the room, Don Pedro continued:

— Hear me out! It's true that I've been married for some time, but I've decided to sue in the Court of Rome for the nullity of my union.

— On what pretext?" asked Carmen.

— Under any pretext and by any means! I can't live without you.

— Well, die!" Carmen replied, and left.

Don Pierre should have come to his senses in the face of such a harsh statement. But he didn't. On the contrary, a kind of joy intoxicated him. First, he had confessed his love; that was a step; then he admired the pride of the woman he loved, and found Carmen so beautiful in her anger that he forgot to grieve.

He no longer slept, he no longer ate, he no longer rested; all day long, he went from one place to another, distracted, astonishing his wife and servants by the constancy of his silence. He became thin, pale, frightening; people continued to attribute this state to the impression left by the accident on the wedding day; yet such exaggerated sensitivity was beginning to weary everyone.

His wife confided in him one day that she would soon be a mother. He replied:

— I want to confess something to you too. You're my best friend; there's no one in the world I hold in higher esteem. I want you to know that I love a lady and I'm determined to marry her. You and I are related to each other to a degree that is forbidden; we can therefore easily obtain our separation, and I beg you not to object.

At first, Doña Isabelle took this language as a joke, but when she saw that nothing was more serious, she burst into tears, threw herself at her husband's feet.

husband and begged him to abandon such a dishonorable project.

He listened to everything, and made no reply other than to shake his head. Doña Isabelle wisely took it as a very bad symptom that he kissed her sadly from time to time, and didn't get angry at the violent words she couldn't hold back in her indignation. Finally, overcome by the strange, irresistible, fatal quality of her husband's countenance, she exclaimed:

— If you want to, so be it! Let's split up; leave your wife, your child, do as you please! When you're too unhappy, maybe you'll come back to me!

After these words, she thought she was dying.

He went prowling, as was his custom, around Carmen's house. It was now evening. Outside the window, he found a young man accompanied by musicians, tuning their instruments for a concert.

Don Pierre realized that the engagement had been made, and the moment of marriage was approaching. He hid in a dark corner between two houses, and the serenade began. When it was over, the young man bowed respectfully at the window. Don Pierre said to himself:

— She was there!...

— Does this story tire you?" asked Harriet.

— Go on! Go on! please," replied Conrad, his eyes shining.

Don Pedro approached the young man, and, bowing, said:

— Lord Lieutenant, my name is Don Pedro de Luna and I'm the governor of this town. I love doña Carmen; we intend to give her to you, and if you deign to do me this insignificant favor of giving her up, I'll thank you on both knees! There is no sacrifice other than this one that I am not ready to pay you homage to; know, moreover, that I am not meditating on anything offensive. My marriage is about to break up; I intend to lay my name at the feet of doña Pilar's daughter.

— Lord Governor," replied the lieutenant, "in any other encounter I'm your slave. In this one, I'll forget, out of respect, what you've just said.

— I implore you, rider, spare me! I beg you, listen to me! Be generous; you don't love Carmen the way I do!

— Don Pierre, one more word and I'm insulted.

— God forbid! I'm to blame for everything, but I can't help it. Give in to me!

— Since you persist, since you and my honor can't stay alive, one of them will disappear.

At these words, the lieutenant stood on guard.

Don Pierre did the same with extreme reluctance; but, as his adversary pressed him a little too hard, instinct made him tighten his grip, and, after a few seconds, the iron entered the young man's body, who fell, didn't utter a word, and expired. A night patrol rushed over the combatants, that is to say, the dead man and the survivor, and when the quality of the culprit had been recognized, the police guards didn't even dare to hazard a question; they took away the corpse, and don Pierre returned home.

The next day, the whole town heard what had happened. Doña Pilar came crying to Doña Isabel, telling her of the crime and its cause, which the unfortunate woman already knew all too well. For her part, she had just called her family to her side. She had also written to don Pierre's parents, and the lieutenant's friends arrived to demand justice. Doña Isabelle recounted what had happened between her and her husband; doña Carmen, on her mother's orders, revealed her conversation with the culprit. We would have liked to have had him arrested, but he was the supreme authority of the country; a court order was required; moreover, soliciting such an order was a very serious matter. Several days were spent deliberating. An incident occurred that precipitated matters.

CHAPTER THREE

Don Pierre, losing all restraint, had decided on violence. One night, at about three o'clock in the morning, he set out to break down doña Pilar's door and kidnap Carmen. He had two men with him and set to work without much care, believing he was dealing only with women. But he was mistaken. Carmen's brother, don Juan, had arrived that evening. At the first sound, he rushed into the vestibule, and when the exit was opened, don Pierre was face to face with him.

— Get out of here, you wretch!" exclaimed Don Juan furiously.

Don Pierre thought: we must persuade him gently; in any case, no violence; he's his brother!

But before he could open his mouth, Don Juan marched up to him, sword high:

— Defend yourself," he shouted!

Don Pedro threw himself aside, drew his sword, broke it in two, threw the pieces behind him and murmured:

— Never against his blood!

Then, in the presence of the two soldiers, the brother struck Don Peter in the face and, throwing himself on top of him, knocked him to the pavement.

The next day, everyone knew about the new attack, and don Pierre was judged not only as a debauchee of the worst kind, a murderer, a prevaricating magistrate, an executioner of his charming wife, but also as the last of the cowards.

The measure was full. The four families concerned wrote to the Court to request the deposition and confinement in a fortress of the man convicted of so many disorders. Doña Isabelle begged, but the request went through.

So Don Pierre said to himself: if I'm arrested, I won't even be able to see her.

He decided to flee. Gathering resources was impossible. At the time, he could find no one willing to lend him anything. He decided to go away, to hide, to live as best he could, and to carry out this resolution around the time when Madrid's reply was due.

However, for their part, doña Pilar and Carmen, half-dead with fright, and unable to keep don Juan close to them at all times, thought they could do no better

The only way they could make use of his presence was to have him take them to Portugal, where they wanted to escape.

Don Pierre, always on the lookout, heard of this resolution. That same night, he disappeared. Doña Isabelle searched everywhere for him. His enemies, guided by an entirely different sentiment, also multiplied their efforts. He could not be found.

Then the fugitive's poor wife fell ill. Her condition added to her suffering, and despite all the care she received, she died, begging her family to forgive her murderer; for, she said, he has neither the will to do wrong, nor the power to escape what he is doing.

Meanwhile, don Pierre was wandering in the mountains, on the road to Portugal, some twenty leagues from Alhama. In a few days, his clothes had become rags, and the little money he had ran out. He begged for alms. He spent his time on the main road, watching for travelers, looking for Carmen among them. One day, he was happy.

Carmen, appeared between her mother and brother; she first saw him, standing on a rock, gazing at her passionately. Don Juan followed the direction of the poor girl's gaze, saw what she was frightened of, brought his arquebus to bear and fired. Don Pierre, hit, fell, got up, fled, and Carmen saw the blood redden his shirt. She hid her face in her hands, crying out in anguish. But the unfortunate man had the strength to escape. It was out of the question to pursue him on horseback along the stony paths where he dragged himself.

In the evening, having bandaged his wound as best he could, don Pierre heard the muleteers recount the death of his wife; his name was covered with curses and, it was added, Saint Hermandad was looking for him. He lay on the ground in a corner and wept bitterly all night. The next day, he set off for Portugal, making sure not to lose track of the woman he wanted to see at all costs.

The two ladies settled in Cintra. Don Pierre found work on a nearby farm. He hid during the day; at night, he wandered around the house that held his treasure; on Sundays, he sometimes managed to catch a glimpse of Carmen at mass. It's hard to say that this satisfied him much, but he lived. Could Don Pierre de Luna, who had become a laborer, a man of the most abject class, fed on coarse bread, sleeping on straw, dressed in tatters and, what's more, knowing himself to be an abhorrence to anyone who had ever heard of him, be an object of envy? But he was still alive, and seeing Carmen from afar was enough to make him prefer this miserable existence to any other... This went on for two years.

— Two years!" murmured Conrad.

— Yes, two years! One evening, Don Pedro, secluded in the tall grass, half-hidden by a tree, opposite the house, saw Carmen's brother arrive on horseback with a young man, elegantly dressed. A few liveried servants accompanied them.

Don Pierre shuddered. He had reason to. Don Félix de Souza had just asked for Carmen's hand in marriage, and had been granted it. The engagement was about to be celebrated. The engagement took place, in fact, while Don Pierre was eagerly approaching the door, hearing these details from the people of the house. He was strangled by grief, and although he tried to contain himself, the movements of his face were such as to attract attention. One of don Juan's men recognized the unfortunate man, and denounced him to his comrades; They, in turn, alerted the Portuguese; they pounced on him, knocking him down despite his resistance, and garroting him. They ran to inform their masters of the capture.

Don Juan de Menezès and his friend went out at once.

— It's really him!" exclaimed Don Juan, without deigning to say a word to the captive.

But Don Félix, considering Don Pierre, said to him haughtily:

— What were you looking for?

— Only the sight of him," replied Don Pedro, lowering his head.

— Don't talk to that man!" cried Don Juan, "he's a murderer, a coward.

— No! He's a lover like none we've ever known!

The two riders made no reply and, mounting their horses, marched their prisoner ahead of them. They took him to Lisbon and handed him over to the police judge. Then, the next day, they went to the palace, where they told the King everything, asking for the guilty man to be punished, either by being handed over to Spanish justice, or deported to the African presidencies.

The King, having listened to don Juan's account, testified that he wished to put an end to the odious persecution of which doña Carmen was a victim, and so that the affair should not drag on, he gave orders for the various people involved in the affair to be brought immediately to a room in the palace, where he went with the Queen, the lords of the Council and the whole Court.

And so, when the time came for the audience, on one side we saw doña Pilar, Carmen, with her brother and fiancé don Félix, and on the other, soldiers surrounding don Pedro, who was pale, in disarray, in irons, and while the King seated the ladies and horsemen, he was left standing like a malefactor.

— You are," said the King in a stern voice, "you are don Pierre de Luna, of the house of Benavidès, former governor of Alhama?

- I was a long time ago, I'm nothing like that now.
- Who are you, then, that shame separates from yourself?
- I am a man whose grief has bleached his hair and destroyed his life.
- Has this young woman deceived you? What do you blame her for?
- She always hated me, always despised me; I never got a glance from her.
- Your excuse?
- I love it! Don't talk to me anymore, make metake you away!

are the King, you can do anything! get her to let me just look at her for a moment.... and then.... Well, then, they can do whatever they want with me!

— What impudence!" murmured don Juan.

— Have this criminal removed," says the King, "he's incorrigible; tomorrow we'll hand him over to the Spaniards.

The soldiers put their hands on don Pedro's shoulder to make him walk. But just then, doña Carmen rose from her seat. She was very emotional, and her eyes were shining:

— Sire," she said, "I will be this man's wife! For you, don Félix, I thank you for your attachment; you gave me your name, all the happiness of a faithful affection. There is no gratitude that can repay you. But you are rich, brilliant, cheerful, happy, without remorseyou you don't need me; but look at him! He's a frightening shadow! And what has reduced him to such a ghost is his love for me... Without me, he'll die... Without me, he wouldn't have done what he did...

Come don Pierre!

And she held out both her hands. But Don Pierre was in no condition to take them; he had fallen unconscious on the floor.

This was how Harriet ended her story. She had no serious intention of inspiring wild hopes in Conrad; she was only trying to distract his attention and pull him out of the numbness she saw him in. She assumed that, through the exaggeration even of the story he had just heard, he would come to his senses and, in a few days' time, be in a position to consider his situation in a calmer light.

In any case, she succeeded in making her friend less unhappy. Following Don Pierre's example, he took on a blind resolve that won him more than his willless despair. It is not external facts, positive impressions, happy or unhappy, that cause the transports or convulsions that affect a soul in love. Rather, they are what we might call the visions it creates for itself within itself. Nothing had happened since Conrad had exhausted the agony of tears so bitterly shed under Harriet's gentle pity; yet he had quieted down. He returned home, enjoying, with a

The story of Don Pierre suggested a thousand imaginations to him, and he recognized that he was less to be pitied than he had been up to then in this desperate struggle against a love whose head he could not bend.

He arrived at his home and entered his studio. His spirits were so high that he had resolved to write to his friend, Lieutenant de Schorn, this very evening, to give him some news, which he had not yet done.

As he sat down at his table, he saw a letter. His heart pounded; it was Madame Tonska's handwriting. She was warning him of her arrival, giving him her address, and asking him to come and see her.

He didn't hesitate; he obeyed at once.

— Whatever happens," he said to himself, "I couldn't be more unhappy. She has my life, so whether she takes it, revives it or suffocates it, she's the master of it.

Sophie received him with the most affectionate simplicity.

— My friend," she said, "perhaps I'm doing wrong by calling you back to me, and if I could have doubted it until this moment, I'd understand it by the expression on your face, and I'm not hiding anything from myself. I will try to be kind and to make you suffer as little as possible. But when you love, you have to suffer, do you know that?

— Very well," replied Conrad, "and I'm ready.

— I've been thinking about this for a few days," Sophie continued, running her hand over her forehead. I'm dangerous, and all the more perverse for having done it in good faith. The truth of my nature is to be false. I'm my own first dupe. But I'd like to change. Honor and goodness, of which I am not without, have been crying out for years against my lies; and if my head is guilty, I believe, I feel that my heart is much less so. Of all the victims of my inconstancy, none has suffered as much as you, I'm sure. It is for this reason that I have written to you. I shall try to make amends by being the best of friends. Ask nothing more of me, demand nothing beyond that, and then you can, Conrad, you can give me calm, rest and self-respect. I'll owe it all to you. Do you want this deal?

— I want whatever you want. Let me just remind you of one thing. Why am I in Florence? The Prince has sent me away from you. I cannot deceive him.

The Countess smiled evilly, but immediately, covering her eyes with her hands, she turned inward, reflected and made up her mind.

— You're right," she says, "I'll be the one to warn His Royal Highness. Come back tomorrow. I have so much to tell you!

The next day, Conrad was sitting opposite her. She told him, without

This time, she soundly judged the false devotion she had thought she felt for her husband, but which she had imposed on herself, and ended with her encounter with the Gennevilliers. In this second part of her story, she heard flashes of irony that she recognized to be wicked.

As she finished, she put her hand on her friend's, and looked at him gently:

— Enough selfishness now. Speak up, it's about you. Are you working?

— Little and bad.

— You have to work hard and well! In this, I will serve you. I claim to be useful to those who love me, since I can do no more. From now on, entrust to me whatever touches you, occupies you, worries you. I'll be in your life like a torch of soft light. I want to become necessary to you.

-Well," said poor Conrad, "may God bless you for all these words and repay you a hundredfold for your charity towards me!

When Jean-Théodore received the Countess's letter informing him of her resumed relations with the young sculptor, he was furious; the sovereign's offended pride far outweighed the lover's disappointment. For several days, he indulged in feelings of contempt bordering on hatred, but he took no confidants; he repeated to himself this maxim of wise antiquity: "Any person placed high must refrain from lively movements." He said nothing to Professor Lanze; he said nothing to anyone. Soon absolute disdain replaced the brusqueness of the first irritation; then his natural generosity, the chivalrous turn of his imagination completed the task of imposing calm on him. Here is a passage from the letter in which he replied to Madame Tonska:

"Insofar as I have any right to do so, I therefore restore all your freedom to both of you, and sincerely hope it is for your happiness. I hold no grudge against Conrad. He has my complete friendship. Far be it from me to seek revenge. But I will be. You don't suit yourself in any way. Later, I'll give you the reasons for my opinion, when it will be clear that my explanations are not complaints. Farewell."

To properly describe, depict and explain the life that begins between friend and lover, we'd need to find a comparison whose accuracy would leave little to be desired. This life resembled a northern landscape. A cold, damp, peaty, dark land, but covered with short, green grass like

emerald. Endlessly prolonged lakes, embraced by silent woods; in these woods, the rigid foliage of firs, the red trunks of pines, the flexible, drooping, silvery, weeping masses of birches, great oaks, moss-covered rocks and lost paths. A pure blue sky, but so sad! A clear sun, but so cold! Smiles, however, throughout nature, goodness everywhere, and everywhere, as the soul of this creation of a suffering God, an inescapable melancholy.

It's quite common for a woman who loves, or thinks she loves, to exclaim tenderly: Tell me everything that concerns you! Tell me your troubles! Let me know about your work, your affairs, your worries! I want to be your friend, your advisor and your sister! There's nothing more affectionate than this ambition; nothing more difficult to put into practice and rarer to see fulfilled. In the man you love, it usually happens that you've only fallen in love with love. We haven't listened to the music, we've indulged ourselves solely in the sounds that flatter the ear, and of the marvellous opera we give ourselves, we savour above all the ballet. To step out of this enchanted sphere and bravely venture into the realm of your friend's positive preoccupations requires strength of character, real devotion, a complete detachment from what amuses, and a continuity of thought that very few female beings possess. Out of twenty women, there is hardly one for whom the charming exclamation: "Tell me everything" is anything more than a pretty phrase. Sometimes, even this phrase is just a disguise. Then it has a fatal purpose. It serves to mask the absence of tenderness itself under an imposing appearance of serious interest. You don't give love, but you pretend to put something much better and more dignified in its place. It's monkey money.

Then the patent for this pension is solemnly delivered to you, and, after a few minutes of affection that necessarily accompany the handing over, your generous protector is free of all obligation, and no longer takes any other interest in the man she has confined to a purely honorary situation.

Madame Tonska's temperament, essentially rebellious until then to any sustained application, was hardly prepared to tackle such an austere task. But she had a good heart. She sincerely wanted to do good for Conrad.

She had a deep abhorrence of the exaggerations and wild emotional pursuits in which she had hitherto wasted her life and compromised her sincerity. She set to work with all her heart, and understanding very well what she had to do, she began to follow day by day, hour by hour, and, so to speak, pulse by pulse, all the movements of her friend's moral life; and he, who had never been expansive, nor trusting, who had

Having always rejected with a rather fierce pride the idea that the heart could benefit from opening up and pouring its overflow into another heart, Conrad felt, with the most naïve joy, not only a complete relief from what usually fell on his overworked forces, he felt that, lifted, refreshed, supported, reassured, his soul's wingspan was increasing, and, like the mysterious beings of the Apocalypse, brought closer to the Holy of Holies, he was adding new ones to the two he already had, brighter in color, more thrilling and stronger.

Before long, Sophie was able to appreciate the value of her work. As for Conrad, he was transfigured. He was no longer the suspicious, touchy, reserved, brittle man she had known at first; nor was he the sad, acrimonious lover she had glimpsed. The good she was doing appeared to her as great as it was; she loved the good that came from her; and the man who received and enjoyed it, she loved in the same way. She wasn't in love with him; her moral being was too sore from the existence she'd led until then to allow her such a vivid sensation, and we've seen that, in her worst deviations, she'd always been above low fantasies. So she didn't love Conrad in the absolute sense of the word, but she was beginning to feel attached to him, and she explained this to him, and he had no illusions, he was sad, and preferred this sadness to all joys, and Sophie, because of him and through him, on her way to reconciliation with herself, listened to him when he said to her one day:

— I notice that, of all the subjects you talk about, the one that draws you in the most is the one in which you accuse yourself. You like to repeat, and I'm sure you've said it not only to me: I'm a coquette, beware! I'm false, I'm perfidious; my variable nature seeks evil for the sole pleasure of doing harm. - In this way, you've created for yourself a kind of convenient justification for your worst inspirations, and even, ultimately, a kind of pride in a veracity whose true merit, in your eyes, is, without you quite realizing it, to authorize every whim and deviation.

I don't think it's useful to say to a man: "Run away from me, I'm coquettish, I'll hurt you! If he's a mediocre man, he'll just conclude that you're giving him one more coquetry, and he'll be encouraged. If he's really attached to you, you make him suffer, but you don't drive him away. I'd prefer it if, in the depths of your conscience, you told yourself over and over again: I'm great, I'm generous, I'm bold, I'm proud, and being all that, and because I am, I'm good! It's my imagination, not my heart, that leads me down crooked paths, and if I only want to remember to use what I feel not to be ashamed of myself, I'll leave everything that puts me down. I don't need it, and all the times I've indulged in it,

It hasn't led me to debasing follies for which I've never had a taste, nor to pleasures I'm not looking for, but only to dead ends where I've been crumpled and bruised, falling back on myself and feeling nothing but the boredom of the emptiness into which I'd plunged so willingly. That, I think, is what you should tell yourself, and I imagine you'd be happier for it.

For Madame Tonska, these words coincided with her own reflections. It seemed to her that this language was the very voice of the inner Sophie, who, for the first time, was seizing the power to cry out loud against the outer one. That day, when the sculptor had left her alone, she found herself in a state of mind she had never known before.

The next day, she in turn confided to Conrad what she was feeling, and added:

— There's only one thing that surprises me. I'm a believer, I love God, and he doesn't appear to me in any of this. The inner movements I feel do not refer to him. I believe myself, I feel I'm on the verge of being worth more than I was; but, to explain my thought, I'm not aware, by any redoubling of fervor or piety, that this is what we call a conversion.

— No, it's not," replied Conrad. You're not becoming anything other than you were. You remain yourself. You don't take on new gods, place them on the altar, smashing the old ones. Only, one part of you - and, I dare say, the best, the true part - gradually acquires the energy to bend the lesser part.

— These kinds of prodigies," said the Countess, "can happen, but not without a fairly powerful determining cause. But I don't feel any special impulse. For want of religion, I'd need love, and I don't love you.

— Don't you like me?

— Not at all.

He put on a brave face, but he was in pain. He controlled himself, took Sophie's hand and, with a smile he wanted to make cheerful, asked her:

— Yet no less than a month ago?

— Yes, maybe less.

She accompanied these words with an icy stare. Conrad turned pale and felt deeply hurt. The Countess continued:

— Leave me; I'm hurting you, it's useless. I wouldn't be able to give you the slightest consolation right now.

— Will I come tonight?

— No, I'm going to the theater. I promised the Marquise Balbi. I want to have a chat with her brother. What's the matter? Are you jealous? What are you trying to say?

If you become one, I warn you, you'll be odious to me before long.

Conrad picked up his hat and headed for the door. There he stopped, hesitated for a moment, then returned to Sophie and offered her his hand. She coldly gave him hers.

He left. His head was spinning; the whole enchantment was gone. Once or twice, he was on the verge of falling on the cobblestones and held on to the walls. Passers-by moved along beside him, carried away by a whirlwind; he could distinguish nothing; he could discern nothing; it was as if he were in the midst of a world absolutely different from him and alien to both his senses and his brain. He returned home, and remained overwhelmed for over an hour. He wasn't thinking, he was suffering. Then he went out again, driven by that instinct which leads sick people to change places, as if their pain could be lessened by doing so. He had the idea of going to the theater, but he didn't dare; he was afraid:

— She's sending me away because she loves this young man. She loves him, that's for sure! I'm sure she loves him! Maybe she was coming from his place; maybe she'd made an appointment with him; I'm convinced of it... she loves him... She's his!

He made a plan. It was to watch her, to follow her, to enter his rival's house with her, to see them in each other's arms! Afterwards?... afterwards?... what?...

— She can do what she wants," he says, "she doesn't owe me anything... she's never cheated on me.

He returned to his windows. One o'clock in the morning was ringing on all the clocks. He sat on a bollard and watched. A ray of light came through the shutters of Sophie's bedroom.

— Here it is! She kept it!

He broke out in a cold sweat. He combined the possibilities, the verisimilitude.

— If he's not here," he says, "she's at his place. I'll go and see.

It was quite far. The rain was pouring down. He was exhausted. But he went. When he got to the front of the house, there was no light anywhere.

— They'll have turned everything off so as not to give themselves away, he thought.

As for being sure she was there, he was. He could see them, read their eyes, hear their words and count their kisses.

Suddenly, the door to the house opened. A man and a woman came out, joining arms.

— Here they are! he thought! Here they are! I did well to come! I'm going to kill them!

I may not have the right, but I'll kill them!

He moved quickly forward and found himself in front of two strangers who looked at him with surprise. He passed by and returned to his house mechanically.

Entering his room, he found a letter. It was from Sophie and dated

eleven o'clock in the evening.

"I didn't go to the theater. I was wrong with you. I'm sorry. Come tomorrow morning. If I don't have love, I at least have a lot of tenderness. Don't be unhappy, come!

" S. "

All the ghosts vanished. There are such men - not many, fortunately - whose existence is like a thread terminated by a hook. This hook attaches itself to a woman's hands; they live and die according to what she decides.

Sophie said to poor Conrad:

— Please understand and help me. I've never loved; I've been told I'm incapable; I believe it. It's not for you, it's for me that I'm attempting this test of renouncing my habits. If I can live beside you, be a helpful, firm, unselfish friend to you, I'll be saved, I believe, and the good part of me, as you say, will take the upper hand over the bad. But, Conrad, you mustn't expect such a transformation to be completed in a day. I'll often cause you grief, and, I tell you, perhaps, in the end, I'll be forced to leave you, recognizing the impossibility of succeeding. Be patient, be indulgent; remember that every time I'm hard on you, it's because I'm hard on myself. I preferred you to the Prince; isn't that something? You have my affection; I swear I want nothing more than to see it last.

