BROKEN MUSIC

BY

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“*Broken Music*”

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By Phyllis Bottome, *Author of “The Imperfect Gift,” “Crooked Answers,” “The Common Chord,” etc.*

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DEDICATION

"*To the Memory of the Siegfried Idyll*"

PREFACE BY THE AUTHOR.

THE material for the French life in this book I owe entirely to a friend, without whose knowledge and assistance it would not have been written, but whose name I am not at liberty to disclose.

The faults of the work are my own, but the merit, if there is any merit, is his; if there is not, the misfortune is his as well as the public's, since an abler hand should have made something of the material he placed at my disposal.

The actual characters are not, as children say of fairy tales, "true"; but many of them belong to that system of parallel cases which runs side by side with the truth.

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“BROKEN MUSIC”

CHAPTER I

"SO she's sent for you too, has she?" said the doctor. Of course he knew that Miss Prenderghast must have sent for Monsieur le Curé as she had sent for the doctor himself, for neither of them would have gone to the Castle uninvited. They would have cheerfully borne with many things for the sake of Jean D'Ucelles, but they would not have gone uninvited to see his aunt, especially not for *déjeuner*.

The Curé hesitated; if he could have made a mystery out of his invitation he would have done so; he loved mysteries quite as much as the doctor loved probing them, but he was not quite such an adept at inventing them—he preferred those which had been already invented for him.

"She intimated that she desired to see me," he cautiously replied. "I could have refused, but she is, as we all know, alas! a Protestant, and as such her soul is in hourly peril. I said to myself: 'Perhaps this is an awakening to the truth.' It's true I should have preferred to go up to the Castle after *déjeuner*. It is a strange thing—I have often remarked it—that Protestants enjoy neither the fruits of the spirit nor the fruits of the earth. It was not so always at the Château. I can remember well enough in the late Baron's time what a table she kept—the poor young English wife—even in his absence. She was not born a Catholic, it is true; but she became one. She spared no expense, and she had a great respect for the clergy. She was always telling me to take care of myself. She had a cook trained in Paris."

“Perhaps she was able to train her cook,” said the doctor. “The more pity she couldn’t train her husband—the poor Baron, he was always a wild one. I had hoped the marriage would steady him, but it never did! How well I remember his saying to me: ‘You believe in nature, then, Monsieur; so do I. She has made the plants to keep still, but men she has made to move about—do not trouble yourself, then, that I fulfil my destiny!’ He was going to Paris, of course; he always was. I remember it was before Monsieur Jean’s birth. I had ventured to implore him to remain. I knew it was a liberty, but what would you? The Baronne was in a very delicate condition. I feared that she had anxieties, there was much talk about the Baron’s long absences—always without her, you understand, but not always, I fear, without others—and I had much sympathy with the poor lady, alone, and in a strange land. She was very young, too, and neurotic; she wanted to die.” The doctor blew his nose.

“That was a sin,” said the Curé severely. “I can hardly believe that of Madame; she never mentioned the fact to me. I think you must be exaggerating.”

“Bah!” snapped Dr. Bonnet. “I am not a priest. I have some experience of women; she was in love with her husband. English women are droll; it is a great mistake, I find, this love of the husband—it leads nowhere. However, it is not so easy to die when one is twenty-five and has a man of science against one, and then when Monsieur Jean was born it was all another story! The Baron sent a telegram in the best of taste, and came down later with the Comte and Comtesse D’Ucelles to the christening.”

The Curé nodded.

“It was a magnificent christening,” he said. “I myself officiated. There was talk of the Bishop of the Diocese, but Madame was firm; she said I should be the one to make her son a Christian, as I had made his mother Catholic. Yes, yes, doubtless she is with the Blessed Saints—the little English lady—and I hope the Baron too, though of that we cannot be quite so sure.”

Monsieur le Curé made the sign of the cross and looked very grave. There was every reason why he should, for the Baron D’Ucelles had shot himself through the head five years ago—two years after his wife’s death. It was natural that he should regret her. She had spent six months in giving him what he wanted, and thirteen years in not giving him what he didn’t want. She would have made an ideal wife for any man. Still it was not altogether on her account that he had followed her to the grave. The late Baron had been a little extravagant both with his money and with his life, and when he had at length discovered that he would shortly become a helpless paralytic on a very small income, he had decided to take the only means left him to avoid these issues. He had left behind him only Ucelles itself and two small farms, which was all that could be saved for his son out of his once handsome inheritance. His family said that this was what came of having married an English woman without a *dot*.