— But love, Sophie, love!

— Ah, we're so far from that!

She shook his hand, and looked at him so kindly that he bowed his head and replied:

— I adore you, do with me what you will.

CHAPTER FOUR

I haven't explained clearly enough the impression Madame Tonska's letter made on Jean-Théodore.

In the midst of great and beautiful qualities, there were certain preoccupations in the ruler of Rurbach which, without injustice, might be described as petty. He had regarded the Countess's conduct towards him as a lack of respect as much as a lack of love; and, if he had suffered from the latter, he had been particularly hurt by the former. Jean-Théodore would never admit to being disrespected. He harbored a sickly susceptibility on this subject, which he himself condemned inwardly; unfortunately, he had more temperament than reason in everything.

Sophie's departure had seemed insolent to him; this sensation had calmed his ardor considerably. Generosity was therefore not very difficult for her, although at first there was something bitter in the preference given to the young sculptor, a preference whose nature and limits the Countess had not deigned to explain to her. In doing so, she thought she was failing herself. As a result, Jean-Théodore held a silent grudge against the woman who had humiliated him. There was another reason for his resentment. His life was sad and gloomy. He didn't believe in the future of his principality. He knew that sooner or later, on one occasion or another, as a result of a European reshuffle or an inevitable negotiation, his domains would merge into the territories of a large neighboring monarchy, and such a conviction disgusted him with work and sovereign power. Besides, he was not to leave a son. By means of a family pact, he hoped to succeed in passing the crown on the head of his daughter and future son-in-law; but he feared Prince Ernest's machinations and the ambitious people this wicked man would undoubtedly find willing to second him. So much trouble, little future, no results. His people were becoming less manageable by the day, and precisely because they were so happy, they were prone to all sorts of seditions. His nobility claimed to be devoted, but they were religiously carrying out the program of all modern nobility; they were carefully maintaining themselves in an intellectual and moral state that would render them little service, and, as a result, Jean-Théodore didn't count on them. If he had, why bother? He'd come back to it any way he could.

On another note, his wife weighed on him. She was a great

misfortune; for, often, in the course of his mistakes, and, more generally, at moments of disillusionment, he would have been willing to return to her, to be content with little, to ask only for a mute but benevolent friendship. At least, he thought that would be enough for her. In this, no doubt, he was mistaken. He was too ardent to be satisfied so cheaply, and after a few months he would have offended all the negatives that made up the princess's character. Nevertheless, he had believed himself to be willing to convert in good faith. It was never even possible for him to try, firstly because the august wife did not care at all to see her husband return to her, and secondly because the desire never lasted long enough with him. After the break-up with Madame Tonska, and when the affair had to be abandoned, Jean-Théodore found himself face to face with himself.

Compensating for his faults and qualities, he wasn't very innocent; on the other hand, he was very unhappy. He judged and sometimes condemned himself; yet he had to accept himself and his position at the same time. Walking in the void and trying not to get agitated, lest he become ridiculous in his own eyes, he was a good example of what might be called a soul without a body.

In this state of mind, he saw Nore and Laudon arrive at Burbach. Autumn had come; he remembered inviting the French gentleman to his hunts; as for his cousin, son of one of his aunts, he had never had any previous relations with him. So when the two friends had sent their names to the aide-de-camp on duty, and he had placed them before the eyes of His Royal Highness, it was with complete indifference, and solely to conform to custom, that Jean-Théodore gave the order to invite the travelers to dinner for the following day.

However, Wilfrid and his companion, taking advantage of a letter from Conrad to his father, soon arrived at the professor's house, where they were warmly welcomed. At first, Madame la docteur befriended her son's brilliant friends; Liliane was drawn to them by that charming instinct which attracts women to those who can love them. As a result, the home of the learned physiologist soon became the headquarters where the two strangers would gather and socialize on a daily basis.

The courtly dinner was unremarkable. The Prince showed himself to be very affable, but above all a prince, inspired by the idea he often had of maintaining distance. In this preoccupation, he failed to notice the savor of Laudon's wit, and was unmoved by the originality of views that marked Nore's personality. The latter even worried him, in that he felt he was capable of forgetting a little, in substance, not in form, the authority of the sovereign word, and this sort of fear kept him on the defensive, unlikely to let him taste the merit of his English host. It wouldn't do to take it too badly

Jean-Théodore's opinion. Conversation was sparse before, during and after dinner. When the ceremony was over, and Nore and Laudon found themselves seated in good armchairs at the Professor's, they felt infinitely more at ease, and even in the mood for sarcasm, which old Lanze was quick to cut short.

— You don't know the man you're talking about," he tells them, "nor do you know what circumstances of any kind are working against him to spoil him. You've come at a bad time. For reasons that are useless to enumerate, the prince is not himself. The crisis will pass, and then you'll judge him better.

So spoke the philosopher, and, as if by chance, Laudon went for a walk alone in the palace gardens at an early hour the next day, while Nore was writing letters, and found himself face to face with Jean-Théodore, who was smoking a cigar in a rather absorbed mood. Louis saluted and tried to withdraw, but the prince held him back and said:

— Are you in such a hurry that you can't take a ride with me?

Laudon bowed again, and the walk continued. Jean-Théodore, more communicative that day, soon learned that Louis and Nore had met on Lake Maggiore, and how they had bonded, and how Conrad Lanze, previously recruited in Zurich by the Frenchman, had formed the third person of a highly amusing trinity, the narrator assured us.

Conrad's name undoubtedly answered in some way to the prince's reflections, for from that moment on, he gave himself over more to the conversation and visibly took a liking to it. For his part, Laudon was in good spirits; he was witty, he had verve, he unnerved his august interlocutor, and things went so well, that the latter, in spite of all etiquette, offered to take him to lunch at Monbonheur and had Nore meet them there. From that moment on, the prince was as seductive as his nature made it easy for him to be; he surrendered himself, he charmed the two friends, and they, in turn, pleased him infinitely.

— Monseigneur," said Laudon towards the end of lunch, "I must confess, without pretending to make myself too interesting, that no mind has been pulled at more horses or so cruelly quartered as mine. Mr. Nore, here present, assures me from morning till night that it is now impossible to profess a practical political doctrine, given that, nowadays, States, which have become very large, walk all by themselves by virtue of certain laws of gravity, break without being able to be mended, move without being able to be stopped, or

are bogged down without any human means of pulling them out of the mire. As a result, he concludes that, in the face of such fatal evolutions, all interest vanishes and that all we can do is let it happen, while ensuring, however, that we won't be crushed by the irregular jolts, frequent in these heavy machines. On the other hand, I have another advisor, who professes that, by means of education, by a constant application to penetrate certain lights into the most numerous, opaque and darkest masses of the social order, we will succeed, in the long run, in modifying their instincts to such an extent, that the reign of virtue will be established on earth. From then on, there will be no need for compression; laws will be fragile bonds, but no one will think of abusing immense freedom, and something as sweet and pure as the feelings of Utopia will light up life on earth.

— I can see how two such different alternatives would perplex you," replied the Prince, "but I think I've noticed one more significant point. About twenty years ago, everyone complained that we lived in an age of doubt and cruel scrutiny. It was felt that nothing remained solid in the depths of people's consciences. The existence of God, the different varieties of religious faith linked to this dogma, the relative merits of state constitutions, monarchy, republic, were now only found among distracted believers, and a universal melancholy invaded, it was said, deviated souls. Byron was the poet of this debility; Shelley was its fanatic. Basically, I don't think we really saw what was happening. The world was turning away from the ideal, no doubt, but to give itself more and more to positive life, and, while we lamented that we no longer had a guide, we faithfully followed one; it was the passion of material enjoyment, and here's where it led men: they now believe, they firmly believe; Their feet rest on solid ground, and, disabused of mysticism, of faith in the supernatural, of the poetry of the heart, of the great apocalyptic visions of thought, no longer even pretending to seek the fraternal embraces of a conventional freedom, they conceive of an organization in which the peoples, well fed, well fed, well clothed, well housed, will form a vast, immense herd of cattle, admirably directed, maintained, fattened according to the most learned rules, and will be led from on high by all-powerful shepherds, who will become mortal gods to whom there will be no reply, against whom it will be senseless to argue, who will have all the rights, who will apply all the disciplines, and whom generations of brutes maintained by their care will have to bless with a perpetual hosannah. I don't know if this theme will succeed, or, more sincerely, I believe it to be impracticable. The world has already seen a few specimens of it in ancient Egypt and under the scepter of the Incas; but it was necessary, to make the application of such systems possible,

homogeneous populations of childlike peoples, and modern Europe will always contain enough ebullient, impatient, generous blood; the definitive imposition of such a stupefying regime is therefore not possible. What we will see **w i l l b e** trials; abortive trials lead to struggles, struggles to blood, and blood, shed in this way, to the most savage and degrading anarchy.

— That's what I think," exclaimed Nore. Everything will be useless, except the permanent and assiduous fabrication of expedients that will introduce more or less brief moments of peace and rest into the great sick body of the European world. Statesmen will be nothing more than handlers of ineffective plasters, distillers of opium, morphine, chloral and other soporific panaceas, and after a few months, a few years, they will see their patient fall back into convulsions. Believe me, Laudon, it's not the little moral booklets of M. de Gennevilliers and his ilk, nor their pious lectures, nor their preaching, nor their preachers, that will halt the progress of an evil whose name alone shows its incurable nature, for this evil is none other than senility.

— Yet," cried Laudon, "religion! Isn't religion all-powerful? And wouldn't it be an excellent omen if we managed to bring it back to life? The churches are full of faithful; faith is being reborn to an unexpected extent... Never before has there been so much veneration, and so general a veneration, for holy things.

— Faith didn't save the ancient world," replied the prince, shaking his head. When all the calamities came at once to the empire of Rome, paganism found itself more purified, wiser and more elevated in its ideas and dogmas than at any time in its history. Its morals had been sublimated, its beliefs refined; the idea of a single, very-good, very-great God had emerged in the noblest way from the mythological chaos, and it was not just a few obscure philosophers, spreading their eloquence in the schools, but rich senators, opulent knights, who were edifying the world with equally exemplary principles and conduct. And yet the world was dying. The virtue of a few gave it back neither life n o r greenness, neither energy nor authority; it was old, too, it was as old as our world has become; it was dying, it had to die, and all the merits possible didn't prevent the blood in its veins from becoming stagnant and cold.

— Ah!" exclaimed Laudon, "it's that all his beliefs were errors, and that error brings death with it!

— Are you quite sure?" replied the prince sharply. The entire empire had only been flourishing, energetic and domineering when its errors had been ignored.

had shown themselves most worthy of condemnation and vertigo pushed to the point of madness; what am I saying? The feasts of Venus, the Lupercalia, depravity on the one hand, brutality on the other, had never for a minute stopped the triumphant chariot of Roman prosperity. Believe me, the ancient universe was dying, not because it was wrong, but because it had reached the end of the times marked for its existence, and verdant youth was setting foot on its body withered by the centuries.

— Monseigneur, if this is so, you are proving Nore right! He listens to you with visible satisfaction, and refrains from speaking out in his own well-defended cause.

— I'm delighted that Mr. Nore agrees with me," Jean-Théodore smiled, "and that gives me courage.

— You're too kind, Highness," says Nore, bowing.

— And here I am, reduced to silence," exclaimed Laudon, "and I have to conclude that from now on there's nothing more to do, that we must abstract ourselves from everything, sit on the ground in a corner, and, as far as possible, near running water, because, by twiddling our thumbs, we'll at least have the only rational distraction, that of seeing something flowing.

— You're wrong," continued Jean-Théodore, "and rather than sum myself up in this way, I would certainly advise everyone - and I mean everyone worth taking advice from - to work themselves to death, without being forced to, in the factory of expedients I mentioned earlier.

— So," asked Wilfrid, half guessing, "what does Your Royal Highness think?

— I believe that the honest man, the man who feels he has a soul, has more than ever the imperative duty to turn in on himself, and, unable to save others, to work to improve himself. This is essentially the task of times like ours. All that society loses does not disappear, but takes refuge in individual existences. The whole is small, miserable, shameful, repugnant. The isolated being rises, and, as in Egyptian ruins, amid piles of rubble, mutilated, unrecognizable debris, collapsed, crumbled enclosures, often difficult to restore, it survives, it soars skyward a few colossi, obelisks whose height sustains the noblest idea, In the same way, isolated men, more remarkable, more worthy of our admiration than their predecessors, help to maintain the notion of what must be the noblest and most sublime of God's creatures. There were many of these beings in the worst days of ancient decadence; there were more of them than we had ever seen before; there were more of them than we had ever seen before; there were more of them than we had ever seen before.

among pagans and Christians alike. It is not true that all those who professed the new faith were equally free from the miseries of the times; the legend is misleading on this point. Most of the zealots of the Judean cult weakened in the face of adversity, and even more so in the face of prosperity. If there were Anania and Sapphira even in the time of the apostles, how many more there were under Constantine's successors! The Fathers of the Church do not spare their indignation or their sarcasm at the luxury, coquetry and baseness of the Christian ladies; they show us them astonishing the cities with the display of their softness and the noise of their scandals. Great souls were rare here, and just as rare among the pagans. But there were some in both camps, and it's to these that I speak, and it's to these that I say we must resemble; and it's like these that I say we must act! To work on ourselves, to elevate what we have that's good, to lower what we have that's bad, to stifle what we have that's worse, or at least to train it; this is the duty from now on, and the only duty that serves.

— In a word," said Laudon, looking at Nore with a smile, "ingenious enough to be counted among the Pleiades?

Nore nodded in agreement, and the prince was told the details of the conversation at Lake Maggiore. He enjoyed it. His esteem for Nore grew as a result, and the conversation became increasingly intimate.

It will come as no surprise to learn that since Wilfrid had conquered the property he had spent so many years striving to achieve, he himself had undergone some rather notable changes in mood. His spirit had remained essentially the same, but the irritation and nervous restraint that were constantly at work on him had calmed, dampened and given way in the face of success and the imminent prospect of happiness. As soon as he returned to Milan, Laudon was astonished to see that he rarely indulged in that stream of irony, a sign of his constant efforts not to drown in the bitterness of his thoughts. Wilfrid had no more thoughts; he made no more efforts; the streams of his heart and mind no longer poured out in tormented cascades, in turbulent cataracts, they flowed broadly and gently down a level slope. He had made no difficulty in telling Laudon the true story of his life, the goal he had in view, and how at last, by the sheer power of sustained patience and will, he had achieved what he wished for and conquered Harriet's hand.

This story had made a deep impression on Louis' mind. He, too, found himself out of his intellectual depth. He regarded Nore as a man worthy of the name of man, and had been astonished to see him sacrifice - that was the expression that best conveyed his thought - to see him sacrifice his own life.

his life to unite with a woman who was older than he was, and who would not bring to their life together the addition of fortune, rank and external credit that he himself had hitherto dogmatically considered to be the indispensable, the only respectable condition of marriage. Had it been anyone other than Wilfrid, he would have said to himself, pure and simple: this is madness, this is a fantasy, this is a foolishly sought-after, foolishly willed ruin that will produce nothing but regret and remorse! But, despite the long dryness that his upbringing and his ordinary attachments had practiced on his character even more than on his heart, Laudon retained a fund of sensitivity that did not allow him to conclude in this way for someone he esteemed and whom *in petto* he recognized as superior. He found in the situation he was witnessing a subject for reflection such that his mind was truly altered, and, without his realizing it, he went on to think of such things that, three months earlier, he would never have realized.

This is what animated his conversation with the prince. He was less astonished by it than he had been before, and Jean-Théodore liked it more. Most of the day was spent in talks of this kind. A great deal of good came out of this for the very man who had raised the level of ideas the most in these friendly communications. He had spoken at first, rather to persuade himself, to calm himself, to preach himself, in a word, than out of any firm conviction. Seeing his words received with such confidence from Nore, with such complacency from Laudon, he felt a degree of pleasure and consolation he hadn't expected. As I've already shown, he wasn't a vulgar person, far from it. He had, as we used to say in the language of the seventeenth century, great parts; certain aspects of his temperament were more than praiseworthy; he also had his shortcomings, his failings, his pettinesses. A particular commonality of views he encountered there repressed the lesser fraction of his being and elevated the other, nobler one. From that moment on, he wanted to see Nore and Laudon every day, and, sometimes through his hunts, sometimes through meetings at Monbonheur, sometimes through fortuitous occasions he liked to create, he worked to draw them more and more into his intimacy. The two friends were not, as was to be expected, equally successful, or even successful in any way with the other members of the reigning house. The princess instinctively disliked Nore. She immediately recognized him as a stranger to her own way of life and feared him. Laudon was scarcely more agreeable to her; moreover, apart from any other consideration and even before they had had the honor of being presented to her, the newcomers were tasted by her august husband, and this was enough for her to pronounce against them forever the most absolute of condemnations.

Princess Amélie-Auguste did not yield to the same current of ideas; but she had her prejudices, her system, her framework of perfections or imperfections, of venial faults, of faults that were not. She didn't see the sign of the lamb on Nore's forehead, let alone Laudon's; perhaps she even caught a vague glimpse of something that seemed to her to be the seal of the beast.

Prince Maurice frankly disliked Nore; but, finding Laudon elegant, he would gladly have drawn him into his counsel and consulted him on the delicate matters of which he made his sole study; Laudon, unfortunately, did not lend himself to this. He found Maurice too inept, and was not amused by his puerile chatter; as a result, he was disliked, with that abandon, sincerity and fullness of hatred, which moral dissimilarities so easily inspire in little geniuses.

At the sight of such lofty examples, the Court, from the Grand Marshal to the last-named aide-de-camp, via all the chamberlains and gentlemen of the Chamber, saw only with a mood difficult to suppress, two intruders aspiring to the sovereign's favor. Behind closed doors, in the salons, in the dressing rooms at the theater, at the home of the excellent Madame de B..., at the home of Count R... whose discretion we are so sure of, there were, I say, tantrums that might well have become fearsome, if those who gave themselves over to them had not first taken care to close doors and windows and to compress their terrible outbursts into the most discreet silence.

Amid the general animadversion, there were two exceptions.

CHAPTER FIVE

Duke William of Wørbeck was uncle to the reigning prince and elder brother to his father. His birth had designated him to wear the crown, and he had been considered a hereditary prince for most of the late sovereign's reign. However, long before the throne became vacant, he had wanted to strip himself of his birthright in favor of the younger brother. He had never consented to give the public any explanation for this other than his lack of taste for government; but the truth was different.

He loved his brother dearly, and had noticed on several occasions how the latter was suffering the pain of thwarted ambition. No sooner had the youngest, Jean-Philippe, reached the age of understanding the difference between himself and the hereditary prince, than he experienced violent grief. In childhood he cried, later he became angry. William, on the other hand, felt little of the happiness of his privilege. He took pity on Jean-Philippe, and submitted to his father the intention of never reigning. At first, the prince showed little interest in such a project.

— You don't know your brother," he said, "you judge him through the mist of exaggerated affection. I'm not saying he's a bad man; but from the point of view of the heart, of which you have far too much, I believe him to be of great inferiority. He is not, moreover, one of those rare mortals in whom the thirst to dominate is merely the index of great faculties and the promise of memorable deeds. He's a spirit of the most ordinary category; he's very vain, a spendthrift, incapable of order or continuity in his projects. Believe me, he wouldn't even be grateful.

This refusal was a disappointment for both parties.

— Don't abandon me!" cried Jean-Philippe, pleading with clasped hands. Guillaume constantly returned to his father's side, and the first result he achieved was to inspire the latter with the most absolute aversion and contempt. for his second son. Eventually, faced with William's invincible obstinacy, the prince, weakened by age, gave in and, after a final, violent scene, signed the rescript requested of him. Shortly afterwards, he died, and Jean-Philippe became master of the state.

This year, winter at the residence was admirably used for pleasure. The young sovereign had an opera company sent from Italy, and wanted only subjects of the highest merit. He also commissioned a comic company from Paris.

to perform drama, comedy and vaudeville for him, and was greatly amused by the moans of the French newspapers, lamenting the departure of irreplaceable artists. By dint of outbidding, he snatched from the Berlin theater a singer idolized by the whole of Germany; and, thanks to her, *Fidelio* was given in Burbach, as it had never been given anywhere else. Then there were the balls, balls at the palace, balls at Monbonheur, balls at the town hall, balls at the governor's house, balls everywhere, every night and two or three at a time; and to make things even more magnificent, the prince, underhand, paid at least in part for the pleasures they were supposed to provide.

At the end of this well-spent season, the prince left for Vienna, and from there pushed on to Constantinople. A vague recollection of his profligacy still survives in many memories. In short, Jean-Philippe enjoyed himself immensely, and when he married, a year after his accession, the solemnities were so splendid that for a long time nothing had been seen or learned that could compare with them. We had to admit that we were saddled with debts. The resources at our disposal could not cover the deficit, and served only to demonstrate, by their sad inadequacy, the extent to which final bankruptcy was imminent.

When the prince realized his situation, he did what he had done all his life: he turned to his brother. His brother, master of an immense fortune, was much richer than Jean-Philippe. Since renouncing the throne, he had often been hurt by the airs of superiority the reigning prince put on him. Much neglected, his heart had bled to the point where his eyes had finally been opened; he had recognized his father's good judgment, and conceived feelings for Jean-Philippe in which the old affection no longer entered except as a memory. However, when the ungrateful Jean-Philippe returned to him with trepidation and, made eloquent by fear, painted for him the miserable situation to which the head of the family had been reduced in his person, and showed him, in the near future, something like dishonor for the name they both bore, Guillaume complied. He surrendered what he owned, keeping only the bare necessities. The debts were paid, and Jean-Philippe had been so appalled that, from that day on, he became stingy and selfish as he had been prodigal.

William, disgusted, left Burbach. He entered the Austrian service. His rank earned him deference, but not favor. He didn't want to live at Court; he was employed as any other soldier would have been, and although he quickly rose to the rank of major general, from which he never moved again, nothing distinguished his career from that of his foreign companions.

Poor, dignified and in need of esteem rather than tribute, he strictly

his duty and led a most exemplary life. During a long command in Dalmatia, he had the opportunity to meet a young woman of good birth, at least as poor as himself, if not poorer, and having loved her with a warmth that disappointments had not extinguished, he asked for her hand in marriage and made her his wife. This was the main thing that prevented him from becoming a field marshal-lieutenant, for this union caused a scandal. Had he chosen a cantatrice, some dubious but very prominent woman, people would have criticized his folly; however, according to the world's way of reasoning, they would have confessed the drive of passions and shown themselves indulgent. But a prince allying himself with a poor little damsel, born and bred in a Dalmatian village! Well-bred, but so obscure! Charming, but a provincial beauty! Virtuous, but, my God, what bourgeois virtue! Prince William was a flatfoot; his conduct fell below the level of vice. The reigning prince, Jean-Philippe, threw down fire and flame; he and his wife wrote to all the courts to denounce the conduct of the man who had disgraced them. An *ad hoc* decree forbade the outlawed couple to appear in the country for ever. Jean-Philippe did so much to make himself ridiculous. There were still a few people here and there who remembered what the condemned man had done for the judge and told the others. Nevertheless, Guillaume spent fifteen years with Catherine Pamina in his Dalmatian garrison, and, sad to confess, he loved her so much that it made him absolutely indifferent to the fuss made about her.

When Jean-Philippe died, one of Jean-Théodore's first acts, if not his very first, was to write to his uncle, with whom, through Professor Lanze, he had maintained the most tender correspondence for years, begging him to return. The Duke resisted for some time. He had his own habits, nothing was lacking, he was accustomed to the little combinations of service; he feared being drawn into ceremonies and court affairs where he would experience nothing but trouble. His wife persuaded him to leave. So he wrote to his nephew that he was coming! But six months passed before this promise was fulfilled. Catherine, his beloved Catherine, was dead, having given him nothing but joy and peace, and he was left alone with a young girl.

The blow was hard, too hard; the wound would never heal. When the prince's uncle arrived in Burbach, a tall, lean body, a long grey moustache, a receding forehead, an expression of the purest goodness on his face, and, beside him, Aurore Pamina, for the marriage was morganatic, the courtiers smiled, the reigning princess tensed, Amélie-Auguste reserved herself, and Jean-Théodore, deeply moved, threw himself into the arms of his father's elder brother.

father and asked for his affection.

- I don't have much left to give," replied the veteran; "part of it's in the ground, the other part is here," and he looked at his daughter. But what's left of it, my nephew, I owe to you; it's yours.

On the same day, he was created lieutenant-general and commander-in-chief of the army.

Jean-Théodore understood that the most glittering titles in the world would not give William much pleasure, but the duties attached to them would give him back a life more or less similar to the one he had lost, and would make him, if not all, at least part of his former life. Then, in the eyes of the public, the prodigal uncle, so much maligned, had to be exonerated by the sovereign. As for Aurore, she was created Countess Pamina and took her place at Court after the ruling family.

All these attentions touched the vulnerable spot in Guillaume's heart. He already loved his nephew, he adored him, and when the latter, guessing a secret wish, had brought the ashes of the much-mourned wife, and had ordered them to be placed under a magnificent mausoleum among the tombs of the reigning house, William secretly said to himself: - You wretch! You've felt your brother's ways and the injustices of the Aulic Council, but you don't have enough honor to have guessed what this child is worth!

From that day on, Guillaume regained his composure and organized his life according to his tastes. Every morning, he was seen arriving at headquarters in a state of undress. He worked there, received and chaired commissions, and attended experiments. Afterwards, he visited the barracks, supervised drills and gave audiences. In the evening, he would chat with old Lanze, for whom he had regained his childhood affection, play chess with Aurore, and at ten o'clock kiss her on the forehead and go off to his study, where, until about one in the morning, he would devote himself to his passionate studies of mineralogy. When his nephew had spoken to him two or three times about Nore and Laudon, he came to Monbonheur one morning when they were there, enjoyed the conversation, and invited the two friends to dinner. Professor Lanze joined the party. Aurore acted as mistress of the house. There was a great deal of rambling, to the great satisfaction of the Duke, whose imagination was as lively as his compact exterior and regular habit. Nore had developed a real passion for him; he told him about his travels, and as he had acquired extensive knowledge of natural history and physics, the old man's enthusiasm became such that, seizing a torch, he wanted to lead his new friends straight away through his collections.

— Aurore, you're coming with us!" he exclaimed.

Countess Pamina smiled, called a servant, gave the order to bring lamps into the gallery, and continuing her conversation begun with Laudon, followed her father who marched at the head, holding Nore's arm and squeezing it the better to make a demonstration felt. At the tail of the convoy came Professor Lanze, shouting at the top of his voice:

— So you share Agassiz's views on the formation of certain terrains in South America by glacial deposits?

But Nore had no time to reply, and we arrived in the midst of stones and crystals admirably classified by their learned owner; the brightness of lamps and candles shimmered a thousand lights. The stones seemed to understand that someone was looking at them, questioning them, and they responded with their most beautiful sparkles.

In such moments, the spirit is freed from what saddens or worries it; it soars into a sphere where sorrow does not reach, where desire no longer irritates, where what is lacking disappears. Then you're not living in a funereal past, nor in a future veiled in obscure, tormenting secrets; you're all in the present; you hold it, and not the transitory present, but the eternal present in which nature blooms, which she extends over you at the moment of such close communication as you find yourself with her. You speak to her, she embraces you; you love her, she loves you and draws you to the heights of her heavens, and when you are several companions thus occupied in questioning and hearing her, and you understand her answers in the same way, to more or less the same degree, you can say to yourself that you are enjoying the purest and most delicious of feasts; you are as close to happiness as it is granted to men to arrive there.

From that day on, Nore became Duke William's declared favorite, and it's easy to guess that Aurore was equally favored. However, the young countess preferred the ease of mind, manners and language that Laudon possessed so well. Perhaps her reason, in all its fullness of reflection and fairness, would have accorded real superiority to Wilfrid, but there's more to our judgement of each other than reason, and Laudon's charming amiability made its way to the fore and took precedence over more essential qualities. Two camps didn't form because of this; there was no opposition of colors and flags. These were merely oscillations of taste, and the most complete harmony reigned in the small group. The two friends felt so at home with the Duke that they kept coming back. Jean-Theodore noticed this. He was delighted and made no attempt to keep them in his exclusive domain. On the contrary, he joined them quite regularly.

at her uncle's house. Almost every evening, two delightful hours passed in this salon, perfect for this little intimacy. We parted inexorably at ten o'clock, the duke being inflexibly punctual. Often, the Prince would then take Wilfrid and Louis to the part of the palace where he had his apartments. Otherwise, they would accompany Lanze, and find ways of keeping him out half the night by exciting him on his favorite topics of discussion. Then he'd take them back to their hotel, and from their hotel they'd take him home, and on and on until he was on edge.

The mornings were spent at the professor's home, where they sometimes dined. On these occasions, Madame la Docteur displayed the luxury of her elaborate tablecloths and exceptional napkins, but she spoke little at table and was content to offer everything. She might have found these deviations from ordinary life a little tiresome, had she ever thought of protesting against what pleased her lord and master. Nothing of the kind was to be feared, so much so that the discipline Lanze had always maintained was sincerely embraced at home and regarded as a divine institution. One person remained to be examined in this circle, and that was Liliane; she too had an opinion; she too was observing and, without her being fully aware of it, her observation was becoming more and more interested and dominating her thoughts.

The two strangers were unique apparitions to her. She considered their rank in the world; she saw them esteemed by her father; she heard them speak and saw that they stood up well to the onslaught of this colossus of erudition; one, Nore, firm-footed and armed like an Argian troplite, with spear, breastplate and shield; the other, Laudon, light-footed, throwing here and there insecure strokes, but which shone brightly and did not fail to hit the mark. She was also aware that the Prince and Duke William shared the Professor's prejudices in favor of these exotic characters. They spent part of their time with the young Countess Pamina, a point that gave her pause for thought; for all the world she'd have liked to know what Aurore thought of them, but there was hardly any way of finding out; What she could do was to lose herself in endless commentary with Princess Amélie-Auguste, and from this commentary the two girls became more and more convinced that the Prince, in agreement with his uncle, had sent for Nore and Laudon, and that one of them would be betrothed to Aurore any day now. The fact had become indubitable. The only question was which one would be chosen.

Here, Princess Amélie-Auguste pronounced with stern disdain that it mattered little to her to learn more; that such unions, not being of those which derive from the highest sentiments of the heart, are not blessed by

God, and that those who contract them are to be pitied and despised. She declared Nore a man of the century, a man of flesh and blood, proud and soulless, without generosity or nobility, ready to marry a daughter of nothing, the fruit of the guiltiest marriage, for the sake of money. As for her partner, she didn't want to judge him out of respect for herself; it was enough for her that he was French, and from then on she knew what to think of him; he could only be vice incarnate. On the day she made such a precise pronouncement and handed down, without appeal, such a severe judgment against two men she didn't know, the dear princess thought she was simply giving her confidante further proof of her perfections and the irreconcilable purity of her soul. She achieved an entirely different result; she wounded Liliane appreciably.

She didn't like Countess Pamina, but only because she shared her royal friend's antipathy; besides, knowing Aurore very little, she had nothing to complain about; however, since Nore and Laudon had been decreed by the two observers to be the possible fiancés of Duke William's daughter, Liliane had taken a particular dislike, cordially and on her own account, to the one who was to monopolize one of the two friends; for God knows whom she would lose, and, to reveal all, Liliane had found her ideal. Schorn's lieutenant was out of the picture. His life could now have its purpose and its *raison d'être*; no one thought about him anymore. No one thought about him at all; he no longer appeared on any page of the newspaper, neither for good nor for ill. Liliane's head went up; she told herself that she loved Wilfrid Nore, and, seeing him treated so cavalierly, so despotically by the princess, seemed to her the height of injustice and iniquity, she pushed away from her heart the friend of her youth, the ancient confidante of her thoughts, and took to judging her in turn with a harshness at least equal to that which her enemy allowed herself towards the object of her secret admiration. How the human race walks in darkness! While dear little Liliane was indulging so charmingly in her dreams, hoping, at times, that Countess Pamina would choose Laudon and leave Nore to her, and imagining no other danger to her desires, Nore was busy insisting to Harriet on an idea he had been communicating to her for some time. He wanted her to come with her father to Burbach; It was there that he intended to have their marriage celebrated, and it so happened that one day, on the very day of the reigning princess's feast, Laudon had not, so to speak, left Countess Pamina all evening, and everyone around Liliane had repeated that, decidedly, Lanze's daughter surrendered entirely to this conviction and was overjoyed, and that very day, at the ball, Nore carried a letter from Harriet announcing his arrival.

CHAPTER SIX

I named Aurore Pamina. I haven't mentioned her yet. She was tall, slim, svelte, beautifully made, delicate, supple; the most beautiful blond hair in the world and blue eyes of infinite softness and depth, so astonishing and charming. A divine smile lit up her pretty face. An air of taking an interest in everything, grace in everything she did, in everything she said, and a character, a blend of sparkling wit, reason, sensitivity, drive and restraint, made her the most attractive of all beings.

Jean-Théodore had been struck the first time he saw her. But she was his cousin, his uncle's daughter, a man for whom he had been so ungrateful, and to whom he felt obliged to make so much reparation. What was he to do? Fall in love with Aurore? Let himself tell her so? Or suffer because he would be loved, and sooner or later lose the reputation of an angelic creature on whom everyone's eyes were fixed? Wickedness would be happy to rip her to shreds. Such misfortune, such a crime, had to be avoided at all costs. It was then that he befriended the Marquise Coppoli.

This intrigue managed to distract him. He amused himself, and, as it was not in his temperament to love without being a little unhappy, he suffered too, and, for the time being, thought nothing of Aurore. But when circumstances had separated him from the Marquise, and his regrets began to fade, he realized that there was someone in his heart, and when he looked, he found Aurore there. Then he began to reason again, as he had done the first time, replaying all the irresistible arguments that had stopped him on the slope of an unacceptable passion, and fell into sadness until the day he met the Countess Tonska. He saw her as his salvation, and to get out of the current that was dragging him down, he swam vigorously towards the new light and came to ground on a barren rock. There he encountered what we've already seen: capriciousness, heights, anger, and finally abandonment. When calm returned and, from the depths of the gloomy darkness into which he had been plunged, he saw a peaceful sky emerge, the first star he saw showed him once again the enchanting figure of his uncle's daughter. He was not the first human being whose destiny had devoted him to the cult of the impossible.

— The impossible! he said to himself, very few days before the arrival of Nore and Laudon; the impossible! but, in the end, what is the impossible? It's what I can't achieve today, but who's to say I can't achieve it tomorrow?

Theodore took his head in his hands, and, eyes closed:

— I'll marry her one day! But how? I don't know how. But she'll be my wife. None of the women I thought I loved gave me that vision. But, for her, she's my wife, she's no other..., I don't want her any other way. I'll have her! I've always been so unhappy! I need a little happiness too!

He didn't wonder if Aurore loved him, if she would love him. Why would she? Was there a magnetism in convinced love that knows its own power? Or was Theodore a little crazy? Exalted he certainly was, and late in the day. He'd spent the outer energies of his being, and, judging by superficial reasoning, he must have been tired, passionless. But the bottom had never been touched. There, riches had slept untouched. The gold coins shone, the pearls trickled, the diamonds sparkled; nothing had been tampered with, put into circulation, profaned; it was a heart of twenty years, master of its treasures, and, himself, he felt the price. Everything belonged to Aurore, Aurore alone. Why wouldn't she want it? He didn't wonder what she gave back to him. He loved, and his love, which confronted the impossible, stopped at nothing. We have already seen, in his conversation with Nore and Laudon at Monbonheur, how much he had changed, how much his thinking had taken on height, his imagination momentum; he could now soar above many of the considerations he had hitherto only been struck by. And yet he was no more reasonable, because cold judgment is hardly to be found where one is devoted.

He also promised himself to love and remain silent. Could he? And even if another man could have done it, he couldn't have done it! He, Theodore, the fiery, impatient being, accustomed to seeing everything bend and give way to his whims! A passive role was not his role, and the first test proved it.

The conciliabula of the Court had decided too well on Aurore's imminent marriage to Wilfrid or Laudon, for some rumor not to reach the Prince's ears. But, as the basis of the hypothesis was always that he himself was preparing this union, and this with the aim of creating a mixed situation for a person who, while closely related to him, came from a background that was, if not irregular, at least regrettable, he knew where he stood and didn't take such rumors seriously. Nevertheless, they gave him food for thought, and he wondered whether, after all, Aurore wouldn't be getting married some morning. This conclusion beat

He was already in a painful state of uncertainty, when suddenly Aurore's hand was confidentially requested. He had to make up his mind.

The suitor was perfectly worthy of what he sought. A large landowner, from a good family, even from a family three times allied to the ruling house, he was noble and amiable, and in no way could he be reproached. The prince replied that the party seemed acceptable to him; that only one difficulty could arise, Aurore's refusal. The reply was that this obstacle was perhaps not to be expected, given the kindness with which Countess Pamina treated the person in question.

The prince then declared that, if it were so, his consent would be given, and, dismissing the negotiator, certain to find Aurore alone in her home, he thought no more about anything; he set aside all considerations of prudence, reserve and propriety, and entered his cousin's home in that obstinate and bold disposition which so easily overcame him.

Aurore wasn't in the living room, so they went to warn her. For a few moments, Theodore looked at the hangings, the furniture, the objects... All of it was hers, she touched it, she used it. It was all hers, she touched it, she used it. He contemplated the carpets her feet trod on, the writing table by the window, the chair she sat on, the open books. All this lived from her; her life filled this space.

It was a temple, the most sacred of temples. Theodore breathed in the air with unspeakable emotion. Then, through a succession of rooms, he saw Aurore coming. The sight always intoxicated him. She was so light! She walked like a fairy! She seemed barely to touch the ground; she was Grace, Beauty; no, much more! Charm! And her airs of head that made her look like a dove, and the divine vivacity of her gestures that made one think of the wagtail fluttering through the willows, skimming the banks, landing on the sand of the brooks!

Theodore said abruptly:

— Do you want to get married?

— No !

— Don't you want to get married?

— No !

— Never?

— Never! is a big word... And Aurore, who had sat down on a corner of the sofa, became pensive.

— So you'll be getting married tomorrow? the day after tomorrow? in a month? in a year?

Answer me, answer me, please!

Aurore looked up at him:

— I'll never get married.

Theodore felt his heart choking him, and, in a voice that emotion concentrated, he resumed:

— Do you have a reason for a party like this?

— I've got one.

— Do you love someone?...Do you love someone, admit it! Aurore! Aurore! Is it me?

Aurore looked at him sincerely and replied in her melodious voice:

— What do you call loving? Have you ever been loved? What such and such a woman gave you, was it what you call love? If I loved you as you ask, is that what you would want from me? Now it's your turn to answer!

— I'll answer you when you've done it yourself... Say... say... do you love me?

— Well, yes, I love you. And now it's your turn to speak! Do you think that what I've just told you has the same meaning as these same words might have had in other mouths?

— I'm so full of happiness," exclaimed the prince, "that I don't know how to answer you. Just believe me: since you love me, no matter how you love me, all is well, all is good! I expect nothing more, I want nothing more. I've had enough of this.

And he looked at her with a tenderness that was truly unheard of. He felt even better, much better than he could have expressed it, that he was for her at once a lover, a friend, a brother, a father, and that all the feelings of devotion and tenderness that a man's heart can contain melted into a precious ingot of affection devoted entirely to her. And, what was very new for the impetuous Wørbeck, he was ready and willing to make every renunciation, every sacrifice, and what he wanted only, what he was determined to be content with, what he was happy with, was only to love and be loved.

He didn't wait for Aurore to impose conditions. He anticipated what she might order. He recognized what he would have not to claim, and declared that he would not claim it. What he asked, once again, was to be loved, and he was. He was loved forever, just as he had given himself forever.

It's a dogma that flourishes in Western Europe above all, that love is not durable, and that a few months or at most a few weeks are enough to destroy such a fragile plant right down to its roots. However, not far from here, in a country not quite at the edge of the inhabited earth, in Italy, we meet women and men, lovers who, for many years, have gone beyond the green paths of youth and continue to walk the path of love.

in the midst of the coldness of age, as indissolubly attached to each other as ever. In the evenings, at La Scala in Milan, as at San Carlo in Naples, we see couples who adore each other and have no intention of giving it up. The customs of the country allow us to recognize this truth; but, if elsewhere it is different and what is shown there is forced to be veiled, how many old friendships are not the touching disguise of an ancient and unchanging affection! Theodore had precisely entered the order of emotions and tenderness that leads to this stability of heart.

Meanwhile, Dr Coxe and Harriet had just arrived two days earlier, and were settling into a convenient house rented and arranged for them. A letter from Conrad to his mother spoke of Harriet in such a way that the desire to see her immediately turned to affection in the professor's family.

As Conrad hadn't thought himself entitled to anticipate Wilfrid's confidences, Liliane didn't even suspect that she had a rival; so nothing prevented her from indulging her taste for the new arrival. She was starting out in life; she had a disposition to seek, to see, to compare, to admit; she gave herself a little, she took herself back; she made a mistake, she started again. But this time :

— I have found in Wilfrid, she said to herself, the ideal of my dreams; so much for love, for marriage, for my happiness; now I need a friend, to enlighten my reason and, one day, when I am sure of her, share with me the deposit of my secrets. I love Wilfrid; I will love Harriet. As for Princess Amélie-Auguste, she's cold, she's dry, she's mean, she's incapable of rising to the level of understanding Wilfrid. I'll have nothing for her but respect and coldness.

The memory of Schorn's lieutenant troubled her a little. Deep down, she was fickle and unfaithful. She was angry with herself for this, and wished she'd never thought about the man she was abandoning. She resented his embarrassment. She looked for faults in him to justify herself in her own eyes, and easily found fault with him because she was making faults for him. From then on, reason had obviously advised the rejection of such an unworthy man. Unfortunately, she had trouble persuading herself of this; something inside her whispered the word injustice. She no longer thought of Schorn because she thought of Wilfrid.

To this one she said nothing. He came and went in the professor's house; he dined there, he settled there for whole mornings, and not only would she never have had the courage to speak to him when he didn't start, but she didn't even dare look at him. Only the hour of this visit was the high point of Liliane's day, and when Nore didn't show up, the

and when he left, the day was over. When he spoke to her, she was moved and listened poorly; but as soon as he was gone, she remembered every word and tried to discover a hidden meaning in it, as well as something in the inflections of his voice that was addressed only to her and for her alone.

A few more months go a long way when you're Liliane's age. Her feelings for Schorn had not, until then, stirred the movements of her nature to any great extent; what they had stirred most of all was a heap of the world's most metaphysical reflections, comparisons and desires, derived less from her own fund than from her readings and what she had heard told by grown-ups and from the theories of her young friends. One proof that these pains and despairs, recorded on every page of her story, did not contain a higher meaning, was that she had continued until then to ask of her piano just what this honest instrument had given her since she knew how to play it, sounds suitably linked together, but which were careful not to express any sensation whatsoever.

Now it was something else, and she heard her father speak to her like this:

— Liliane, you're making progress with your music. You've really resigned yourself to following my advice and you're studying more. My daughter, study is everything in this world; you're getting proof of that right now.

Nore caught herself smiling:

— My dear professor," he said, "like you, I've noticed the progress mademoiselle has made, and she has just played us this adagio in a way that shows she understands it. But, let me tell you, studying doesn't bring about these kinds of transformations; it's age alone and perhaps a little of the ability to be moved, which depends on many circumstances.

At this point, the professor, who no doubt held the power of work in exaggerated esteem, began to elaborate a crushing retort. Liliane, red-faced and sorry to be so, left the piano and fled to her room. It seemed to her that Nore had guessed her, and as there was nothing discouraging about the look she had seen on his face, she concluded that he was affected or soon would be, which made her cry, but cry... as one cries at this age, and as spring rains fall and wet.

It's true that Nore found her charming. He told Harriet:

— What a pretty flower! It's opening up to life! The velvety youthfulness covers all her little pansies blooming into a bouquet! She has a thousand ideas, some are born and become butterflies, others buzz like big flies. I try to find out what these little creatures are thinking, but how can I guess? They don't know themselves. In reality, they think they're thinking

They believe they want, they believe they seek, they believe they find, but they only have impressions that come to them ready-made, go, come back, change, transform themselves, and they are responsible neither for their joys, nor for their tears, nor for their affections, nor for their disdain.

— How you speak to me!" replied Harriet, and she smiled: "You make it sound as if a young girl like Liliane is subject only to the influences of the blood that turns her veins blue and her cheeks red, and has no means of resisting them herself.

— I confess," Nore replied, "I don't think she has much.

— Oh, the paradox!

— Not in the least. Consider that, at various stages of life, nature is also very differently powerful over men, and even more so over women; the latter, throughout their lives, obey her more directly, because they are much more bound to her, if only by the common gift of fertility. Look at very young children: nothing for them apart from food and sleep. Consciousness is barely awakening. In Liliane's case, it's just beginning; it's not there yet. This is what the poets call naivety; and when Galatea, at the sight of the first shepherd, flees to the willows, and, with such a pretty movement, hides so as to see and be seen, that her little heart beats and her eyes are wet, all this is delightful, but quite fragile, and of little value. It's us, Harriet, only us who really feel, who know what we want, who have learned to suffer, who suffer a lot, but also us who can be very-happy! Don't you think so? Don't we have the fullness of our souls? Doesn't that which is fragile and transitory appear to us, as it does indeed, contemptible? And don't we feel within ourselves that if we love, it's no longer just because nature, which is all around us, demands it from our senses, but because our hearts have something divine and superior to nature.

— Yes, my friend, I feel it," replied Harriet, squeezing his hand, "but also this love is quite severe, sometimes quite painful, and, if it possesses the privileges of greatness, it shares equally in its worries. We're no longer as lovable, although we give more, and that peach blossom and velvety fruit, of which you spoke earlier, and which has disappeared forever; when I see it again on Liliane's cheeks and ideas, let's face it, there's no denying that nothing replaces it or is worth it.

— Ingrate!" replied Nore; "nothing, not even the certainty of goodwill and the trust of one in the other?

Harriet confessed her mistake; she wouldn't have wanted to change her destiny. Then she added:

— And who is the shepherd, the first to come along, who makes Galatea run off to the willows?

— He is, I suspect, a friend of Conrad's, an honest and worthy lad called Schorn, lieutenant in the guard, and thoroughly in love with our little belle. I very much blame her for being coquettish with him; but she's so sweet, and he'll be so compensated later that he won't have to regret his sighs today. Anyway, she's lovely!

That's how things worked and worked in Burbach. Life went on, developing in souls of different kinds, of different values, but all worthy of the name. From the point of view of ideal perfection, there was perhaps much to be said against some of them; the others naturally followed their slope. No one wanted to do evil, even those who wandered down dangerous paths. Certain powerful affinities made light of the most respectable human conventions. Isn't that the story of the whole world? Besides, if everything happened here on earth according to the inflexible regularity of theories, the least of the disadvantages would be that nobody would be worth looking at, nothing would inspire curiosity or interest; there would be no conflicts to observe, and, in the end, nothing to describe, nothing to learn.

CHAPTER SEVEN

In Florence, the battle continued between Sophie and Conrad. Conrad was resolute. He gave himself up completely. He accepted from the bottom of his heart any blows that might be dealt him. But such is the horror of suffering in those who feel it, and are still threatened by it, that he c o u l d not help dreading its trials and seeking to avoid its torments. Hence, in a natural and inevitable way, he compounded his dangers in many ways.

He knew, with all too much certainty, that none of what he lavished was returned. He sometimes imagined he was passing condemnation on this crucial point. In any case, he was his own fool. He sometimes said to himself and to Sophie: "I am not to you what you are to me. I accept that, but at least you care about me! You care to some extent, in one way or another! It has to be that way! However little, let me know! Out of pity, out of pure compassion, let me know what you're giving me!

When she tried to satisfy him, she could only calm him momentarily. He didn't want friendship, he didn't want affection, he didn't want tenderness and yet he didn't ask for love. What did he want? Then Sophie would get carried away; he'd cry for mercy and be content to suffer, and so it went until the next crisis.

Above all, he could not restrain himself from making constant comparisons between himself and those who had been known to Sophie. There were moments when his thoughts reached such convulsions of jealous frenzy, that they had all been the happy lovers of the one he idolized in vain. All of them had been her lovers, all of them she had adored, all of them she had preferred to her, they insulted her, they had a reason to, since they were loved; into what abjection did he not feel himself falling? Then, as he had some fleeting glimmer that showed him his exaggeration, he wanted at all costs to calm down, and, making himself a litany of his torments, he said to Sophie, with the most cowardly submission, swearing to believe everything:

— And this one, did you love it more than me?

She didn't love Conrad and made no secret of it, but when he was abandoned to his desolate transports, he forgot to understand her. He always assumed that he was the favorite,

and, as such, didn't want to admit that there had ever been any illusions in the past, because he immediately drew the conclusion that what had been was still being, and that he had been horribly and indignantly betrayed. These kinds of explanations constantly degenerated into quarrels. Sophie was as frank as iron and steel, the privilege of indifference. She, too, always outraged the truth, because she was irritated, and, moreover, assumed in good faith that the absolute had existed in her own feelings. She didn't like to explain herself. Then, she didn't contemplate the harm she was causing as long as the discussion was in its infancy, and when, in Conrad's altered voice, in the contraction of his features, in the poignant pain that burst forth in his language, she finally glimpsed the fire, the flame, the havoc, the devastation thrown by her into that soul, then she was excited, too ; she was impatient, annoyed, and the more she tortured this wretch, the more she avenged herself on the annoyance he caused her. Besides, she obeyed the mysterious instinct of gods, kings and her own sex: she was intoxicated by the suffering she caused as a tribute to her power. If he wanted to escape her hatred, all he had to do was suppress her complaints, her questions, her recriminations, her diatribes. Then Conrad would bow his head, declare himself content, accept everything, close his eyes, protest to Sophie that she was free to love whomever she wished; that, if she did, he would cherish her no less, and when he had obtained some sort of forgiveness, he would return home exhausted, exhausted, with a sense of profound debasement, stuffed full of sorrow. In a word, Sophie was killing him.

It did more than kill him, since it demoralized him; it made him ashamed of himself, and ashamed under the weight of the most horrible concessions he imagined he had to make. It was as much as if they had been real: to know or believe that such and such a fool, such and such a joker, such and such a pied-plat whom you despise in the most sovereign way, is preferred to you by the being you put above all else, and to feel neither strong enough nor honorable enough to smile and break the idol's pedestal with the tip of his foot, by lowering, with a fair hand, the poor woman next to the one he likes! What could be lower? When she complacently dwells on her former illusions in favor of this grotesque, and, instead of being astonished by them, half regrets them; when she replayed in her mind his impertinences, his cowardice, his coarseness, without blushing, but, on the contrary, added with a sigh: "I still have, deep in my heart, a memory of him what! even affection", and you hear such words, and you don't get up to leave and never come back. When one continues to embrace him with all one's passion, this frivolous, petty creature; when one persists in

wrapping her up in this mantle of love that is infinitely too big for her, and which she is quite right to disregard, because it doesn't belong to her and doesn't belong to her in any way; well then, what can we say, except that you're a coward; and, the only consolation to be had later, is that the rival you're given is perfectly incapable of rising to the degree of debasement you've reached!

Conrad was reduced to this situation. The appalling pictures he daily displayed before his chimeras exasperated their bite. In reality, Sophie hadn't the slightest idea of giving him a rival; she didn't prefer anyone to him; she didn't tell him so clearly, but she told him things he shouldn't have taken offense at. For a moment, she had singled out this one, then she had been preoccupied with that one. She judged them for what they were worth and said so. But, as she always added that, for him, she felt none of the more or less exalted preoccupation that had amused her fancy in favor of her rivals, he persisted in taking only the wrong side of what she showed, and sank daily into a situation worse than that of the day before.

Sophie was quite right; he was going to end up making himself obnoxious and destroying himself, right down to its roots, the good will she had to make his life tolerable; she kept telling him:

— Calm down, be peaceful, be quiet; take what I give you; don't worry about the rest and wait for the future.

But, at this word, Conrad stopped the Countess and replied:

— The future? That's all I ask! Don't love me more, don't give me more than you do right now. Just be for me what you are, but promise me you'll always be?

— I can't say for sure," Sophie replied. I wish it were, but I can change; there's no reason today for me to change; but that reason may come. I don't want to deceive you. I'm tired of lying to others and to myself; I'll tell you the truth.

So Conrad, who didn't feel he was in Sophie's heart, who was jealous, jealous of everything, and of the past far more than of the present, who suffered in a thousand ways, seeing himself suspended by the most fragile of bonds above the precipice ready to devour him, Conrad took refuge in an increasingly probable hope, which was to escape, by imbecility or death, from this horrible situation. He observed within himself, with real joy, the daily progress of his physical suffering.

If he was in such a state, it had to be said that Sophie, for her part, was to be pitied. Her task was heavier than she had anticipated. But she didn't

wanted to give it up. It wasn't for Conrad's sake that she had undertaken it in the first place, it was for her own salvation. She wanted to get off at all costs from the road to which the wrongs of her character and the defects of her mind had hitherto led her, and whose detestable encounters she appreciated with deserved contempt. Weary of lying, of acting, of compromising herself, without having to make excuses for vice, or feel or taste its pulls, and far removed still from those sublime transports of passion that make one indifferent to good and evil alike, she had wished to return to an atmosphere free of all these mists, and had found n o t h i n g else to do but devote herself to someone. She felt that her temperament would not allow her to rest, that she was condemned by it to act, and she had chosen Conrad. But he made the difficulties too heavy for her. She was discouraged. After a scene more violent than the others, in which the poor lover had shown himself to be more jealous, more inconsistent than ever, and finally more prostrate, more despondent, more impossible to raise in any lasting way, and as, after consoling him and listening to his fiery assurances, repeated for the thousandth time, that he wasn't asking her for anything, she stood there looking at him, having let him have her hand, she began to look at this ravaged face, these gaunt and withered features, with dry eyes that no longer felt pity, not even the most banal pity.

— I can't go on! I'm at the end of my rope! I'll abandon him, she says to herself! I'll become what I have to become; the task is beyond my strength.

She said this to herself at a time when he was calming down a little himself; and she unwittingly surrounded herself with this belt of ice whose rigidity was bound to invade her whole heart soon. However, at his request, she agreed to come into the studio to look at certain things.

When she got there, she was afraid of her own work: she could see the murder she was committing. Her intelligence was too high not to discover at once the terrible power she wielded over Conrad.

Twenty different creations had been started by the artist. Two statues, busts, bas-reliefs, the products of marvelous fecundity and inexhaustible invention, caught Sophie's eye; but all were unfinished, as if frozen and stricken with death. The statue of Ossian lay there, imperfect; its clay, abandoned, dried and cracked. The artist's hand was paralyzed by an evil influence. This influence would soon extinguish inspiration forever in the sanctuary from which a throbbing world was ready to emerge.

— He's a vigorous genius, Sophie thought, gazing at the Ossian with admiration and pity. What a man he is! He's strong and even rugged, dark and

Why does he love me? I'm turning him into a sissy, and in a little while I'll have turned him into a corpse, if I keep going.

She was, I repeat, appalled at the crime she was committing. As she had felt before, but this time with far greater conviction, she resolved to save Conrad, and a new feeling penetrated her: it was no longer just for herself, for her future, but also for him that she wanted to act from now on.

— My friend," she said, "listen to me carefully. You've told me a thousand times: if you had some certainty that I wouldn't send you away from me, you could regain your composure, get out of the turmoil that's killing you. Well, if I begged you today to have faith in me and promised you that I wouldn't send you back to me, you'd be able to find your way out of the turmoil that's killing you. this: whatever happens, a year from now, I'll only care about you, and I'll only worry about letting you love me? If I told you that, would you be happy?

— Yes, Sophie, and I would believe you!

— And, not only will you believe me, but you will make every effort not to torment yourself or me with you; you will understand that your terrors take me further away than they bring me closer, and you will work, and you will repel the unhealthy suggestions of grief? Take time as it comes, once again, Conrad, take life as heaven has made it for you, and don't reject its happiness because it seems incomplete; it's time enough to be unhappy when absolutely, and for causes too powerful, you must be.

— So I'll be happy," said Conrad, and thus was concluded a truce on the duration and results of which neither of them dared to count much longer.

The transports of bliss into which Aurore's promises had thrown the prince could not last long either. This patience, this moderation, this Olympian longanimity, in which Theodore assured himself he wanted to enclose himself, had little chance of maintaining itself in the face of passion. To see Aurore, to see her every day, had become a need for the prince; although she lived in the palace, it was not easy; kinship explained many familiarities and encounters; but all the eyes of the court were fixed on the lovers, and to blind those eyes indefinitely was the impossible. Theodore was aware of this, and the horror of this minute-by-minute spying inspired in him a dull anger, from which sprang, in turn, an impetuous will to break the obstacles and put an end to the ties. All the Chamberlains, Aides-de-Camp and Maids-of-Honor, however discreet, respectful and restrained, became unbearable. He read in them the appetite for betrayal. He couldn't and wouldn't trust anyone; like a hunted animal

on all sides, he felt nothing but enemies. Not so in the days of his former liaisons. But what did his situation then have to do with that of the past?

The slavery that held him, the passion that increased, the embarrassments that grew, ended up taking the shape and body of a resolution he hadn't thought of at first. Jean-Théodore was one of those naturals who, if left to their own devices, are still capable of restraint; but, if harassed, become capable of toppling walls or leaping from bell towers. He conceived a resolute hatred for the princess, his wife, that no longer resembled the impatient disdain with which he had let her live until then, and one fine night he resolved to divorce her.

He was astonished that this thought was so new to him. It seemed to him admirable, easy to execute, and, indeed, when you're determined to go over everything's head, obstacles become singularly simplified; for, of those that encumber human life, most have no other strength than our reluctance to tackle them and our determination to spare them. As Jean-Théodore wanted to spare nothing at all, and took no account of scandal, his daughter's position or anything else in the world apart from his love for Aurore, he was already calculating that within three months he would be free to place the sovereign crown on the head of the one he cherished. Besides, what he wanted generally seemed to him the simplest and most natural thing in the world; so once or twice, in front of people around him, he indulged in imprudent words which were immediately seized upon, interpreted, commented on and understood, and soon it was the talk of the Court that a considerable event was about to take place in the reigning family. The princess herself being one of the most eminent gossip-mongers in the country, her connections with heroines of the genre served her marvelously in this encounter, and she was among the first to be warned of what was being said. She gave a high-pitched shriek and took on the threatening attitude of someone who was not in the least resigned. She declared in front of her followers that she would defend herself to the **u t m o s t**, and that she would write to all the Courts, and ask for all the support she could get. She was a Protestant, but what the hell! She'd even appeal to the Holy See! The important thing now was to find out why the prince wanted a separation; most likely, it was to marry another woman. What other woman?

When the Prince saw this melee and the preparations being made around him, he did as the Spanish bulls do, rushing headlong for the red coat and resolving to end it all. But first, he had to warn Aurore. He found her in tears. For a long time, she couldn't muster the strength to speak to him;

She looked up at him with her beautiful eyes, so soft and tender; she responded to the pressure of his hand, sobbing and unable to say anything. Yet, in the end, she recovered. This is what had just happened.

About two hours before the Prince's visit, Duke William had entered his daughter's home. His face was stern and sad, and, without explaining himself otherwise, he drew from his pocket a paper folded in four and said to Aurore:

— Read this!

It was an anonymous letter, which read:

"My Lord,

"You pass for honest, and perhaps you are. But is your daughter honest? It's not enough to belong to a good house on the father's side, it often happens that the mother's baseness rubs off on the children. You'd do well to keep an eye on Countess Pamina's tastes: they tend too much towards grandiosity,

"A true friend.

To put it bluntly, this epistle came from the princess's entourage, she was aware of it; she hadn't precisely ordered it, but she found it pleasant and good-natured. In her eyes, it was a very permissible attack. In truth, she and her good friends only suspected an understanding between the beautiful cousin and the prince. But it was enough to justify all reprisals in their eyes. What's lousy eventually becomes perverse.

The Duke didn't take these things lightly. It touched him deeply. Aurore, struck in her sensitivity, in her affection for Jean-Theodore, in her love for her mother's memory, in her respect for her father, in her respect for herself, remained as if shattered for a few minutes; but this creature, so fine, so cheerful, so charming, was courageous to the highest degree. She was not crushed.

— This letter is disgraceful! What does it mean?

— I'll explain it to you," replied the Duke. It's been rumored since yesterday that my nephew intends to separate from his wife. They probably wanted to imply that you are to succeed the present reigning princess. I don't believe it. I can't believe such a thing... But, my child, think. I'm leaving you in the presence of this crude insult to show you what the world is worth, and what precautions you should take with it.

Having thus spoken, the duke left, and it was shortly afterwards that Jean-Théodore arrived. When he had read the letter himself, he turned pale with anger

bit his lips hard, then exclaimed, raising his shoulders:

— It doesn't matter! These scoundrels disappear in the face of what we're about to do.

— Is it true," said Aurore, "that you want a divorce?

— Perfectly true.

— No! It's not true! Renounce such a thought!

— And why?

— I hate such violence! Is this the calm, pure, silent, hidden love you promised me?

— No! Happiness is what we promised each other, and I want it! I need it! You need it too, Aurore! I won't take anything she has away from her; she'll remain a princess; she'll have a great position, every honor, every respect! What more does she need? What more does she need? Affection? You've got to be kidding! She's never thought about it; I'm dying to have some! I want you; I want us to be united for good and for ever, and I swear to God that within six months it will be done!

When she saw him so excited, Aurore threw herself at his feet:

— If you want to lose me," she said, "then do it! My father wouldn't forgive me! I wouldn't agree to anything myself! I would become the object of a just and universal hatred! I wouldn't dare look anyone in the face; your daughter would despise me... No, no, no! Theodore! Spare me! No shame! I'll never admit any!

— Is this how you love me?

— It's because I love you that I reject all infamy! I love you generous, noble, chivalrous, as nature created you; but I don't love you violent, without measure, without patience, as you are sometimes tempted to do to yourself! Forgive me! I don't know what I'm saying! Theodore! My Theodore! Don't ask me to dishonor myself!

— My darling, you're getting carried away and you're not thinking straight. To disgrace yourself! It's the crown I'm putting on your head, it's me I'm giving you, it's peace, it's glory I'm bringing you!

— I'm not of princely birth and I don't want to rule!

— Come on! These rules have had so many setbacks that you can't seriously challenge them. But here's what's more serious and what you need to weigh up. Within eight days, our intelligence will be public; within fifteen, we'll be slandered. Think about it; or rather, it's all thought out: be my wife!

He seized her in his arms, looked into her eyes, hugged her tightly to his chest. She pulled away, and dropped onto a corner of the sofa:

— No!" she said resolutely, "no! don't ask me anything like that! I have

a crime! I don't want to drive a wife from her home, I don't want to give reason to malice; I wouldn't know, I can't! I'd rather suffer anything than such infamies! I wouldn't dare look at myself! Ah, Theodore, what did you promise me?

— I promised to be yours always!

— No! you promised me something more: a life of gentleness, patience, goodness; and here you come to me with anger in your eyes and in your soul! I can be sad, cry, and yet, resolute as I am in my devotion to you, not feel unhappy: but to enter into this enclosure of vile deeds where you want to drag me, no, Theodore, that is not in my power and I refuse you!

— Are you abandoning me?

— I love you more than my life, you ingrate! If I have to, I'll give it to you; it's yours forever! and it's in this moment of poignant pain that I repeat it to you: always, always! I'm not one of those people who change their mind, and for whom tomorrow's will is easily the master of yesterday's!

But I won't encourage you to do wrong; on the contrary, I'll beg you to stop at nothing but good. And don't think I'm without energy! Thank heavens I do, and you'll see! You say that it won't be long before people start slandering my tenderness for you. My God! you can see they've already started. I've suffered; I'll suffer; but I won't love you any less; I'll be yours as I am; I'll never be anyone else's! Did you hear what I just said? Always! Always! And I'll die having loved only you!

Isn't that resolution too? It's the one I have, the one I want to have; but don't demand, my Theodore, if you don't want to disturb every moment of our lives, what honor forbids you!

It is impossible to convey the conflict going on in the prince's mind. He was too noble to blame Aurore for what he called an exaggeration of her virtue. This time, it was indeed virtue, it was indeed honor, it was indeed true magnanimity that animated the most angelic of creatures, and what she felt and what she expressed bore no resemblance to the phony devotion imagined by Countess Tonska a short while ago. This comparison dawned on Theodore, and he understood what his friend was worth; but he was no less sorry for it. For several days he had glimpsed the advent of complete bliss, the end of his domestic troubles and miseries, and this romantic halo to which he was not insensible and which was going to crown his life!

Everything was suddenly missing, thanks to the refusals of a woman who, in his opinion, should have applauded his resolution as an energetic measure of devotion and love. Desperate, tenderized, worried about the future, he promised

He even allowed himself to be pressured into denying any rumors that might be spread about the burning question; but he declared that he wasn't convinced, that he'd think it over, that he'd find new arguments, and that then he'd have to... yes, Aurore, he'd have to accept everything!

She painfully shook her divine head and let it rest for a minute on her lover's shoulder. They parted very sadly, one because she had not received a formal promise of renunciation, and the other because he saw fading away the sparkling picture of happiness he had thought himself so close to. He, at least, had one consolation: his stubborn resolve to do everything in his power to bend Aurore's will.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Laudon found things serious; he was disturbed in his ordinary equilibrium. He didn't know why, but he saw everything in a light he hadn't seen before. Bound by nature and adept at getting into other people's heads, he had nevertheless managed to establish a certain degree of intimacy with three or four people from the Court who were less shy than the others, both men and women, especially women. The latter had indulged in confidences with him, perhaps a little to get him talking himself. He had been made aware of rumors of divorce and common assumptions about the Prince's friendship with his cousin. The probable consequences were presented to him as facts already realized.

At first, he had sided **w i t h** Jean-Théodore and Countess Pamina, out of a desire and abundance of heart. He had done so because he hated groping and felt a gallant man's repugnance for those remarks which, in laughter, ruin reputations. Then he did it because he loved the prince, found the young countess amiable, and could not but deeply respect her father, whose story astonished and touched him, since he had never heard anything like it in his life. He soon became suspicious of his informants, who were indignant at his opposition, and from then on were cold and constrained towards him. This irritated him, threw him out of his indifference, and he took it up with Nore.

— I believe, God damn me," he told her, "that commonplaces are right, and that the world is perverse.

— You're wrong," replied his friend, "he's mostly inconsistent. He only has small feelings, small morals, small indignation, small rules, small principles. If you want to live with him and for him, you have to transform yourself in his image. So let's let him laugh or cry, applaud or get angry, and go straight for what we want, with God and our conscience!

— Do you think there's any truth to this courtroom gossip?

— I don't know. The Prince has made no more confidences to me than to you; but I cannot believe that a man of his kind is at ease in the midst of platitudes that assail him and rise higher than his knee. He must make efforts to get out of them, it's probable; and his past disorders, which don't fit well with a mind of his elevation, his illusions about women who

were hardly worthy of him, everything leads me to believe that, if he has met one at last, he will not have resisted this charm. I wouldn't want a tied man, chained as he is, chained to an inept person, chained to duties of incalculable weight, and needing consolation and encouragement at every minute, I wouldn't want to place him in the intimacy of an Aurore Pamina: a mutual passion would seem almost inevitable, and then all the disasters of the world would be to be expected.

— So you conclude that the prince is really attached to his cousin?

— I conclude nothing at all. From the fact that something is possible, it is not certain that it is. What I mean is this: People like Jean-Théodore are fatally doomed to three kinds of life, between which they are forced to choose: asceticism, and you know he's not there; a certain disorder, more or less elevated, more or less ennobled, and that's how he's lived up to the present day, perhaps he'll continue; or a frank, sincere, omnipotent attachment, in other words, unhappiness; that's what we fear.

— And a life of indifference, why don't you talk about that?

— My dear Laudon, this invention is only of value to negative natures; I'm not saying that they aren't in many ways the most favored, but our prince doesn't belong to them.

— You're right. Negative natures! What's it all about? Nore smiles.

— I hear you," continued Laudon, "a negative nature is me, for example. I've believed it to this day, and I still do. But I'm less sure than I used to be. For some months now, I've been living in an atmosphere so different from what I've known and practiced, that I don't know what to think about anything. I feel like a plant in a hot greenhouse that's come out from under its
I'm embarrassed about the prince, his cousin, the duke, you, everything I hear and myself. I'm embarrassed about the Prince, his cousin, the Duke, you, everything I hear and myself, and with that I'm going to leave, and I think that if I want to continue being reasonable and sensible as I've always been, it's really not too early.

— Your great fault," continued Nore, "is not in considering yourself impeccable, but in confining yourself to a sphere where you believe you can only commit those sorts of faults that are harmless to the tranquillity and, above all, the maintenance of a well-placed man's position. You're not wrong if you're really following the suggestions of your temperament; but, from various signs, I suspect you're simply treading on the tune of your

education. In short, judge for yourself and do what is right for you; you are the sole arbiter of your destiny.

— I'm beginning to fear that my destiny," continued Laudon, "which is much wiser than yours, for example, is infinitely drier, more sterile and more boring, and this suspicion, which wouldn't have occurred to me even this autumn, is giving me cause for concern. Lately, I've been living outside my natural sphere. I'm going to get back into it. Then I'll come to terms with myself. I've taken leave of the Prince. Tomorrow I leave; when you hear from me, you'll know that I've regained my composure and, without compliment, you've done your bit to make me lose it.

— I'll give it back to you!" exclaimed Nore, laughing, "and good for you!

Laudon left, and after spending a few days in Paris, went to Normandy to join Gennevilliers. He saw Lucie again. It was a great pleasure for him. The château was already welcoming other visitors, including Madame and Mademoiselle de Blanchefort, to whom Louis was introduced. He found them perfectly agreeable, and the young lady as well-bred as she was unattractive, so that he would have paid them very little attention if, after two days, Lucie, with whom he was taking a walk in the park, hadn't unexpectedly said to him:

— Monsieur de Laudon, you must get married.

— Married, ma'am? Why should you?

— You've got to get married," she replied, with a decided accent, a sign of the amiable authority she claimed over him. M. de Gennevilliers holds you in high esteem, and we would be happy to fix you in our intimacy. But you can't be there permanently until you have something to hold you there and prepare you for a future worthy of you.

All these words were quite reasonable, but there was certainly a touch of coquetry in the accent with which they were pronounced. Laudon became pensive and began to chase the pebbles from the driveway with the tip of his cane.

— To get married," he murmured after a moment's silence, "you'd have to know with whom.

Madame de Gennevilliers smiles.

— Are you blind and ungrateful? Don't you see anyone here you could marry?

— No," replied Louis candidly, "I don't suppose you mean Mademoiselle de Blanchefort! I wouldn't suit her at all.

— Why is that?" Lucie asked sharply.

— Can I be completely honest and you won't be angry?

— How can you expect me to get angry about something that, in the final analysis, only interests you and in which I can only be absolutely indifferent?

This was also said with a rather haughty expression, as Lucie felt she had to chastise her slave's hesitations. Some women only understand love in the form of servitude, and only taste its sweetness through domination. But, in turn, Laudon was piqued and replied in a rather uninhibited way:

— Between you and me, I'm wrong in not being struck by your cousin's pretty face, and even, to tell you the truth, I find her ugly.

— That's not a reason; a woman can be ugly and perfectly elegant, and still run her home very well, making a name for herself in the world, which always flatters the vanity of you gentlemen.

— I don't want my wife to be so superior, but I do want her to please me a little.

— So you don't like my cousin at all?

— Like your cousin, it pleases me infinitely, but I wouldn't want it in any other capacity.

— You surprise me; I'd thought it would have suited you to belong to our family... to live close to us... not to separate from Mr de Gennevilliers... I was wrong, let's say no more about it. Perhaps you're right.

Admittedly, Laudon didn't understand at all the happiness he'd just deprived himself of. He would have had an ugly, foolish wife, it's true, but he would have been able, for the rest of his mortal life, to be led by Lucie. It was the supreme mark of tenderness she intended to withhold from him. He missed paradise, but he missed it so well that, far from grieving, he rejoiced. His eyes were decidedly different. He found Lucie cold and composed, he felt she was despotic, he no longer found in her that gentleness, that goodness of which he had once been so infatuated... And Gennevilliers, whom he compared to the Prince, to Nore, to Conrad, to Coxe, to Doctor Lanze, simply felt like a pretentious soil.

The people making up the society gathered at the château were not very likely to make him reconsider the prejudices he had decidedly formed during his stay abroad. Brave landowners from the surrounding area, very much occupied with interests they considered positive, and having no idea of what was going on in the world outside the restricted circle of what they knew, they had no doubt that, with the exception of France, the universe was in a state bordering on savagery, and of this France they showed themselves to be very dissatisfied. Their notions about all things were a singular mixture of denigration and blind confidence, and to an implicit faith in themselves they added a distrust of the world.

of everything and everyone. In other respects, they were perfect losers. The women talked rags, dreamed money, and occupied themselves only with trivial pleasures, poor coquetries and rather flat backbiting, showing themselves to be vain and as ignorant as the men with whom they were surrounded. Every day, every hour, every observation took something away from the halo Laudon had wrapped Lucie in. Madame de Gennevilliers stumbled at the sight of this unexpected resistance, and naively found her admirer ungrateful and cold. How could he reject, with such undisguised disdain, the way she deigned to make him live with her! He didn't want to remain under her influence forever! He didn't appreciate this mark of partiality (for she would never have consented to say more), which made her desire his union with a woman he obviously couldn't fall in love with, in order to allow him to devote all his incense to her without distraction! She didn't know what to make of such a disregard for her good intentions, and declared to herself spitefully that she wasn't appreciated as much as she'd thought. It didn't occur to her, she was too virtuous, that she really offered little to her servant, nor did she think of winning him back by some concession, however slight. The ingratitude was too notorious. She hoped that, by a justly proud demeanor and an icy altitude, she would bring him to ask forgiveness and make him tremble. She was quite wrong. Laudon said to himself:

— What does she have in common with Liliane's charming, childlike grace? And above all, if I were to compare her to the Countess Pamina, how she would lose! What a doll! What an imperious, sullen creature!

After a few days, he was so frankly bored, he found the time so long and the hours so empty, that he'd had enough. What's more, he hadn't been very restrained towards Gennevilliers and his friends, and had let his opinions and feelings show through in ways that weren't counted as good. They found him paradoxical; nothing could be more deadly. When he wanted to leave, they held him back just long enough for politeness to prevail, but they weren't sorry to lose him. Lucie bade him an irreconcilable farewell, and Gennevilliers gave him some imperious, benevolent advice with a hint of anathema.

— I regret, my dear friend," says this remarkable man, "that we agree so little on great and eternal principles. I hope you'll come back to us some day; we must wait: your mind will be more mature and your imagination calmer. You will always find, in Madame de Gennevilliers and in me, the most sincere interest.

Laudon didn't feel safe until he'd lost sight of Mademoiselle de Blancheport's red nose and flat waist forever. He went straight to Paris, and when he got there, he felt miserable. He didn't want to go back to the club. He took no pleasure in the world. He was looking for something else, and couldn't tell himself what he wanted. His heart, his mind, his imagination, his will, he was idle, and he didn't realize that this state stemmed solely from the fact that his heart, imagination, will and mind had broken through the ice of his upbringing and early habits, and were crying out for healthy, nourishing food. But we'll leave him in his ennui and return to Nore.

He had a passion for examination, and when a person interested him, he never lost sight of them. This study was neither cold nor didactic; when he came across points worthy of sympathy, he gave it; worthy of his admiration, he admired. What occupied him at the time was Liliane. For the first time, such a subject had been within his grasp, and his familiarity in the professor's house made it easy for him to penetrate the girl's transparent life. He was charmed by her; he judged her for what she was, pure and upright of heart, a child full of promises and only too eager to keep them all. He would sit beside her and talk for hours. He'd tell her about his travels, and explain a lot to her. He loved to hear her play music. Once he'd discovered the cause of her progress, he'd enjoy, like a philosopher, the feeling she put into it. He often talked to Harriet about her.

It was at this time that the bourgeoisie of Burbach gave their annual ball for Their Royal Highnesses and the Court. The wealthy business families had gone to great expense; the nobility had done no less; the women were very elegant, beauties abounded; Aurore was the most ravishing of all, and Liliane perhaps the most touching. The party was magnificent; alas! alas! what a terrible fear for the prince! He managed to control himself enough not to approach his cousin even once, but the sight of such grace, such perfection, such a divine stature, such pure eyes, all threw him into inner transports of rage and despair at not being able to take possession forever of these treasures which, he kept telling himself, were his and his alone! When he had quenched his thirst with a furtive glance, he could not refrain from considering his official companion, seated in the armchair next to his, whose absurd toilette revolted him no less than the vulgar features of her entire person, from head to toe! At this aspect, he felt choked by a pain transformed into indignation against Providence, and his torment was so hard, he experienced such cruel torture, that a smile, the most

Aurore's tender, devoted heart could not calm him. He withdrew early, when he had said the necessary number of words to the principal leaders of the two Chambers, the heads of the municipality, and danced with the women who had the right to claim the honor.

His departure left Aurore painfully sad, but she, a gentle woman, knew how to hide her feelings better than her royal lover. She knew him so well, she had guessed the feelings he was stirring, and she suffered because he suffered. She foresaw that the next day, she would have to do a lot to restore his serenity, and she expected to see those proposals for divorce which frightened and distressed her, and to which she was determined never to consent, reappear with renewed vehemence. She knew, however, that she would succeed in lulling the soul of the man who adored her. She could do anything, because she loved so much. In a situation like this, when you don't love, you can do everything wrong and too little right. While the orchestra played and the waltzers whirled through the buzzing crowd, Aurore, dominated by her own thoughts, was naturally a little distracted. She had welcomed Nore with her usual kindness, but he had realized that she was not quite herself that evening, and he had left her. He'd gone and sat next to Liliane, chatting with her when she wasn't dancing.

Schorn's lieutenant found her, more than ever, cold, stern, focused. She barely responded to anything he said, yet she was cheerful, nervous, agitated. He understood nothing. She refused her favorite waltzers several times, said she was tired and ended up not moving from Nore's side, with whom the lieutenant saw her engaged in what was probably an interesting conversation, as she sometimes lowered her head, sometimes blushed or paled. He felt rather sad and didn't know what to think of what was happening. So there were a lot of very unhappy people at this ball.

The next day, around eleven o'clock in the morning, Harriet had just said goodbye to her father, who had been taken by Professor Lanze a few leagues from Burbach to visit some Roman ruins, and she was going about her usual business, thinking of Nore, who came to see her every day around two o'clock, when she saw Liliane enter and, at first glance, realized that something had happened that the young girl was very agitated about.

— "What's the matter?" she said, "what's the matter? Come and sit here. Give me your hand. Talk to me! What's wrong, Liliane, my darling?"

She kissed him. Liliane threw her arms around his neck and hid her face against his, for she was very red.

— "What have they done to you, my little child?" continued Harriet, caressing her. Are you grieving?

— Oh, my best friend, on the contrary, I'm so happy! You're the only one I can pour my heart out to. I came straight away. He loves me, Harriet, he loves me!

— But who, my child?" replied Harriet with a smile.

— Wilfrid Nore, and I love him for life!

A flood of ice tightened around Harriet's heart. If Liliane hadn't had her head hidden in her bosom, she would have seen her face change and her eyes petrify with horror; but she felt the spasm that agitated Coxe's poor daughter, and she believed that she was clutching her in her arms in a surge of sympathy.

There was a moment of silence, delicious for one, terrible for the other. But Harriet knew how to overcome herself, and when she was quite sure her voice would remain firm, she asked softly:

— Wilfrid Nore, you say?

— Yes, him! Who do you want me to love, if not him? Who's better, more generous, more noble? Would you like me to tell you how it was done?

— Tell us," replied Harriet.

Liliane stood next to her, but the one who was about to listen took up her work and began to sew, while the one who was about to speak looked more into herself than around her.

— I'd been thinking about him for some time. I have never seen a man like him in my dreams! He surpasses all the perfections I could imagine! I thought he was so tender for me! Last night, at the ball, we talked most of the night. How bored and angry I was when all those lousy characters came to remind me of an engagement! I can't stand dancing anymore; pleasure is not happiness! He said to me: Dear Liliane... I bring you his own words! Dear Liliane, whoever gets you will be to be envied! My heart swelled with joy, and I replied, perhaps with a little emotion, for my voice could well have been trembling, since my whole body was doing it: - Do you really think so? - Yes," he replied, "I do.

— Well," I said, "I'm not my own anymore! - I don't know how I found the courage to speak to him like that, but I did. I thought he was going to ask me a name, or tell me he loved me too; but he looked at me with a tender look and whispered: Dear child! but in an accent so penetrating, so penetrating... I wish you could have heard him, Harriet. He had guessed everything, and he's so noble, so delicate! He spared me the confusion of confessing. Then some people came and talked to him, others took me away, and, to my deep chagrin, we couldn't join each other at the ball that was about to end. I only found him again in a moment and in a way that I couldn't have imagined.

will never fade from my memory.

Here Liliane paused for a moment, and Harriet, continuing to sew, said to her:

— Please continue.

— My father and I were going out; I was wrapped from head to toe, waiting for the carriage. Suddenly, a crowd of people who were also getting out surrounded me, rushed me, grabbed me; I couldn't resist and was dragged almost under the wheels of the carriages; then I heard a voice exclaiming:

— What are you doing here, Liliane? You're going to get run over!

It was Wilfrid. He took me by the arm; oh, Harriet! as I was pushed from all sides, he took me in his arms and carried me away rather than dragging me out of the tumult. We were in the square. It was raining.

— I'm wearing satin shoes, and the pavement is quite wet.

I was so agitated! I was cold, shaking; I started to laugh, but it was a laugh that hurt. He looked at me and said:

— Liliane, don't laugh! Rest easy, dear child!

He took off his paletot and, without listening to my refusals, carefully wrapped me up. Then he spotted my father running anxiously to and fro, and called out to him. The carriage was close by, but I felt myself fainting. So he picked me up again and carried me away. I couldn't resist, and as he placed me on the cushions, yes, Harriet, I grabbed his hand and squeezed it. My father thanked him; it was dark; I was ashamed; I hid; I saw nothing more! That's what happened.

There was a new silence, a little long, Harriet resumed:

— Things can't stay like this. Since Mr. Nore has given you to understand that he loves you, he must declare it expressly and ask for your hand. I'm his friend as I am yours, and I'll talk to him. Soon, around six or seven o'clock, maybe earlier, you'll see him, and he'll commit himself to you; in any case, the day won't go by without it.

Liliane threw herself into Harriet's arms, who embraced her, and, on the observation that Nore was coming and that it was better not to meet him at this moment, she left and went home, her heart lit up with all the fires of joy.

Harriet continued sewing, tears streaming down her cheeks as she wiped them away and continued her work. This went on from about eleven until two. Just then, Nore came in. He was preoccupied, and there was something constrained in his manner.

— Wilfrid, you've got something to explain to me.

— I'd rather not tell you. Some stories benefit from delay. If I talk to you this morning about what's bothering me, I'm not quite sure I'm telling you things as they are, because I don't understand them.

myself again.

— I'm more perceptive, and I know more than you do. You have too much honor to drag things out to the point you've reached; you're too friendly to subject me to a situation I don't deserve... Wilfrid, I'm not angry with you; if I agreed to your wishes, you know very well that I foresaw difficulties and pains; now, for the second time, I'm setting you free! Go and repeat to Liliane, in a clearer way, what you said to her last night, in an obscure way.

— Did Liliane come here?

— She gets out. She told me everything.

— I'm sorry," says Wilfrid, "to be forced by you to talk about all this. It wouldn't cost me much to protest, but I don't want to with you. I'll be true, as I've always been. So give me some time; I'll tell you all about it in a few days.

— I can't!" replied Harriet in a hushed voice. Your hesitation alone proves to me that I shouldn't want to. Some blows can't wait. Right away! Right away! Everything is bearable, except uncertainty! Speak, Wilfrid! speak at once!... besides..., that child!... you mustn't leave her in this state of doubt either.

Nore was silent. At last he came to Harriet and said:

— I won't answer you! I'm not sure of myself. If I told Liliane that I love her, I think I'd be lying; but if I told you that I don't love her, that might be too much. Everything in me is shaken; I'm confused; I don't know what to conclude. Once again, Harriet, give me time.

Today, I can't decide anything, and I certainly won't decide anything.

— So I see it's all over. Give me your hand, Wilfrid. Let's split up... don't talk back to me, you love him! I understand... I've always told you! She's so pretty! And I'm...

Nore shook her hand gravely and walked out, and there she remained, feeling abandoned, and falling so far this time that she couldn't even try to measure the depth of her fall.

— Ah! this fatal love, which drags me to the grave! my heart, my poor heart, why did you conceive it? Shut up! Die! Why didn't you stay in this sad indifference, full of regret, perhaps, but bearable and from which I no longer suffered? What's the point of these caresses of a moment, followed by anguish that lasts for long days, long nights, that tightens my throat and inspires me for everything in the world, occupations, obligations, duties, pleasures, enjoyments of the spirit, distractions of the intelligence, a disgust that I can't overcome, that... yes, that overwhelms me, that oppresses and suffocates me, and finishes me off so slowly? What

but wring my hands? Where am I? What do I want? What do I feel? What's left for me? What can I become? what can I hope for? what can I want? talk about courage! Haven't I had any? Well, I've got none left!

No matter how hard I search through the ashes of my destroyed happiness, I can no longer find any of the feelings I should have had, that I did have, and that would have helped me bear the weight of this overwhelming misery! I no longer have any pride, I no longer have any will, I no longer have any reason, I no longer even have, no, I no longer have, in the face of my extinguished conscience, that modesty of suffering that is reluctant to confess I am horribly unhappy, and, so deserted of my strength that I can't even stand it, I can't even stand it!

I can do nothing but confess my helplessness. Ah! if I can die, and quickly, very quickly, if I can, at least, go mad, lose the feeling of what I'm experiencing, how much more I'll have to thank heaven for! I don't mind suffering, but at least let me forget why I'm suffering! May I no longer know that he exists, may I know nothing about him, may I lose even his name, since I've lost him! Then, I'm sure, I'd be much less to be pitied! But I can't! I can't; all I think about is him, all I see is him, all I want to do is think about him!

than him!... Wilfrid! Ah! Wilfrid!

Three o'clock... It's three o'clock... It's daytime, bigdaytimeThe trees are always the same and here are some birdsAn hour ago, half an hour ago, he was here... He was walking through the room... here... this .morning at ten o'clock, I don't know.

knew nothing at all!... I had no idea!... But it happened! What's happened? I'm wrong, no, I'm wrong... he's coming back.....I I shouldn't havepressed himI shouldn't have questioned him! He didn't feel like

to admit anything to me! He would have kept his mouth shut. This day would have passed like all the others. I would have been happy by now; he would have deceived me for another eight days. I would have had eight more days of happiness! I was wrong! I

beg forgiveness... I'll beg him todeceive me He may well love Liliane

and not tell me! Why would he tell me? He's not going to marry her tomorrow... He's going to marry her! She's going to be his wife... She... she-what is she? between him and me? If he hadn't come here... Why did he?.....I would like to sleep... I can't stay here... I'll go out into the streets...I'll do it! meet him. He won't talk tomeit doesn't matter, I'll see him! I want him

to see! I've got to see it again! I just want to see him!...

Luckily, I'm in extreme pain. I don't think I can suffer much more; but, if it's possible, my God, let it be, I beg you, be good to me, kill me, kill me quickly! Will he be happy after having done me so much harm? Did I deserve it? Why

did he come? I didn't ask for him, and I didn't even want him !
I'm suffering too much!

BOOK FOUR

CHAPTER ONE

A thick snow had fallen. It was freezing; the pure sky was rigid. The black, bare trees stood motionless like skeletons and seemed to threaten. A few fir trees towered in pyramids of dark greenery, and the branches below, thick, heavy and sullen, pressed against the ground. No one wandered in the park, no one except Nore; he walked briskly. He didn't feel the cold. He went before him, absorbed, and for several hours he continued to pace the open alleys in all directions. His face was not agitated; his gestures were neither jerky nor troubled; he recovered, he consulted, he directed, above all he dominated himself, and if some conflict pitted his instincts, his fantasies, his passions, his imagination, his heart, a force superior to all, his reason, no doubt suffered the thrusts of the combat, but strongly resisted it and continued on his way.

After a few hours, and when his mind was made up, he headed back down to town and entered the professor's house. It was about the time Harriet had given Liliane for her explanation. Wilfrid found Liliane in the living room; she blushed when she saw him, rose to her feet and stood. With a calm, affectionate air, he seated her again, stood beside her and began:

— What do you think of Harriet?

— What do I think of Harriet?" replied Liliane, surprised to find herself, when she least expected it, diverted from her thoughts, which were all about herself. What I think is that no woman has ever seemed to me more worthy of respect and affection. I haven't known her long enough to know all that she is, but nothing less is necessary. You can't go wrong with her; she bears, in every one of her features, the imprint of such an angelic nature, that, surely, the depths of her heart are no other than the expression on her face.

— You're right; yet, let's face it, she's not very young anymore, her features are tired; a gentle melancholy, but melancholy at last, casts its tints on her.

on her person. She may present you with a touching image, but it's not that of a joyful life, and she may not have anything like it in her mind.

— What do you mean?" exclaimed Liliane, increasingly astonished.

— Answer me this: do you understand why anyone would love Harriet? And if, by chance, this love had been born, would you still understand that it could weigh so much before the one that could easily inspire a more lovable, younger, more attractive creature who would promise quite different felicities? Yes, finally, Liliane, if we had loved Harriet and we saw you, could you imagine that for a single minute we would sway between the two?

Liliane was frightened; but, raising her head, she replied firmly:

— I'm a child and she's a woman. If someone loved her, how would they love me?

— Very easily," says Nore. Love has many forms; it can be calm, it can be drunken; it can address the heart, it can only take beauty into account; sometimes, it's a solid and serious feeling; but when a whim comes, everything is terrible: it becomes a storm. Do you think Harriet is a worthy object of whim? And suppose for a moment that you're at the ball, next to her... which of the two will be looked at? which will please, which will charm? It's you, not her!

— What are you doing?" exclaimed Liliane in genuine distress, and, once again, what do you mean?

— I'm telling you what you should always know in the end. I came here to avoid any misunderstanding between us. I'm telling it like it is. I'm putting you next to Harriet and comparing you to her. These are the kinds of thoughts that come up all the time. Don't give them more importance than they deserve. Just think of it as a conversation piece and a confidence. You told me earlier that you didn't yet know much about the woman we're talking about. I'll tell you just one thing, as I've known her for years: she was born under a star that has been an enemy until now. All her virtues, all her merits, all her wit, all her charm, for she has much of it, have constantly run aground on the reefs of a surly destiny, and, when she is about to escape it, be sure that, by the wildest generosity, she will never fail, either for the happiness or for the salvation of another, to plunge herself into the abyss. Do you love unhappy people?

Liliane replied in a trembling voice:

— If, for reasons similar to those you have just enumerated, if because she is no longer young, because she is neither pretty enough, nor brilliant enough, nor

happy, someone would bring me a heart that he would like to take away from Harriet... I would tell him... I would tell him...

— What would you say to her, Liliane?" interrupted Nore sharply, "what would you say to her? Don't let yourself be affected by the pain that your imagination lends to your friend; you know very well that there is no question of you in all this... that there can be no question of you... Liliane... Liliane, you know you don't love anyone, you're far too proud for that... Dear Liliane... good!... now, answer me, what would you say?

— I'd say I don't want it!" exclaimed the girl, stiffening.

— You're a brave child, and you deserve to be loved by a man worthy of you and not by some cowardly deserter... You will, Liliane, believe me, you will!

When one day you love someone, and it will be soon... don't answer me, don't speak! You're too moved by the idea of Harriet; well then, when one day you accept someone, you will give him the most generous heart he could wish for. I don't know if you think much of my friendship, but from now on, Liliane, that friendship will always follow you; you're really very good to Harriet... and although you're so young, it's esteem that you deserve.

Liliane, desolate, felt herself growing in the face of Nore's praise. Like a plant that's too weak, whose height a gardener raises by leaning it against a stake, she was carried and straightened by the care of the one next to her, and eager to show herself strong and eager to know what Nore might think.

— What did Harriet say to you?" she asked, lowering her head.

— To me? No, nothing. I haven't seen her today. But now you're calmer; we'll, if you like, conspire together against this dear girl. I'm too fond of you to keep secrets. Know this: I love Harriet and I am loved by her. She may not be as young as you, she may not be cheerful, she may not be happy, but she's the only one I know and the only one I want.

Yet she imagines, for affection is often suspicious, that I could be seduced by charms greater than hers. At the moment, she's in one of those unjust moods. I beg you, take the first opportunity to tell her that I have confided in you that our wedding day is imminent; you will try to combat her causeless sadness, and...

Liliane, you might add that if I'd ever loved anyone but her, it would have been you, and yet I've never done anything to let you believe it.

— Nothing done, really," murmured Liliane, wiping her eyes. Leave me alone, Monsieur Nore, I'll go straight to Harriet's.

— Then," says Wilfrid, "I'll thank you from the bottom of my soul, and you can be sure that my gratitude will never fade.

He shook Liliane's hand and left, stifling a sigh. As far as the professor's daughter was concerned, she didn't really understand what was happening to her or what she was feeling, except for one thing. She was afraid of showing herself weak and without pride. The feeling of her compromised dignity dominated all others. She didn't want to be despised by anyone, neither by Harriet, nor especially by Nore. She loved him; she loved herself even more. This supreme preoccupation is an essential part of the spirit of self-preservation felt above all in the first age. She was hurt, she was a little irritated; these sensations took precedence over the loss of illusions cherished for several weeks. Nore had assured her that he hadn't seen Harriet, so he knew nothing of the confession she'd made in the morning, and while she cursed her imprudence, she welcomed the opportunity to repair and remove its effects. She didn't waste a minute, and determined that Nore should never know what she had hoped for, what she had confessed, she ran to her rival's house and found her astonished to see her again.

— Harriet," she said, "you must be indulgent. I beg your forgiveness. I'm a fool, I'm crazy! I've upset you, but on the one hand, I was mistaken in good faith, and on the other, I didn't know what I've just learned.

Harriet looked at her without answering, and continued:

— I had imagined that Mr. Nore was thinking of me. He wasn't! It's not true! He was kind, affectionate and nothing more! I had a novel in my head, I must admit, and I gave his words a meaning they didn't have. I exalted myself on trifles. He told me that whoever I loved would be happy. Was that the equivalent of loving myself? I believed it was, because it suited me; but it wasn't. He surrounded me with care. He surrounded me with care last night like a sister, I thought it was like a fiancée; my mistake is mine alone. I was wrong to have him. Don't confide anything I've told you today to anyone... to anyone! right? I've been weak and foolish; but don't make me blush, Harriet, I don't deserve such punishment! I used to think that a man couldn't say certain things without those things being more far-reaching than they are. Now I know: in future, I'll be on my guard. It's over, I can see clearly, Mr. Nore isn't thinking about me... and I'm not thinking about him... at least not in the way I did for a few moments.

— Have you seen him, Liliane?" asked Harriet, looking sad and suspicious.

— He was here earlier, complaining about you. He thinks you haven't

not trust him. He told me of your engagement. You'll be happy with him, Harriet. He likes you.

— He doesn't love me," Harriet replied despondently. But that's not the point. I don't understand how you can come and tell me now that you don't want him, when this morning, in this very place, you were distraught about him.

— Oh! distraught!" exclaimed Liliane, crestfallen. I wasn't distraught; I had believed that he loved me, and I was ready to return the favor. But what do you expect me to do, when he comes and declares that he thinks only of you, that he is bound only to you, and makes me understand that it would be the blackest of crimes to torment a soul like yours? This is a harsh lesson for my poor judgment. You won't make it any harsher; keep my secret. Do you promise?

— I don't know what you're telling me. You assure me that you didn't understand the first time; who can guarantee that you will understand the second? Mr. Nore has too much honor to commit himself to you without telling you that he previously committed himself to me. Perhaps you require him never to have looked at anyone.

Do I know the conditions you ask of those who implore you? It may be that, out of a compassion for which I am grateful, but also for which I hold you in contempt, you have scruples about accepting someone who abandons me. As for me, I can't make two people unhappy, one of whom I love and the other of whom I'm just beginning to love.

— You are very cruel, dear Harriet," cried Liliane, letting her heart melt into two streams of tears, "very hard indeed, and I don't think I deserve it! I came to you frankly and openly, confessing my wrongs, wanting to make amends, only begging you in return not to humiliate me beyond need, and what do you do? You push me away, you speak harshly to me. I didn't want what was yours; when I was shown the truth, what did I do immediately? I admitted that I should never have wished for it to be mine, and I gave you back with my full consent what I had in fact never taken from you.

— You've taken everything from me," Harriet continued, "everything! First his affection, then my faith in him. I don't know why you refuse him, it's some childish whim, some exaggerated sentimentality. He wants you! He prefers you to me, he prefers you to everything! That's all you should consider.

— If you'd seen him," replied Liliane, "the way he came into my house just now, looking so cold and resolute; if you'd seen him speaking to me only in a paternal, protective tone, as one does to a poor little girl for whom one can never feel love, because she's too little; if

you'd heard him, when he went on to speak about you, you wouldn't look at me like that! I imagined I was attached to Mr Nore, but nothing like that! I'm sure of it, and he, he certainly never wanted me. He proved it to me; you must believe it too.

Harriet was stubborn in her contradiction, and yet she felt that hope returning to her breast, smiling goddess always well received, whatever one has of it.

— Liliane," she finally said gravely, "I don't believe you're so unsure of your feelings that you can declare and deny them in a single day, and to explain how I feel, I don't realize what I'm standing here between you and Mr. Nore.

— It's not you who's between us," exclaimed Liliane, passionately grasping his hands, "it's me who for a moment mistakenly thought I'd slipped in where I didn't belong. But here's Mr. Nore, he'll make you understand everything.

— I'll make you understand everything," replied Wilfrid, "to both of you, and first of all to you, Liliane. For the past month, I've seen you every day, and every day I've given you, if not a reason to think I was attached to you, at least a kind of certainty that it could happen. Yes, it could. Would it have been easy to escape the magic you exert on those who come near you? I don't know; it seems that for me it wasn't possible, because I felt the influence. For a moment, my reason gave in to the authority that, without wanting it, without seeking it, without knowing it, you took over it. I didn't run towards you; I fell asleep for a moment, and no longer watching over myself, a very conceivable sympathy, which I admit without any scruples, made me drift towards you. But what did I say then that could have seemed like a confession on my part?

— Nothing," replied Liliane firmly, looking at Harriet.

— What have I done? Do you have to accuse me of a gesture, of a sign?

— No!" replied Liliane, squeezing her friend's hand.

— I didn't deceive you, I didn't play you, I didn't betray you! I didn't make fun of words that could have been half-true... I slept, that's my fault, I dreamt a little and, in a sort of somnambulism, took a few steps in a direction I wasn't allowed, where you wouldn't have welcomed me, I know, Liliane, and certainly, I repeat, where I didn't want to go. Forgive me for my frankness, as one forgives easily a fault that does not affect you and from which one cannot suffer.

As he said these last words, he looked at Liliane; she returned his gaze, proudly, and squeezed the beating of her breast with her hand.

— And now you, Harriet," continued Nore, "I suppose you don't want

it won't take long for you to understand what I'm about to tell you...

— No," Harriet interrupted gently, holding out her hand, "I don't need another word. I prefer not to go any further today. Tomorrow, I'll listen to you. At the moment, I'm a bit ill and I'd rather not talk about it.

After a moment, Liliane left, and the two lovers were left alone.

It took several days to restore Harriet to her original tranquility, and all the more so as Wilfrid did not want to cover up what had happened inside him with any disguise. It was true, and he said it with the kind of impassivity he put into analyzing himself and others, that his imagination had been caught, dominated, distracted for a moment, carried away by Liliane's youth and beauty. But," he added, "my imagination alone let itself be captivated. Had I been free of any commitment, things might have gone further, and, in all likelihood, even to the point of committing myself. But my conviction is absolute: almost immediately, I would have repented, and it was to find and demonstrate to myself all the certain reasons for this fact that, when you revealed to me your conversation with this young girl, I didn't want to answer you at the time. At the time, I wasn't very clear about my feelings, and however touched I was by your distress, I can't hide the fact that if I'd really been in love with another woman, I'd have thought it necessary, for both your sake and mine, to agree. Besides, and without a doubt, I would have despised myself. But if I'd been forced to acknowledge my own weakness, it would have been better to confess it and afflict you once and for all, than to jeopardize your whole life with a regret whose chain I would have dragged.

I sincerely examined myself, and found that the harm was not great. An attraction is not a passion, an infatuation is not an attachment, and it didn't take me much trouble to discover that there are many degrees to go down from my Harriet to this delicious and seductive child. Believe me, I've gained more than I've lost from this short ordeal, and so have you. I have had the greatest opportunity to appreciate the value of the treasure destined for me; I have compared it to that which glitters and shimmers, to that which leads astray, and I assure you that it has seemed to me far more precious. Up until now, I had allowed myself to cherish you, a little out of habit, a little out of the memory of a long contradiction, a little out of the pleasure of exercising my will, a lot out of an invincible attachment and the most serious love there is; but I had not put myself in the presence of this question: What if you were to be touched by one of your friends?

another? The question presented itself; I examined it, and knew the value of temptation. No! Harriet, once again, if I let myself go to such follies, if I lost you, I would soon find myself at the bottom of such misfortune,

that I was appalled to guess, to glimpse its extent. It would be the ruin and loss of three people, and I spent less time thinking about whether I really continued to love you more than anything else in the world, than I did dwelling on the certain consequences of a moment of dizziness if I had succumbed to it!

These speeches were so sincere, so serious, and at first Harriet's objections were so easy to refute, because they were deliberately made to be so, that calm, peace, trust and something even more were restored between the lovers. This was no mending of fences. There was a more solemn feeling here: these were two true hearts that, for a moment shaken in opposite directions, were coming together, merging with a powerful certainty of their cohesion.

The end of the ordeal came at once. Coxe's affairs of interest were arranged; he was no longer to return to Asia, and Harriet no longer found herself vacillating between her duties to her father and her duties to a husband. The engagement could no longer be kept secret and was declared.

How happy Harriet was! And if the conviction of love, its duration, its self-sacrifice deserve a reward, how she deserved it! She got it; she's got it. May she be blessed, and may her husband and children be blessed too! There never was a more noble and tender union in the world. Harriet has suffered much and in every way; but also, dear Harriet, how much you have received in compensation! Do you regret your sorrows, your pains, your expectations, even your despair? No, a thousand times no! If the lovely woman hadn't felt all those goads piercing her with all those claws, tearing her apart, she wouldn't be worth what she is, she wouldn't be what she is, and the affection she has for Wilfrid wouldn't have taken hold of her being so absolutely. To love, one must have suffered; to be great, too, one must have suffered; the faculty of suffering much is the most wonderful crown of those who occupy the first rank among humans.

It's impossible to say everything, and even more difficult to explain; but if you imagine that Wilfrid hadn't had long, painful years of his own, you'd be mistaken. No one can keep a strong passion alive and gnawing away at him without his flesh and soul twitching and bleeding cruelly. That's what had happened to him. Without complaint, with inextinguishable constancy, he had endured the most poignant of sorrows, that of believing Harriet so obstinate in her devotion that he would never succeed in overcoming her, and would only obtain from her invincible refusals.

Nonetheless, he had persisted in his desire, and, as the days accumulated, he had come to know the world, men, women, and compared Harriet to what he

even perfect, the more he confirmed his love for her.

CHAPTER TWO

Laudon was therefore very bored in Paris, and sought, with difficulty and without much success, to make an existence for himself which would have the double advantage of responding to the ordinary habits of his life and to the needs which his experiences of the past summer and autumn had developed in him. If one observed him a little, one saw that the death of his father had left a stronger impression on him than anything that had happened to him up to that point. He had also been disgusted by the first inconveniences of his kind of existence; therefore, he had accommodated himself to a pleasant compromise, by seeking the intimacy of Lucie and Gennevilliers; they seemed to him, at the time, to realize all his ideas about perfect amiability and greatness of character. It was a kind of apprenticeship; he had spent several months shaking off the accumulated rust on his feelings, and had become accessible enough to the impression of higher things to appreciate, as he would not have done in his fine club years, the intimacy of Conrad and especially that of Nore. When, having lived with the latter and allowed himself to be won over to his opinions and those of the Prince, he had felt that Lucie no longer corresponded to what he admired, he had distanced himself from her, without regret, having nothing left to occupy his imagination and move his mind.

While he was thus in suspense, not knowing which way to turn, he received a letter from a man who had some obligation to him. It was the son of one of his farmers. The boy had been well brought up, had graduated from the École Centrale as a civil engineer, and had decided to seek his fortune in Russia. Laudon, interested in his efforts, had advanced him some money. It was this protégé who unexpectedly wrote to him.

He told him that, being in Wilna for the construction of a railroad, he had been very surprised to meet in the street a man who bore a strong resemblance to the Marquis de Candeuil, a cousin of Laudon, of whom there had been no news for two or three years. He made inquiries and learned that this character was known as Casimir Bullet, and was told of his peculiarities, his love of solitude and his poverty, details which made him suppose that he himself had been mistaken. But a second opportunity having made him see at his ease the object of his curiosity, he was now certain of having recognized it perfectly, and he thought he should let Laudon know. Laudon was impressed by all the details in the letter.

Until then, he'd thought of Candeuil as a strange man, not very easy to talk to; but in those days, Laudon didn't think much about things. This time, it was different, and he thought about it so well that he suddenly left for Wilna, intending to see for himself what his cousin's retirement, change of name and inexplicable destitution meant. He felt it necessary not to abandon a relative in such a situation.

Arriving in Wilna, he wasted no time in getting in touch with Candeuil, and went to his house in a suburb. He knocked on the door, and when he was invited in, he pushed open the door and found himself face to face with his cousin.

— What are you doing here?" he asked, but there was nothing malicious in the accent of his voice.

— Perhaps," replied Laudon, surprised by the calmness of his austere face, "I should invent some story to explain my presence; but the truth is, I've come from Paris to see you. I've been told you live alone; I've come to keep you company.

— Be welcome," replied the marquis, "this fantasy will soon pass you by; you've got your business. Besides, the comfort of my apartment won't captivate you.

— You're wrong," Laudon replied, sitting down on a stepladder and gazing around the room with an air of lively satisfaction. But this is the home of a wise man, with nothing superfluous; only the essentials and books! At last, the abstract abode of pure intelligence!

Candeuil smiled.

— What will your elegance do here?

— My elegance? She and I are divorced. I'm looking for something else.

— What are you looking for?

— And what did you find?

Candeuil rested his head on his hand, and, after a moment's silence:

— So you've changed?

— I agree that I've changed. But I have no idea what I've become.

And, with a carelessness inspired by the place, the prevailing influence and the master's appearance, Laudon recounted his feelings and the story of the last few months. When Conrad's name came up in his account, Candeuil made a gesture of surprise and redoubled his interest. We'll know later how Candeuil knew all about Lanze.

If we understood the nature of the stoicism professed by Sophie's stern lover, we could see that it was not moody, nor even misanthropic.

The Marquis considered all his worldly affections of all kinds equally lost, and didn't think that attaching oneself to the branches of the tree was worth the effort when one didn't have the fruits. On the other hand, he hated no one and took an interest, within reasonable limits, in the troubles and sufferings of others. He saw Laudon's mind evolving on its own, and didn't hide his thoughts from his cousin.

— Do you know, Louis? I'm a man in one piece, and I don't change, I don't bend, and...

— And me," replied Laudon, "if I were a man in one piece, I'd be in my club's smoking room right now, waiting to drop in on Flora Mac Yvor. I'm sure you'll agree that it's better not to insist on a single idea. But we'll have plenty of time to talk things over.

Indeed, they did. Laudon took a tender interest in Candeuil. Candeuil didn't tell him her secrets, but Laudon sensed a soul strongly, too strongly, touched by touching regrets, and felt an instinctive admiration for the courageous way in which she carried her office. The Marquis was perfectly even-tempered. It wasn't long before he realized that while his relative's moral power was enormous, his physical strength, tyrannized to excess, bent and bent painfully under oppression. He could see that Candeuil was ill. A leaden pallor, eyes sunken in their sockets, with a black circle that brought out, in a disturbing way, sometimes the flame, sometimes the extinguished expression, red spots on the cheeks, and, when the stoic wasn't observing himself, a complete slump that relaxed all his limbs, his hands cold or burning, everything indicated, to Louis' scrutinizing eye, that Candeuil was suffering and suffering cruelly. But he said nothing of his discovery and waited. In the meantime, the recluse examined him, studied him in silence and took a noticeable liking to him.

— You're not as bad as I thought," he said to her one night. How could I have been so wrong about you for so long?

— Because I was deceiving myself," replied Laudon, smiling. I'd been given a way of life that I'd obediently put on; I thought it was the only right way. Fortunately for me, I've worn this habit in places where it's torn, and I've recognized its bad fabric. So I threw it away. I'm looking for a new one; in the meantime, I'm free of its compressions, and if the air that hits me from side to side sometimes makes me shiver or burn, I'm not angry about it. I feel more alive than I used to.

— And what do you intend to do with this independence?

— If I knew, I'd have my new suit. It's not ready yet; all in all, I'm

I'm with the law, and as long as you don't push me away, I'll stay there, having nothing as good to do.

Candeuil was about to reply, but as he did so, a dry cough caught him. He got up to conceal it and walked around the room. After a few minutes, he spoke, and it was a sort of half-confidence:

— If I have any advice to give you, close your heart. I don't mean that you should remain without any sympathy, without any affection, and that you should look upon all beings and all things with absolute indifference. Far be it from me to entertain such an idea; but when I advise you to close your heart, I only mean that you should treat it like the turbulent springs that flow at the foot of mighty mountains. As long as they are left free, they do little but harm. Sometimes their basin is completely dry, and an ant couldn't quench its thirst in it; sometimes they bubble with fury, pouring out waves accumulated outside their bosom, spilling them foaming over the ground that surrounds them, raising them to the tops of submerged trees, tearing away grass, stones, leaves, flowers and fruit, and, in the silty embraces of these furious and troubled waters, carrying away everything and especially themselves. No, you can't let your heart run away with you like that. You must love your country soberly, so as to be able to forgive it a lot; you must love everything in the world in the same way, with the same aim, because everything needs indulgence, and never dare to see and glorify in the excess of affection a principle perhaps divine, yes, certainly divine! celestial, immortal, but which must not touch the things of this world, because as soon as it embraces them, it burns them up and annihilates them. Do you know the story of Sémélé? It's very true! This woman was not content to be loved by Jupiter, as Jupiter, in his celestial reason, had resolved to love her. She said to him:

"You take the form of a man; I don't want to! You are God; I want to be loved by a God! I want to know what love is in its excess, what can be greater, more powerful, more sublime! Love me, then, as master of the whole of nature!" And, you know, Laudon, what happened to this Sémélé when she came into contact with this force?

How could the poor child bear neither the lightning nor the flashes? No! You can be sure that enough is enough, and that too much can't be risked on this planet without producing disasters, even though we all have a tendency to only want too much.

— If I understand you," returned Laudon, "you're setting an example.

— It's not about me; it's about my advice to you.

Here he was interrupted by another bout of coughing, and for a few seconds leaned with one hand on the back of a chair, while with the other, the other hand, on the floor.

the other, he compressed his chest. Laudon lowered his eyes. At last, Candeuil started walking again and said:

— This taste for the absolute, this passion, this need for the perfect, for all time, is the strangest feeling to be found in the fragile human creature. Everything passes outside her, around her, she knows that as external objects believe and contemplate her, she will pass, disappear, be annihilated; and yet, the more she advances towards this inevitable dissolution, the more she redoubles her love for the brilliant clarity, apparently so alien to her nature. If I wanted striking, unanswerable proof that everything that seems real to us is a lie, and that we really are immortals, I'd find it here!

Yes, we are immortals, and the infinite that we feel, that we guess, that we cherish, that intoxicates us, we will certainly have it! But our misfortune is to be too hasty; we want now what will only belong to us later; in today's life, we shouldn't even think about it; we're still only equipped with muscles and nerves; with this imperfect apparatus, we only know how to produce irregular leaps, too heavy to launch ourselves into space; so we soon fall back onto the ground, which crumples and hurts us; we don't yet have those light wings on which we will one day float, tireless, across the immensities of time.

It's pure advice that I'm giving you, once again: try to love nothing and want nothing within narrow limits. After all, my dear Louis, there's no need to insist; you'll follow your temperament, and nothing can stop you.

There were many more conversations like this one. Candeuil had become more and more accustomed to Laudon's company; he liked this relative who had arrived unexpectedly; and what was more extraordinary on his part, he let him see. There was in him, not a change, but a softening of his will, and inside, he was happy, was he not? he was happy not to be alone. At times, he even wondered, with some trepidation, whether his companion would suddenly leave him, despite his promises. As this weakness was completely new to him, he would never have allowed himself to express it with a question. However, Laudon guessed it, and one day found a way of telling him in an incidental sentence;

— Next summer, we can, if you like, move to a house that's just as philosophical as you like in its extreme crampedness as far as you're concerned, but where I, who don't prick myself with so much virtue, will be a little further out.

Candeuil was greatly relieved to hear this, but he didn't say a word. When a change like this occurs in a violent soul, it is

Candeuil had pretty much used up his physical energy. What's remarkable is that, in contact with this excessive, exhausting nature, Laudon's own strength was increasing day by day. He believed himself to be necessary; he felt that, to fulfill the task he had assigned himself, he needed seriousness, continuity of thought, resoluteness, and he found the model of all these qualities in the shaken temple presented to him by Candeuil's soul. He was so moved by the desire, the need, to support the sick man, to console him, if possible, without ever speaking to him of what his friend would not reveal, that he associated himself with his work, and gradually found an interest in it of which he would never have believed his mind capable. That winter, he became a philologist, so that he could revive in Candeuil the only fantasy that still shed a few invigorating glimmers of light on a soul ready to lie exhausted on the debris of the body it had overpowered.

Science is a great love. It's a noble love that neither abandons nor deceives. It can embellish the brightest hopes of youth, and that youth itself in all its vivacity, in all its ardor; it can, prolonging it through the disappointments of middle age, carry it, full of its warmth, well into the cold regions of old age; but only on condition that this love has not been taken as a second-best by an intelligence despairing of arriving elsewhere. Candeuil was a scientist; but he was a scientist because he had never believed he could become a patriot, a statesman, a soldier, a beloved and happy lover. He had entered into a marriage of reason with science, and once united with her, he had been more and more penetrated by the virtues of this noble wife, by the truth of her charms and the security of her embraces, no doubt, but he had not loved her; he had asked her for everything: oblivion, peace, and, if possible, happiness; but, his own heart, he had not succeeded in drawing it towards her, in handing it over to her in its entirety, in abandoning it to her. She could do little for him. His strange way of working; the vast and reliable knowledge he accumulated in carefully thought-out manuscripts, then threw into the fire, could only succeed in distracting him; nothing cured him, and by the time Laudon came along, his confidence in this last resource was worn out. Left alone, he would have closed his books. He continued only to avoid denying himself in front of a witness.

On the contrary, Laudon was immediately and completely taken with what his cousin taught him. He thought that by becoming his pupil, he would please him and give his work a new stimulus; he had even better things to offer himself than the satisfaction of being a friend; contact with the ideas that were communicated to him caused sparks to fly in his mind, and he discovered the necessary dispositions to attach himself to the order of research in which he had at first feigned interest, rather than to his own.

had really done it. It's one of those encounters. You never know exactly what you're made of until you've tried it. Chance has made so many discoveries in the material world, and will make so many more! It is no less adept at showing many minds their aptitude. Laudon's cool-headedness, his searching and restrained imagination, his genuine sensibility but little inclination to extravagance, his spirit of examination, were all foundations on which scientific passion found comfort. There was no fear of ever being disturbed by unforeseen fantasies. Since his stay in Wilna, Laudon has published works of sufficient importance to ensure that his name will live on among men interested in the comparative study of languages.

Towards spring, the marquis's health began to deteriorate, and Laudon was under no illusion that danger was imminent. The untoward symptoms multiplied so rapidly, and the philosopher's morale changed in such a notorious way, that at last Louis summoned up all his courage and said firmly to Candeuil:

— I want you to see a doctor.

— I'm happy to do so," he replied coldly.

In himself, he knew the uselessness of any remedy and didn't want to argue. It was agreed that Laudon's wish would be fulfilled the next day, but the day was not yet over.

The post arrived in the evening. The two friends were discussing erudite subjects, when Laudon's valet brought a letter. It was addressed to Candeuil. Candeuil very rarely received news from the outside world; Laudon had noticed that only twice had news arrived since the beginning of winter. He observed, and has often recalled since, that things did not turn out the way they had on previous occasions. Candeuil then took a long look at the address, placed the envelope on the table without opening it, and continued his conversation, absolutely as if he had no interest in the contents of the paper whose reading he was postponing. When he saw this letter, on the contrary, he seized it with an ill-contained vivacity that was so out of character that Laudon was surprised. He tore open the envelope, read, and remained in a sort of mute contemplation before what he held before his eyes. Laudon realized that only one side of the page contained the entire missive.

After a moment, Candeuil placed the letter on the table beside him; immediately he drew it to him and reread it again; then he smiled, folded it, placed it in the same place and stood up... Suddenly he let out a heart-rending cry, grabbed the letter a third time, crumpled it up convulsively and struck his head with his hands.

both hands clenched, would have fallen backwards if Laudon hadn't thrown himself on top of him, embraced him with all his strength and dragged him, rather than carried him, onto his bed. The servant was still in the house. He was sent in a hurry to fetch the help that was only due the next day, and in the meantime, Louis undressed Candeuil and put him to bed. Candeuil was mute, stupefied and insensitive, but he held the letter tightly between his fingers, and Laudon knew better than to try to take it away from him.

When the doctor arrived, Louis was losing his mind. He felt in the utmost peril and told the doctor so. The doctor examined Candeuil and said:

— You're not wrong. Your friend has very little time left to live. It's an organization worn out by some cause unknown to me; it must recently have received a shock stronger than its debility. A few hours... that's all he has. I can only order painkillers; I cannot change the conclusion.

— Then do whatever it takes to make him suffer as little as possible," Laudon murmured in a strangled voice.

He sat by the bed. A priest was called. This time, Laudon's feelings about religion were quite different from those he had so unhappily associated with his father's death. Towards morning, Candeuil made a move. He turned his head and seemed to search the room as if he thought he saw someone. An expression of mad grief crossed his face.

— What do you want?" Laudon said tenderly, leaning over him.

— Sophie," he murmured, and exhaled.

And that's how he died, for having wanted one thing too much, and always that one thing, and nothing but that one thing, in the face of the obvious impossibility of ever obtaining it. He died because he believed that in the absence of what one desires, one can choose nothingness; he died because he considered himself a god capable of overcoming all the revolts of flesh and blood, intelligence and heart, and bending them to having no more consolations, and not even seeking any, because the ideal was denied them. Finally, he died because he proudly passed by mediocrity, unaware that this goddess is the arbiter of the world, and holds in her hands the only goods that can be obtained.

When he was laid to rest, Laudon forbade him to take away the letter - certainly murderous - that the poor, broken stoic had clutched in his hand. He would have considered it a profanation to read it, and, if the truth be told, he took a horror to love at that moment.

— There's only science," he says to himself, "and as for the rest, it's an abominable lottery; if there are winning tickets, there hardly are any.

After Candeuil's funeral, Laudon left, and, very sad, headed for the

to Burbach, hoping to find some of the distractions the winter he'd just spent had made him feel the need for. He was not so much overshadowed by the final catastrophe of Candeuil's existence, as by the memory of those few austere months which had led up to it, and yet he admitted to himself how much he owed to this harsh ordeal, and the gratitude with which he wished to forever surround the memory of the one he had just lost.

CHAPTER THREE

In Florence, a new state of affairs had been established between Sophie and Conrad. The latter had used his little reason and all his strength to moderate himself, to calm down, to be content with what he had, in order to fulfill the conditions of the pact he had made with the woman whose power over his soul was so absolute, so frightening. He felt, and admitted to himself, that she was the sovereign ruler over all his resolutions; had she so willed, she would have made him capable of a crime.

— Well," he said to himself, "since I'm her slave to such an extent, let me at least obey her in what she orders me to do for myself.

Not without revolts, not without terrible and painful jolts, and moments of indecision when he thought he was about to fall back into the convulsions that had reduced him so low, he managed to control himself enough to force himself to live calmly, at least in appearance, and, it must be admitted too, Sophie helped him as best she could to support himself in this state. She had become patient, encouraging; she didn't abandon him to fatal daydreams. She had affectionate words that lifted him up; in short, she was a friend, not just in words, but in good, true reality. Little by little, he stopped suffering acutely, and reached a kind of numbness that was not happiness, but at least allowed his mind to return, his imagination to speak, his body to breathe. He was like a man who has lost a loved one to death. Little by little, he recovered, and found sweetness where he had only found bitterness. Sophie had said many tender things to him earlier, but he had either taken them the wrong way or not appreciated them enough. On walks they'd taken together, s h e ' d b e e n affectionate, and he hadn't understood her enough. At least, that's how he saw the past from now on, and when he felt on the verge of falling back into his despair, he would go out, he would go, as if on a pilgrimage, to those various places where his memory of her was imprinted. He'd go there, and he'd be touched, and he'd understand better, and he'd be grateful, and moved, and stirred to the core of his being, he'd say to himself:

— No! the one who told me all this won't abandon me, and, as long as she supports me, I can hope that one day she'll welcome me; she'll want, she'll value a love like mine!

He regained his taste for existence and his sensitivity to the flavour it contains.

full. He loved music, which during his period of torture he had hated because it hurt him; he could open a book without feeling cruel pain when he read something of love in it, or complete disgust when that something wasn't there. At last, he began to become himself again, and to cease being that unfortunate man stricken by heaven with a sacred but horrible disease bordering on madness.

When Sophie saw the improvement in Conrad's soul, her first reaction was astonishment. She had despaired that this was possible, and found it hard to admit how love, love itself, could be strong enough to dominate and bend character, reduce native dispositions, tame passion. Then she felt real relief that her conversations with her lover were no longer overshadowed or inflamed by outbursts of perpetual pain. Having become calmer herself, and having enjoyed for some time a peace so unfamiliar to her and so sweet, she was curious to know if this state could last; she waited: it did. Then, in turn, she felt touched by the greatness of the effort and the beauty of the victory, and she said to herself:

— Poor Conrad! No, no! I'll never leave you!

And as she gave herself over to this feeling, a doubt suddenly entered her mind which would have been at least indifferent to her a few months ago, and which this time caused her the sensation closest to anxiety.

— Who knows? she thought. Perhaps in what charms me like a prodigy of love, there's only the beginning of indifference.

This idea saddened her, and she became preoccupied and worried.

— I wouldn't want him to stop loving me.

She became distracted, bored, gloomy in her turn, and one evening, which had not happened for a long time and which she had avoided with scrupulous care, she let herself go to bitter reflections; and as her lover answered her gently, she insisted, and, from word to word, became as hard, as haughty, as cold, drier, yes, meaner than she had ever been. She treated Conrad like an enemy; she tore him to shreds, and did him all the harm she could think of, and, as she held him down in her talons, she had complete satisfaction in her process! Alas, no! Poor woman, I

She had just ripped off every last bandage covering the still-bleeding wounds; she could see them; the wounds were raw and deep! As for Conrad, he was standing there in front of her, and she found again on his forehead that expression of atrocious despair she knew well enough and which had once outraged her. But it wasn't like that this time, she wasn't horrified, she wasn't outraged.

It was not pity she felt; and, as Conrad, at the end of his pranks, stood up and silently held out his hand to her, half turned towards the door, ready to re-enter the hell from which he had thought himself escaped, she stood up and, throwing herself into his arms, cried out to him:

— Don't be unhappy! No, never again! Come, I love you!

What entered Conrad's soul when he heard these words could only be described as bliss. Like Don Pedro de Luna, he was almost struck by lightning. Human nature is not strong enough to endure great contrasts without bending. Conrad could not suddenly climb out of the abyss of misery into which he had seen himself rolling again, and find himself raised to heights that his own resignation had not allowed him to even try to glimpse. But he was there! That day, he told himself, but he couldn't imagine it. It took him some time to enter into the fullness of his salvation. As for Sophie, she found herself transported into happiness. The rock of her heart had been broken; but, no, her heart had never been a rock, as she had come to believe. Only there was a shell of a rock; for the first time in her life, she took herself to task, and in the full awareness of a true, boundless devotion to the one who was to become her husband, she wrote this:

"My friend,

"When I told you, three months ago, that I'd be abandoning Conrad and would not be able to complete my final attempt, I was wrong, and you were even more wrong! I have a good heart and I love those who love me.

"SOPHIE."

She never knew the murderous effect of this heartfelt letter. Her steward informed her of M. de Candeuil's death without giving any details, and as having occurred as a result of illness. The Countess was distressed, however; she had much to do, and thought of her confidant's demise only with half-distraction. This is what you get when you give too much. Sophie instructed her business associates to seek out the natural heirs of M. de Candeuil, and these, belonging to a branch of the family different from that of Laudon, came into possession of their property without Louis having to worry about it.

When the news of Conrad's forthcoming marriage to Countess Tonska reached Burbach, one can imagine how such a grave tragedy of the heart was played out on the theater of imaginations in this capital city. The tragedy was not regarded as such by anyone except the Prince and Nore. Conrad had written to the latter and told him, under the still burning impression of

the existence he had just left behind, and his despair and fanaticism, and his heavy resignations, and finally the explosion of his joy. The Prince was touched by Conrad's happiness; on his part, there was little merit in being so. His tenderness for Aurora absorbed him, and his old feelings had no reality for him.

So he seemed to have barely known Sophie, when he said to Nore:

— I had misjudged Madame Tonska. What she does is very noble. She's always been sincere in a way, but I didn't think she was any good.

From the looks of it, she had a hard time becoming it; she did. I told her that the two of them would avenge me. They won't, and I'm delighted. From the bottom of my heart, I wish them all the happiness that generous natures can wish for. Tell them so, and that I am their friend.

As for Nore, since he didn't believe, from his own experience, that you could win anything without suffering, and knew on the contrary that the more you won, the more you had to pay, he was delighted to see Conrad at the end of his ordeal, and so it was that he discussed it with Harriet. Harriet certainly felt as he did. She had consoled Conrad for a while; she watched him from afar in his happiness with fraternal affection. But the sympathy of the Prince, Nore and Harriet was all that Conrad and his fiancée first gained in Burbach.

The court was outraged. The princess dropped a few precise words on all the kinds of scandal presented by such a union: forgetfulness of rank, forgetfulness of principles, forgetfulness of what the countess owed to herself by marrying an artist, and of what the artist was trampling underfoot by marrying a woman who might be suspected of some weakness, even if one wanted to admit with the best-informed people that it was unjust. The chamberlains, posed in their ties, smiled incredulously at this gesture of charity; the serious women put on a grave, mournful air. Professor Lanze wasn't happy either. He had long since expressed his opinion of nervous, romantic women; changing his way of seeing things was not in his nature, so at first he was rather unsatisfied.

The Countess, before marrying Conrad, had told him of her resolution. Her knowledge of the world and its judgments required no great expense of study to conceive it, and she was strong and noble enough to feel that no injustice was being done to her, even by slandering her.

— Conrad," she said to her lover when he became indignant, "I'm not an unblemished victim of hypocrisy or wickedness; I'm being punished, that's all; I've earned it, and you'll share my pain, and suffer with me. I braved the world, I was wrong; but in its eyes I have a more serious fault, which is to stop braving it; the world only respects and spares what continues. I

persuaded him that I was walking in one direction, and then suddenly I'm walking in another. He finds me weak and attacks me. I've caused him astonishment, and to tell you the truth, I've scandalized him. He replies: "Why aren't you astonishing me anymore? Why aren't you scandalizing me? I don't want to admit you to the life you're asking for; you have no right to it, having so far wanted another. Everything has to be paid for, Conrad, I'll pay for my past mistakes; they weren't what you'd think, but nonetheless I was outside the truth, outside reason. I'll pay, I'm ready to pay. It's not good to reconcile with oneself to pretend to defend that which has divided you.

The countess got her lover to live in seclusion, away from the crowd and looking after themselves, not only to give themselves better to their tenderness, but to make themselves as forgotten as possible. Sophie had sought brightness; she wanted to love obscurity all the more, so that the sum total of a woman's existence would, after a few years, be complete. Besides, she felt, she needed rest and almost sleep, so exhausted was she herself. After their marriage, the couple settled in a mountain fold near Lake Garda, where they lived for a long time, calm, hard-working and happy, with no one watching them except old and trusted friends who came to see them, and Liliane, who came every year with her husband and children to visit her sister-in-law.

At first she'd been a little afraid of him, but now she was firmly attached to him. She had been a charming girl, a charming woman, and Captain de Schorn was convinced to the depths of his soul of his companion's merits.

Liliane had had a painful time, and had shuddered a little when she'd admitted that Nore didn't love her. But she was at that point in life when these kinds of experiences don't really alter those who go through them. Her pride had been put on the line immediately. What she had taken for convulsions of her wounded heart were only spasms of her damaged imagination. A few days of tears, a few days of melancholy had exhausted her grief. Harriet had shown herself so compassionate and so aptly confident in her girlfriend's energy and generosity, that she had grown in her own esteem by making herself strong, though the strength she had to expend was really not much. For his part, Wilfrid had been so stubbornly unaware that he had been the object of any preference, and had shown himself so fraternal, so touched by Liliane's worth and perfections, and had made it so clear that he would never have thought himself worthy of the attention of such a girl, that the love she had had was embalmed in such exquisite aromatics, that after a while it was a pleasure to contemplate such a delicious dead man. A rose-shaded, perfumed tomb had been made for her.

of jasmines, enhanced and ennobled with beautiful epitaphs, and you couldn't help but be moved by such a monument to a young and fresh memory. Then the rosebushes grew, the jasmines became more and more dense and full of their fragrant white flowers, so that the tomb was only just visible, and little by little it faded and disappeared; Nothing remained but the perennials that had covered it, Harriet's friendship, Nore's affection, the feeling of having nobly behaved herself, and a great need to love for good, sharpened by this disappointment. As she looked around, she caught sight of the faithful Schorn, who had known nothing of all the weather changes and the spring thunderstorm that had raged for a moment. There he was, poor Schorn, a little sad to be mistreated, not knowing why, but waiting **a l l t h e** more patiently because he had had no suspicions and had conceived no jealousy. He had only thought that Liliane didn't love him yet, being too young, and that there was nothing to prevent her from loving him one day, since he himself was so attached to her. Schorn was not a hothead, but a solid, loyal character. He didn't ask for passion, and he waited for what people would give him to give back what they wanted from him, and which he wouldn't dispute. Without losing courage, he continued to go to the professor's house as often as he could; he stood patiently in his corner, spied on Liliane's every move, didn't get exasperated at indifference, was gently saddened by jibes, and finally touched the young girl who, quite naturally, one fine day said to herself, making a great discovery:

— After all, this one thinks of me? Why shouldn't I think of him? She took Harriet's advice, who smiled and kissed her back:

— But it's true, why wouldn't you think of it, Liliane, since you're already doing it?

— It's because my thoughts belonged to someone else," she replied, with an air of doubt that was far from conclusive.

Harriet struck her girlfriend's forehead with her finger, and continued:

— You love M. de Schorn, and, in truth, you've never loved anyone but him.

— Do you mean what you say?" replied Liliane.

— Yes, and you know it.

Liliane liked this positive statement so much, she couldn't have wished for anything better than to be convinced. From that moment on, she was, for it's especially at her age that we believe what we want, and that what we believe immediately becomes real.

Henceforth, she found herself so free, and so willing to stop being free, that the lover finally realized that his patience was about to bear fruit.

There was a country party where several young ladies and their friends, flanked by the necessary number of respectable relatives, went for a walk.

in the forest next to the Residence and sample the guard's house. It was a charming place. The little dwelling, similar to a thatched cottage of the Middle Ages, built of tree trunks where art figured rusticity, was as if smothered under clematis and dominated by a large red-brick chimney. Windows peeked out here and there through the foliage, all trimmed with small panes set in lead; on either side of the stoop stood tables and benches, and arbors above them scattered the fibrils and leaves of the Virginia creeper, chasing the amber blossoms of the hawthorn. A small clearing encircled the small manor; immense trees, beginning the thicket of woodland, rounded so high and so well, that they gave shade without stopping the sun's rays, gilding here and there house, flowers, lawn and the rest.

The merry company, after much wandering under the trees, contemplating at leisure the flight of the fallow deer and roe deer, which, as they approached, disbanded their troops and escaped into the distance, came to sit down at the tables. The dispositions of these gentlemen and ladies had turned to a rather notable exaltation. There had been a lot of talk about the knights of old and the heroines whose horse-drawn carriages had so often trod the grass of these parts. There had been talk of how we loved in those days.

Generally speaking, the girls had taken the view that nothing of the sort could be found nowadays, which the gentlemen had indignantly disputed. Once at the table, it so happened that the people who had least agreed on this interesting point had come closest together and were sitting next to each other. The fathers took care of their meal, the mothers made sure nothing was missing. Everything was going as well as could be expected.

Liliane and Schorn had quarreled so well that Schorn was eager to follow in his comrades' footsteps and take his place next to his adversary. But, as he didn't dare risk such a big blow, he hesitated, when Liliane, with an imperceptible nod of her head, a wave of her hand that was no less imperceptible, and a smile to delight the angels, proved to him that he could dare. So, when we were settled, everyone took what they wanted, ham, cakes, jams, Rhine or French wines, and we continued to discuss and reason and unreason, and the fathers lit their pipes and the mothers took their knitting, and Schorn (I swear by all the gods that this is perfectly true!), Schorn found Liliane's little hand beside him on the bench; he took it, he squeezed it, he held on to it for a while, and they let him.

We let him, heavenly powers! So what had happened? It's impossible to know what happened, but what followed is even more important. On that delightful spring evening, when we returned to the city, there was a

company of hearts that came to an agreement, and of these we know two; and, as in the evening darkness, already a little misty, and about to become night, and where the moonlight was casting pale gleams, we followed the path in distinct pairs, if anyone had been able to approach Liliane and hear what was said in her ear, we would have picked up phrases like these, phrases pronounced very low and in a voice muffled by the emotion of happiness:

— I'll talk to your parents tomorrow.

— If you like.

— Ah! if I want! Don't you love me?

— I love you forever!

— Forever! Forever!

The next day, Schorn's lieutenant appeared in his best attire before Professor Lanze's fearsome robe. He was also admitted in the presence of the doctor's cocked cap, and made his request, saying what he had to say according to all the forms and rites observed in such circumstances. Liliane, consulted, acquiesced by putting her charming hand in her lover's, proving in the most obvious way that she would not refuse to give it to him, and, a few minutes later, with inconceivable rapidity and far superior to that of lightning, all the girls in the residence, from the age of fifteen to thirty and beyond, all the women, all the ladies, including Princess Amélie-Auguste and Her Royal Highness, were repeating in the salons, in the streets and on the promenades:

— My God! Is it true? Liliane Lanze is engaged to Schorn's lieutenant!

This was the only conversation in town for eight days, and Liliane, once engaged, grew daily more confident and attached to Madame Nore, the more so as Schorn, whose opinion was the law for her, and whom she regarded as a judge without appeal, assured her at every opportunity that Wilfrid was one of the most distinguished and remarkable men she had ever been given to approach.

Here are two lives matched and saved. They won't be what you'd call brilliant. The Prince has just made Schorn a captain; he'll become a major and maybe a colonel, but by then he'll be an old man. He has no ambition and only wishes to live in peace. Liliane is passionate about her husband and children. She has everything she needs, and only one danger threatens such a delicate and lively nature: too much good and too much security. If she oversleeps, the Liliane we have come to know in these pages will gradually disappear beneath the housewife.

thickened, as fairies sometimes melt into the fog of the swamp. But, if she continues as she is now, full of devotion to those she loves, with a mind open to great things, able to admire and hate, the little wife of the obscure officer will remain a Pleiades, and we must hope it will be so.

CHAPTER FOUR

The idea of divorce, having once seized Jean-Théodore's mind, dominated it absolutely. It cast a shadow, a thick shadow, over every other thought. He couldn't think of anything else. Once again, he could think of nothing more natural, more legitimate, simpler, more inoffensive. Since the princess, his wife, cared nothing for him, a formal separation added little to the separation in fact, and did not even add to the already complete notoriety. He explained and detailed all these points to Aurore with the utmost meticulousness at every opportunity, and the opportunity he created every day. He protested endlessly about his firm desire to fill the repudiated wife with every advantage she could invent. She would miss nothing in the world, not herself, not her vanity, not any of her weaknesses. She would lose only what she didn't have and what she didn't want. Théodore returned again and again to this kind of conversation with Aurore, which he could not stop talking about, with a restlessness and vehemence that made the poor child very unhappy.

She tried to calm her friend; she never succeeded, and spent her life in tears; for him, these tears brought him to despair, but did not persuade him.

Things got even worse. Everyone agreed that the prince loved Aurore. Inductions, suppositions and dark speculations were soon rife, and malice was the order of the day. Throughout the court, there was nothing but running talk from one to the other, and this train of wickedness spilled over into the city. What was most damning for Countess Pamina was to be besieged by interested sympathizers, eager to seek her fortune; some zealots shamelessly proved her right in what she had not the slightest idea of, in what she would have been loathed to commit. Human baseness knows a thousand ways of exercising itself; all the masks it dons bear the semblance of virtue. While the majority of people found it pleasant and useful to parade their morality by allowing pure malignity to have a career, others, believing themselves to be more skilful, displayed the cult of Christian indulgence, or that of philosophical sentimentality, and assured us that sincere love must be forgiven everything. In an ecstasy of loyalty, they declared the sovereign above ordinary rules. This was the pure doctrine of the time of Louis XIV.

Theodore, equally unaffected by any of these agitations,

Aurore's assured, not seeking to abuse her affection, dreamed only of marriage. Every day, he came to his cousin's house, and she understood that he was entertaining a violent situation. She would tell him:

— Let's go three days without seeing each other, and then, after that, a bit more. Aren't you sure I think about you all the time?

— Yes, I am," he replied, bowing his head. When you're there in front of my eyes, I'm patient and, as you can see, I end up giving in to you, granting you everything, doing only what you want. As soon as I'm away from you, I lose my mind. Do you know what I do? I have my watch in my hand; I count the minutes that separate me from the moment when I'll see you again, when you'll be there, as you are there, in my eyes, when I'll be satisfied with your smile, alas! or your tears! Alone, that is, when I no longer have you, my life is suspended... I'm mad with expectation and sorrow. But you're right; I mustn't see you like this every day; I'm losing you; I won't come tomorrow, I promise, Aurore, I swear! And the next day he was back.

Isn't it strange that a man of his kind, who had loved so often, should be so restless, so ill, so possessed? Doesn't the heart wear out in some people? But then, it must be through the use of the same kind of love.

Theodore's attachment to his cousin was unlike anything he'd experienced before. One recalls that on the very day he was left by Countess Tonska, he was able, despite his anger and grief, to dominate himself to the point of working and reducing his passion to at least apparent obedience. Henceforth, this tour de force would have been impracticable for him; he didn't even think about it. Separated from Aurore, he was nothing but suffering; his head was lost; not a feeling, not an instinct in him that didn't turn towards her and remain fixed there; each of his pulsations beat the idolized name to the bottom of his chest.

There was no hiding such a state. However, Jean-Théodore was forced to fulfill the duties of his position. He did so with a somber resolve, a rigor, an unaccustomed stiffness; he had but one instinct; in every matter but one motive: to get rid of him as soon as possible and isolate himself in the intoxication that was killing him.

Every day, he wrote to Aurore as he was leaving her. He'd give them back to her when he got to her. They were dear to the poor girl's heart, but what harm they did to her! How carried away, how senseless, how frantic! How they made clear to her the full extent of the misfortunes of the man she loved so much. For her part, she also told herself that such a situation was untenable, that it couldn't go on, and she didn't know what to do about it. Yet, if she awaited Jean-Théodore with apprehension, she saw him with happiness; then,

the struggles that never failed to establish themselves between them, the final impotence of her consolations, the bitterest discouragement that seized her when he had left her, it was too heavy a burden.

— Why are you so unhappy, my darling?" said her lover. Am I not respecting your every wish? Do I ask more of you, even desire more than I should? Aren't you convinced of my blind devotion as much as my passion? And this devotion, the sacrifices you impose on me, oh my beloved, oh my Aurora, don't I make them dominate over and above my own love?

— You can't live like this! You can't love me like this! Or you'll leave me, and, suddenly cured of such a fatal illness, you'll hate me, and what will become of me? or, what do I know? you'll die! No, my beloved, that's not loving, what you're doing; you don't love like that! What should last doesn't have this violence and doesn't destroy everything around you!

However, neither the Prince nor Aurore could find the means or the strength to put an end to such a horrible state. The catastrophe happened without them.

One morning, Duke William entered his daughter's home.

— My child," he said to Aurore, "you know who I've loved in my life, and since your mother left me, you also know on whom I've focused all my tenderness; it's on you, on you alone, and you mean everything to me. I know, Aurore, that you are a noble, dignified and pure child, and it's only natural that I should see you as the object of attack in this entire world.

Aurore looked at her father, who shook her hand and buried her head in the old duke's chest.

— Well, don't cry, my girl. You must not grieve. But do you know what you must accept?

— No," said Aurore, whose heart was clenching and foresaw a great misfortune.

— Today you must accompany your father on a walk he wants to take you on. He won't leave you, he'll like you, and if you want to cry with him, you can, Aurore.

— Are you going to take me away from here?" she exclaimed.

— Yes, my poor child, I want to take you away from here, and I should have done it sooner. I don't intend to kill you with a pin. And if it's not for you that you obey me, let it be for me, Aurore, because every wound inflicted on you goes straight to the bottom of my heart.

The dear old soldier's expression was so poignant as he spoke these words that Aurore shuddered, and the affection she felt for her father countered.

swayed the revolt of her love for a moment.

— Come on, darling," continued the duke with affectionate firmness, "put on your hat. Everything's ready!

Everything's ready! Aurore shrieked and buried her face in her hands.

— No! No! I can't go like this! No, Father, I beg you!... Just think...

— And you, Aurore, my poor girl, remember not to say a word to me that you might regret tomorrow!

He kissed her several times, put his pelisse over her shoulders, picked her up, supported her half-fainting, and when she came to, the carriage was rolling fast. An abyss had opened up between the past and the future. Oh, then, everything she had experienced and felt in the last few weeks seemed like an existence in paradise! Her sufferings, her tortures had come to her beside the one she loved. It was for him, with him, next to him that she had cried; now she was alone! she would never see him again! What was she condemned to? To a nothingness full of threats and renunciations.

The old duke shook her hand and didn't say a word; but he looked at her constantly, and with such tenderness, that she threw herself around his neck and wept.

— How he loves me too! she thought. Who wouldn't have loved Aurore?

After five days' travel, they arrived in an agrarian land; forests, rugged fields, a murmuring lake and sea, stretching beneath the windows as far as the eye could see beyond a small archipelago of islets and rocks. Aurore learned that there were no towns or villages in the vicinity. The idea of this solitude did her good.

In fact, the home he would now call his own was as simple as possible: a chalet rather than a villa.

— This suits us fine," says the Duke. I've resigned my jobs to devote myself solely to you, and we're not rich. This is your room, Aurore, and here, in the window embrasure facing the sea, is your writing table and everything you need! Please send some souvenirs to your friends, we'll send them off tonight.

The duke left and closed the door. As soon as Aurore saw herself alone, she fell to her knees:

— Oh, my God!" she cried, clasping her hands together, "look after Theodore! Poor, poor Theodore! He doesn't see me, he doesn't speak to me, he doesn't wait for me! Oh, my God! He's lost me forever!

She sobbed bitterly at first; then, after a few minutes, rising to her feet, she wiped her eyes and wrote these words:

"My father took me away, dear Theodore. He suffers as much as I do, as much as we do. I don't know right now if he did the right thing; he thinks he did. The only thing I believe is that I'll always love you until the day I die. Don't for one minute let that truth slip from your mind. It will save him from everything. As long as a breath remains in my chest, I'll love you; don't be afraid, you'll love me too; I won't die, don't die! Let's keep each other! Let's love each other, Theodore, through everything, in spite of everything, tomorrow as today! Let's love each other, ah! Theodore! How unhappy you are and how I love you! Obey me always, absent as well as present; don't divorce me; do your duty in everything; write to me; love me!

" A... "

The next day, a new life began for Countess Pamina. The Duke had already been meditating for some time on the violent plan he had just put into effect; he had rented this house far from his nephew's estate and had had his collections and books transported there, along with the necessary furniture. Soon Aurore's belongings also arrived, and everything was put in place.

— We're only good bourgeois," said the duke with a smile, "we don't have much to spend. We'll have to sort it all out, my dear.

Aurore's character was so firm, so restrained, so far removed from caprice and weakness, despite her great gentleness, her native cheerfulness and her curiosity for life, that she did not shrink from any law of necessity. She immediately complied with her duties and fulfilled them. She remembered her early years in Dalmatia, when she had lived in a modest home, and had not developed any habits in her association with the Court that she could not easily break. She was so dominated by the feelings that filled her whole that she didn't care about the world around her. Only she had let herself dream a lot; and she had welcomed seduction with a kind of moral somnolence and detachment from all material things; she gave it up. She did so, certain, moreover, that she could experience nothing but good, both for herself and for others.

It was such an upright nature! A few days later, she stood up again, like those supple plants that are trampled for a moment by the heavy feet of flocks and herds, and then immediately straighten up and, though bruised, bloom again. She had no desire to succumb to the blow that had struck her. What would have become of Theodore? What would become of her father? She was not demanding when it came to happiness, and she resolved to be content with little, with nothing, if need be. As constant as she was in her affections, she was also limited in what she could do.

and if, instead of being attached to the fiery Theodore, she had been devoted to a calm, peaceful, kind and tender man, and who would not have asked her what Theodore wanted in order to be happy himself, she would not have wished for anything beyond that. Let's suppose for a moment that things had worked out this way in Burbach between the prince and her; no love, only a lively friendship: nothing of the sort would have happened. Moderate relations would have established security and duration; Aurore would never have been forced to leave; time would have passed gently over a harmless liaison; everyone would have been happy. But it was quite the opposite, and Aurore, sad, exiled, alone through Theodore's fault, by no means her own, nevertheless loved him with resolution and in an unshakeable way.

The first letter she received from her lover in reply to hers was, in truth, a sob. She understood it, as indeed there was nothing else to see in it, but the expression of a crushed pain that did not possess itself in any way. The second was no more reasonable; only, to her repeated entreaty not to think of divorce, Theodore replied that he was hers and would obey her; but, as could be seen from the rest of it, there was nothing left for him in the world. Aurore made another worrying observation: she didn't recognize her friend's handwriting. The lines were jumbled, the characters blurred together.

— He's certainly sick, she thought.

And after thinking it over, she wrote to Nore. He remained unanswered for several days, but every morning a letter arrived from Theodore, who never spoke of his health, only of his attachment and the eternity of his passion. After a while, the handwriting of the letters became more like what it had once been, and then Nore broke the silence and wrote to Aurore that the prince had been unwell, was now much better, and every day strengthened his convalescence. It was a sad time for Aurore, but perhaps less sad than it would have been for anyone else. She waited, and for each day she took the amount of sorrow that heaven sent her.

— I'll never be his in this world, she said to herself, but I'm so much his in eternity that I can live with that certainty.

Aurore regained a kind of tranquility that was indicative of her strength; not that tranquility resulting from distraction and easily regained by mediocre natures, but the calm of imperishable resolve. Theodore kept her busy; she didn't think about herself. She knew her friend was unhappy; the letters she received from him daily showed him sometimes in such exaltation, sometimes in such complete prostration, that she felt great sorrow for him. But she didn't think he'd give up on her, nor did she think he'd give up on her.

that she would give him up. This truly sublime soul had the trait of greatness in the highest degree; she didn't doubt, even when she didn't hope for an improvement on a disaster that would have made any other human creature fall into languor. She saw herself as Theodore's sister, his mother; and that, she told herself, nothing in the world could take away from me. I devote all my tenderness to him, and I'm so completely absorbed in him that I'll never feel any desire other than to carry on.

In the charming country where the duke and his daughter lived, a country where nature is so peaceful and melancholy, they both loved to walk the solitary paths of the woods. They would walk side by side, talking about man's eternal relationship with his surroundings, and enjoying its salutary influence. Aurore often thought, as she contemplated these trees that shivered with calm tenderness under the caresses of the breeze, these tall grasses inclined to the wind, these flowers open and raising their outstretched lips to the lover that the breath of air brought them, these ripe strawberries that puffed up the lawns, she thought:

— I, too, am a plant in love. I live and breathe for love.

Every thought I receive from him makes me happy! I will live on him and have nothing but him! I shall pass away like that which vegetates at this hour, grows, greens, blossoms and falls in autumn, but falls to grow again, to green again, to blossom again in the resurrection of spring. Why should Theodore and I die and live apart forever? No! I'm sure of it, my God, I'm quite sure of it, we'll die to reunite, and what separates us at this hour will disappear alone from between us! She didn't repeat these words of hope to herself with sickly exaltation; she murmured them to herself with persuaded quietude, and it was the foundation and support of her life.

Other times, she would sit on a rock, or on the white sand, on the shore, facing the immense sea. She would see the waves rise, follow each other, fade away by the hundreds, and the flakes of foam would form streaming manes for these turbulent horses. Gulls and seagulls circled over the waves, sometimes piercing through to the clouds, sometimes crumpling the crest of the waves with their wings. In the distance, ships passed by, their white sails billowing on the horizon, or their plumes of smoke wafting behind them. The celestial horizon embraced the vast stage.

— How it all lives! And so do I," thought Aurore, "and I'll go through life like all that, without changing a bit. These gulls, these greedy, shrieking seagulls, seek their prey in the waves, take it or miss it; aren't these a thousand desires that, in the end, in no way disturb the necessary serenity of inevitable laws?

Much of her time was spent writing to Theodore. She never tired of showering him with words of tenderness and encouragement.

Wilfrid sometimes came to the cottage and spent several days there. His arrival was a big deal. At other times, Laudon would appear. One or the other was equally welcome to the duke, and for as long as they remained his guests, they threw into the house a liveliness and movement that continued even after their departure. The prince had never failed to give them infinite recommendations concerning Aurore. They were to tell him, down to the smallest detail, how she looked, what she did and everything she said. Aurore was the same, with less enthusiasm and a restraint that prevented her from asking too many questions; but her friends knew what she was thinking, and were eager to teach her what she could know, as they would often have feared to afflict her without any need. These journeys of Nore and Laudon easily came to occupy an enormous place in the existence of the two lovers. This was gradually a relief for Theodore; but, as his imagination could not stop at compensations, in reality so imperfect, he conceived a project which he communicated to Aurore, begging her to approve it. He wanted to make a trip to a nearby capital; to disguise himself, to hide, and to come and spend two hours with her, in some retreat of those woods where she so enjoyed herself, and which Nore and Laudon had described to him with an enthusiasm that made his desire to see her even more poignant.

Aurore felt a strong temptation this time. It took all her courage to resist. She wrote to Theodore to come, then, just as she was about to send the letter, she stopped, hesitated for two days, and finally, her reason prevailing, she tore up what she had written, and begged her lover to give up a project that could only make them both more unhappy.

CHAPTER FIVE

There was no point in concealing it; on learning of Aurore's departure, Theodore had received a blow that had overwhelmed him. Already exhausted by the suffering of earlier times, he had succumbed and fallen gravely ill. Suffering violent cerebral pains, we had despaired of saving him for a fortnight, and even when Professor Lanze's science and affection, helped by the patient's vigor, gave us hope that he would live, Lanze, with a secret dread, had wondered whether it would be possible to keep him sane. Little by little, these terrible fears had disappeared; the prince had returned to health, but weakened, deeply affected, and in a state of melancholy that did not seem likely to dissipate any time soon. The professor, Nore and Laudon feared that some unforeseen incident, linked to the fatal love that had brought their friend so close to his end, would compromise everything; they feared it all the more because, with singular obstinacy, Jean-Théodore's thoughts, riveted to his passion, contemplated nothing but this point of view. The physical disaster he had just escaped had made him even more indifferent to anything that was not united to the idea of Aurore. In such cases, either the heart heals, changes, passes to another atmosphere, or it sinks further and without remedy this time into that which is leading it to its doom. The precipice is crossed, but the man has kept his fetters; he is caught more than ever and for ever. Until then, Jean-Théodore, violent, vivacious, precise, domineering, believing in facts and clearly reasoned opinions, had become the most superstitious of all men, the most devoted to the calculations and puerile hypotheses that all fanaticism cherishes.

Not having what he wanted, he paid no heed to the present, and lived only in a future that he was determined to seize at all costs by determining it as he saw fit. He would open the Bible ten times a day, and in a particular verse, placed in a certain way, he would announce to himself the things to come. When he encountered a favorable meaning, he hardly calmed down; a hostile meaning, he suffered immeasurably; an inexplicable meaning, he tortured. With Virgil's verses, he sought the same mysteries. If I meet such and such people," he said to himself, "so many soldiers, so many women, a man carrying a burden, horses in such numbers, it will be a sign that it's mine... Here, too, the lack of success drove him out of his mind, and necessity did nothing to calm him. He had to start all over again. He spent hours examining maps of the country where Aurore lived. He had drawings and paintings. He had asked her for a

He knew by heart every station on the road Aurore had followed, and when he picked up a book, after a few moments, his attention would turn from the content: he'd formulate the name of the place he was going to visit. He knew every station on the route Aurore had taken by heart; and when he picked up a book, after a few moments, his attention would be detached from the content: he would form Aurore's name with the syllables of the various words, then with letters, and spend hours in this occupation which hurt him, but nevertheless relieved, for a few moments, his grief. This is what had become of this haughty prince, this imperious organization.

One day he said to Nore and Laudon:

- It is a proud doctrine, worthy of a brave man, to proclaim the power to develop oneself in the direction of one's own qualities, by suppressing, or at least appreciably attenuating, one's faults. I have professed it, I still do, and I hold it to be indisputable that, in the ordinary play of moral faculties, we always remain masters of doing much of ourselves. However, I have forgotten one point. Until now, I hadn't seen it, and on this occasion I recognize the wisdom of the ancients. They knew how to get to the bottom of things. You're not great, you don't become great, no matter how hard you try, when you're not happy. Being happy is a virtue, and one of the most powerful, and Cornelius Sylla was absolutely right and spoke like a master when, boasting of being happy as much as prudent, sagacious and bold, he inscribed among his titles this qualification: "Felix." Happiness gives **t h e** soul balance; this energy is lacking where it doesn't exist. It fills the most gaping, the most appalling of all abysses, and adds to power that vital flavor which alone drives man to action. In the absence of happiness, worry and doubt cling to their slaves, robbing them, along with their strength, of the very desire to grow.

By speaking in this way, he justified in advance a project so completely resolved, that he found it necessary not to speak to anyone about it, and not to consult Aurore, certain as he was of her opposition. He considered himself free to do so, and didn't think she'd have anything to say against his decision.

Princess Amélie-Auguste had just been married. She had married an agnate from a sovereign house, and the august couple, after a honeymoon that had brought them tributes from all the surrounding courts, had been back in the Residence for six months. Prince Ulric was a cold young man of merit, well-versed in military studies, with a tinge of religiosity that made him agreeable to his wife, and a pronounced taste for etiquette that had won him, on the part of the reigning princess, as much sympathy as she had for him.

could give. Moreover, since the rumors that had spread about Aurore, and especially since her marriage, Princess Amélie-Auguste had distanced herself considerably from her father, the reigning princess had taken great account of her, and a real bond of intimacy had formed between these two virtuous people.

Jean-Théodore took no notice. He had become indifferent to everything, with a gentleness and moderation that astonished those around him. It was hard to understand why this master, once a little jealous of his authority, had taken it upon himself to instruct Prince Ulric in the main conditions of the country's administration, and had relieved himself of the care of military affairs, put him in the places left vacant by Duke William's resignation, and what was perhaps even more astonishing, had himself represented by him in the ceremony for the opening of the Diet. We were lost in conjecture and malicious comment, when one morning the prince had the aides-de-camp and the chamberlain on duty warn the various members of the sovereign family to report to his person.

The solemnity of this invitation caused quite a stir. Jean-Théodore had never done anything like it. His agents, questioned earnestly, could not help saying that Her Royal Highness seemed preoccupied; but as she had long had a worried countenance, there was nothing to conclude from this; In short, at the appointed hour, the Princess Regnant, Princess Amélie-Auguste, Prince Ulric and Prince Maurice entered the large cabinet, where Jean-Théodore was waiting for them, seated before a small table laden with papers, with the State Councillor in charge of the Justice Department, Baron Muller, beside him.

When everyone had taken their place according to their rank, the prince, in a clear, soft voice, spoke as follows:

— As members of my family, you have the right to be the first to know my wishes. I have not made it known to anyone, not even to this Baron. He is attending this meeting to learn for himself, and to read to you, the contents of the wording I will be handing him shortly. Political circumstances on the one hand, the state of my health on the other, and more than anything else my desire to live in retirement from now on, have dictated my firm resolution to abdicate the crown. I can do so without any inconvenience to the country. The hereditary princess is united to a husband worthy of her, whose talents and merits are well known to me. I have noted with satisfaction the esteem he has already earned among the considerable men who approach him, and the affection with which my people surround him. I have no need, of course, to recommend the present reigning princess to the respect of her daughter.

I'm sure that, on this point as on others, and in particular on Her Royal Highness's. Moreover, before relinquishing my authority, I fixed the dower and honors of my august wife, and I have no doubt that, on this point as on others, and in particular with regard to Princes Ernest and Maurice, my wishes will be scrupulously respected. I now ask the Councillor of State to kindly read out the act of abdication I have prepared, which I shall shortly place before the Council of Ministers.

Astonishment ran deep in the assembly. The reigning princess was overjoyed. She was hardly capable of analyzing her feelings, but we can do it for her. She guessed that Jean-Théodore would be leaving, and that she would become completely independent and free to follow her own tastes, with the advantage of being more of a victim than ever before. Then she felt a sensation of contempt for the man she dreaded, and it felt good. In this inner conflict, she couldn't think of anything else to say:

— Ah, my God, who could have foreseen this!

And she wiped her eyes without really knowing what she was doing.

Princess Amélie-Auguste was delighted to see herself sovereign; Prince Ulric, at least as much so; but he felt the need to say a few sentences; he lined them up well and insisted in suitable terms, begging his father-in-law to abandon a project so distressing for a family so united and so devoted to its leader. Jean-Théodore replied in the same tone.

Prince Maurice, delighted to see himself out of guardianship, murmured:

— Thank you so much for what you do for me.

State Councillor Baron Muller, foreseeing that the new reign could do no less for him than confer a great cordon, dwelt on the loss the country was about to suffer, and assured Princess Amélie-Auguste and her husband of his absolute devotion. The ceremony was not extremely long, and the Prince gave the order to introduce the Council of Ministers.

Here the same speeches began again; Jean-Théodore was begged to reconsider his resolution, and, as he was found determined to carry it out, no other thought was entertained than to please the new masters. During the day, the great news spread through the city, and in the evening large groups formed in front of the palace. The newspapers were unanimous in regretting an event which deprived the country of a leader whose good will had always been recognized, so that Jean-Théodore found himself, as is usual on such occasions, much more popular than he had ever been. However, two independent newspapers declared that there was a murky plot behind all this, and that the prince was only abdicating to please a large and influential party.

power, and was compensated with considerable sums of money. As these revelations circulated mainly among the lower classes, it is likely that they served to educate them and hasten their moral improvement.

In the salons, there was general agreement that Jean-Théodore had taken such a clear-cut decision only to go and live with Countess Pamina, and when it became known that he was leaving, the conclusion was that he was running to fetch her. A witty man wrote a four-line epigram on the subject, which was found piquant.

However

Jean-Théodore, under the name of Comte de Wœrbeck, did indeed leave, but in a direction diametrically opposed to that of the places inhabited by his uncle and cousin, and it soon became known that he was in Palermo.

Nore and Laudon had insisted on accompanying him. He refused, and sent them both to Aurore to report on what was happening. He himself explained to his friend in his letters that he could no longer honestly take on the responsibility of leading the others. He only wanted to take Professor Lanze with him, and even then on condition that the latter would leave him as soon as he wished, and would not interfere with his way of life.

Once in Palermo, the Count took up residence at the inn and began to lead a life he had probably prepared for himself. He never went out; he saw nothing, he received no one; he spoke very little. All day long, he wandered up and down his room; in the evening, he wrote to Aurore. These letters were masterpieces of artifice. He often repeated them up to three times. They were perfectly calm, with not a trace of vehemence to be seen. They were to be taken as the productions of a slightly sorrowful, but disinterested and dispassionate mind. It was in meditating on a thought expressed by Aurore, a prayer she had addressed to him, that Theodore had decided to reduce himself to expressions so out of tune with his present state.

"Don't tell me so much that you love me," wrote the woman who meant everything to him, "don't I know it? I only need to look at myself to feel it. I know that you love me and that you'll never stop doing so. It's less for me than for you if you repeat it like that; but you're exalting yourself, you're hurting yourself. I implore you; friend of my heart, don't do it!"

Apart from the somewhat laborious work of this correspondence, he had no other activities.

The teacher soon said:

— Do you know what you're doing?

— Well then, what do I do?

— You kill yourself.

— Do you really believe, Lanze, that such a result can be achieved by peaceful means alone?

— I'll let you be the judge. You've seen a thousand times on the seashore huge rocks, of imposing mass, of massive build, rocks of granite or basalt washed by the debilitating waves. You've seen them, despite their size, pierced in a thousand places, perforated, mined, threatening to topple over, and, have no doubt, one day they will fall, they will be reduced to sand, they will be annihilated, and how do you expect that the persistent flow of unhealthy thoughts, to which you prey, won't end up bringing about the same result for you? You may resist for a while, because your constitution is robust, but in the long run you'll succumb.

— Do you really believe that?

— I'm sure of it.

— In that case, thank you, I'll think about it.

It seems he thought about it so well that the fever took hold. He got into the habit of no longer walking, and of lying on a sofa in almost absolute darkness for most of the day. Lanze made a violent scene:

— You're destroying yourself to your heart's content! The prince smiled and replied:

— Dear Professor, you know what I told you when I allowed you to follow me, and you also know what you've committed yourself to. It's ten o'clock, time to go to bed. Say good night, farewell, and tomorrow go back to Burbach where you have your business and your family.

Poor Lanze fell into noisy pain. He begged Theodore, clasped his hands, and fell to his knees. Theodore, who was no longer angry or impatient, replied with obstinate indulgence, assuring him that he was mistaken, that he himself was feeling better, that he was sure of recovery, but that he wanted to be alone. It was a heartbreaking parting for the professor.

— I know it," he said, sobbing, "I know it! I'll never see you again! Is it possible that you've made such a resolution? But one shoots oneself with a pistol, one stabs oneself, one puts an end to it immediately, if one absolutely wants to put an end to it; one is not one's own executioner in such a cruel way! I know what you're up to, I can clearly see your aim!

The prince embraced his old friend.

— Farewell," he told her; "don't confide in anyone your opinion of the state of my health, for I assure you you exaggerate. You love me too much to be true to me.

doctor. We'll meet again in a few months, and you'll be pleased with my good looks.

When he found himself alone, Jean-Théodore was relieved. He no longer owed anything to anyone, and no one had the right to ask anything of him. Aurore? She had chosen. She had set herself apart. She gave back to the world what the world demanded. With duty done in lieu of everything else, she had no further claim to anything. She would be faithful to the memory of her destroyed love, as she could be to this desperate lover, suffering all martyrdoms; well! the joy of this sacrifice, the sweetness of regret, the happy awareness of self-denial, was more than enough to console her for the fact that eternal absence had taken the place of unlimited absence. Farewell, Aurore! She was in the ideal sphere of angelic natures, conversing with renunciation and virtue. She could stay there and enjoy herself. As for him, surrounded by emptiness, powerless to grasp anything worth existing for, finding himself, feeling himself - a shining truth! alone, quite alone forever in the world, he was free, he judged himself as such, and we know what he wanted to do.

What the Roman of Utica had inflicted on himself in resentment of lost freedom, he imposed on himself in resentment of chained love. But he didn't want to materially rip his insides apart; he didn't want to use a piece of iron to search his chest to draw out breath through shreds of throbbing flesh, and streams of blood, the divine stream of existence which, brutally disturbed in its course, then comes to be soiled by the profane contact it was never to know. He was dying because he was suffering too much to go on, and it was from the very hand of suffering that he accepted the mortal blow. He accepted it, he desired it. He asked for no mercy. He was happy not to receive it. He didn't kill himself, he let himself fall, without resisting the vertigo by which he was dragged.

One evening, around midnight, his situation became perfectly clear to him. He was on his bed. Gentle darkness enveloped him, a profound silence poured calm over his senses, and it seemed to him that his soul, warned of his imminent departure, was rekindling its brighter flame and suddenly illuminating the interior of his being. At the same time, a physical improvement was felt in his limbs; the oppression that had been choking him for weeks loosened its grip; his throat dilated; the blood seemed to flow back and stop crushing his chest; his heart no longer ached. He breathed, and once again saw clearly within himself, as if despair, before taking him away, had granted him one last moment of complete consciousness to collect himself, judge himself and say an eternal farewell to everything.

Tomorrow, no doubt, in a moment perhaps," he thought, "one of those clearly defined illnesses that have a name will have taken my body from the hands of pain, and any number of days will bring everything to an end. I'm at the point where moral evil, after creating disorder in the organs and pricking them like fruit pierced by the worm, is finally going to hold them under its empire.

He allowed himself to become increasingly convinced of his impending end, and what he hadn't yet realized, for until then he had reasoned nothing, was that, in the instinct he had and the consolation he felt, this end was none other than the most complete and absolute of annihilations. This nature, so resolutely idealistic until then, had somehow been detached by the grief of what might have been called the rock of faith. He had lived in the certainty of immortality; all his opinions, all his pride had taken their birth and their constant nourishment from this doctrine, and now, without wishing it or realizing it, he was denying it, and, if he wanted death so well, it was because he considered it to provide him with the supreme good of no longer feeling anything, of no longer being, no! of no longer being anything! All vitality was abhorrent to him, because he couldn't conceive of it as anything other than coming from love and returning to it. What he needed was to dissolve and disappear in the most absolute sense of the word.

A contradiction so blatant with his conviction of all time came before his mind at that supreme moment. It frightened him. It caused him a kind of horror, the shock of which was felt above all by his pride. Theodore had never considered himself an ephemeral accident among the forms of creation.

He had never doubted that he was gifted with the power to save, through all the metamorphoses of matter, the torch of his conscience. He cast an astonished, scandalized, indignant glance at himself, at his evil, at what he was doing, at what he wanted to undergo.

— There, where I so willingly descend, I am mistaken, I will live! And the pain that pushes me and walks with me, it knows well, the cruel one, that it will lose nothing of its captive! Only I'll be further away from Aurore... I'm separating from her even more... I'm becoming even more of a stranger to her, because the shadows of those who live in the other empire are not accustomed to wandering into this one. Am I right? Am I wise? Is this the right thing to do? Do I have the right? I'm willing to be weak, I am: but what's the point?

And when I'm dead, lying in this bed where I am at this hour, but then without movement, when I'm a dead man, I said, yes, a dead man, a corpse, and my soul still alive, exiled further away, even more unhappy, will begin eternal moans and we'll go crying to Aurore: He whom

you love is no longer there! What will she say? What will she feel? The ice of anger melts around my heart. I was wrong to think that your virtue would take the place of everything. My beloved Aurora, who pierced you with this wound and hurt you so badly? Why are you so pale? Because your friend, no, your most implacable enemy, the one whom your adorable ghost, in tears, as he appears to me at this moment, will not have been able to soften, will have made a point of trying to escape the grief he leaves you, and will have thrown all the weight of it, increased on his part, onto the fidelity of your tenderness! That's how I would have loved Aurore!

But I didn't believe in the impossible, and I wanted to stand my ground in the face of the monster; yet it's my cowardice in the face of the impossible that turns me towards a false nothingness. I say to myself: the impossible surrounds me, it controls me, I'll never make it bend! Then I bend myself, and fall at its feet! Why? Have I no more weapons against him? have I no more constancy? have I no more patience? can't I hold on for a few more days, a few more weeks? a few months? On my honor! Can't I hold out a few more years? I admit defeat, I overthrow myself, I strike myself, I abandon you, Aurore; all that loves me, yes, all that loves me in the world will cry out: that it was debilitated, inconsistent, impotent; and beyond the barriers of this present world, I will wake up just now, alive, deceived in my foolish hope, ashamed, alone and more miserable than ever, because I will not have known how to wait! No! by my immortal soul, I won't kill myself! I don't want to die!

It was a sudden resolution, but violent and complete. Weak as he was, his sick head filled with dazzles, Theodore left his bed; staggering, he walked to a window and gazed up at the vast sky, the armies of stars and the resounding sea, those most perfect images of the majesty of life. What imposing and salutary advice he received from these giants! He listened. He softly whispered the name Aurora, and it seemed as if the infinite answered him. A kind of calm descended like dew, numbing for a while the poignant suffering of his being.

The next day, he wrote to Lanze to return and bring Nore and Laudon with him. He was very inclined to submit now; however, he also felt that he couldn't fight solitude, and he needed support. There he was, barely alive, now seeking to fight valiantly with himself, and, as if destiny had only been waiting for him to make the resolution he had just vowed to and firmly accept the fight, everything changed for him.

His valet entered and handed him a telegram.

He took the paper, opened it and read:

"Burbach, 7 o'clock in the evening.

"This morning at ten o'clock, the Princess Mother was struck by a stroke; she died at six.

"ULRIC."

Jean-Théodore was galvanized. He got up, dressed and went out. Three days later, Dr Lanze was back with Wilfrid and Laudon. It was some time before Theodore was able to recover. It's quicker to bring on suffering than to drive it out. At last, as the patient lent himself to his recovery as willingly as he had brought about his demise, his friends succeeded in getting him fit to travel, and one unforgettable evening he arrived at the cottage door.

— I've come to ask for Aurore," he said to his uncle, kissing him.

— Here I am," she replied.

— My God! how beautiful everything is here! cried the lover at every step he took, in these places animated by the woman who was his universe; the inner light of his soul, brilliant and limpid, sowed the sparkle of diamonds everywhere. What bliss began for this man who had paid for it with so much pain! who had sought it all his life, who had found it so late and who savored it so well! Yet it could not be said that he was happier than Aurore. He was happier than she was; he deserved to be happier than she deserved; he had certainly suffered more than she had; but he was not happy.

wasn't there something sublime about the absolute, unclouded trust they had in each other, without hesitation of any kind?

And Aurore, seemingly more tranquil, what would she have done if Théodore had died in grief? Aurore, that charming girl, so smiling, so bright, so well made for the pure joys of life, would have sat resignedly by the side of the funereal memory and, wrapped in the black veils of her passion, would have vanished into the eternal clouds. She had the reward, like him, of the greatness of his soul, and when, leaning on each other, they looked into each other's eyes, if Théodore had more flame in them, Aurore had no less tenderness.

Time passed like magic, and four years had already passed since the sinister days in Palermo. One summer evening, Aurore and her husband were sitting on their doorstep, the sea calm and smiling before them. All was peaceful! Theodore dropped the book he was holding in his hand and gazed at a child playing in the grass a stone's throw away. Aurore followed his gaze and no doubt understood the nature of his thoughts, for she smiled.

Then Theodore bent down, drew the child to him, lifted him into the air and looked at him.

with an exaltation reminiscent of the Theodore of yesteryear, and suddenly exclaimed:

— Go, Renaud, kiss your mother, she doesn't love you!

Aurore took Renaud in her arms and showered him with kisses.

END.

BERSERKER

BOOKS