“There is one thing,” said the Curé, after a pause, “that I have never quite understood, and this is why Monsieur Jean should have been brought up by this English relation?”

The doctor shrugged his shoulders.

“I too have wondered,” he said. “But what will you? The Comte, his guardian, married a rich wife of the *bourgeoisie*, and they have a large house in Paris and a big income; they have no children of their own. What more likely, it would seem, than that they should adopt Monsieur Jean? In this world, so I take it, what is likely does not happen. Instead, one fine day this English aunt arrives, who knows nothing of our tongue or of our ways, and nothing—it would seem—of children, it is to her, then, that they entrust our little Baron. For myself, I am a philosopher, I have no theories—all I believe is that in the long run nature has her way, and her way is, perhaps, the best; at any rate it is the only one I know.”

“I have always endeavoured to guard him against her errors,” said the Curé; and indeed he had done his best. He had baptized Jean, he had taught him his catechism, and prepared him for confirmation and for his first communion; he had also taught him a little Latin, a great deal of theology, and what he thought was literature. He really believed that Jean thought so too, but then he had watched Jean so carefully and incessantly for twenty years that he knew nothing about him at all. The doctor, who had not seen nearly so much of Jean, understood him a great deal better. He had kept a fresher eye for change.

Both men were silent after this. Little St. Jouin lay in the broiling sun behind them, a small, huddled town in the ancient stubble-fields of the plain. The broad white road, through which life flashed by in swift, infrequent modern traffic, divided it from a fashionable watering-place on the one side and from a commercial seaport on the other. But nobody ever stopped at St. Jouin, there was no reason why

they should; it had nothing rare enough about it to ensure its ruin and there was no one to realize that in being so near modernity it had altogether escaped it. Certainly the two figures that plodded along the broad white road had no such fancies; they had no fancies at all. They had lived in St. Jouin nearly all their lives. Monsieur le Curé in particular, with his high, narrow head and irritable, unseeing eyes (the kind of eyes that are always glancing about, driven by a suspicion that there is something wrong to be observed, and overlooking everything else), was not likely to approve of fancies. Why should he? his religion was sufficient for him. He was the most important person in St. Jouin; there was no unbelief there (in spite of the newspapers) and very little faith. Everybody went to church, so that their lives were always under the Curé's eyes; only their souls escaped him.

The doctor had his ideas, of course, but he was terribly scientific; he had spent a year in Paris thirty years ago, and he took in a Radical newspaper. He thought he was a red-hot Socialist and a cynic, but he was really a very kind-hearted man and treated all his poorest patients free of charge, only he was a little impatient about what he did not understand. He was quite sure that what did not appeal to him personally was either old-fashioned or new-fangled, and when he talked about progress, he meant his own ideas.

The great bell at the Château rang out the hour of noon; it seemed to shake the hot air round them and to keep the silence listening to its deep reverberations. The Curé stopped, crossed himself, and repeated his *Ave* with bowed head. The doctor, who was a stout man, was glad of the pause, but lest his friend should suppose that he was putting

it to a religious purpose, he whistled—at least he tried to; but he was too much out of breath to make a success of it.

Through the opening in the trees beyond them Ucelles itself appeared. It was a long, low house, with a steep, grey roof, in which tiny round windows were thickly set. At a distance it still looked, what it had once been, the chief mansion in the district—the Château of Ucelles. The garden had been allowed to run to seed, but the long avenue of limes approaching the house made stout sentinels for its dignity.

In a small wood of fir and plane trees, close to the house, stood the family chapel; the sun shone through the leaves above it, and the priest and the doctor caught a glimpse through the open *grille* of a tiny altar covered with fresh flowers. In front of the house stretched an uncultivated meadow, but in the centre a square was trimmed with neat little box hedges, and in the middle of the square was a small pond covered deep with water-lilies. Around it late roses and early chrysanthemums mingled their blooms together.

"He has always kept his mother's garden gay," said the Curé approvingly; "and the flowers in the chapel there are fresh. I prefer myself the artificial ones, but we must be indulgent to youth; the Church has always recognized that."

The doctor frowned. The Curé had never revealed to him what his ambition for Jean was, but the doctor had long ago guessed it. You cannot know a man for thirty years and be entirely ignorant of his favourite idea, especially when he has not got more than one. The Curé wished Jean to become a priest, and the doctor hated the idea with all his heart. He was a Socialist, you must remember, a Radical and a cynic, so of course he wanted Jean to become a grand seigneur—a

man of the world, and at the same time noted for his domestic happiness, with a large family of sons.

As for Jean himself, he wanted to become a musician, but nobody minded very much what Jean wanted.

“It has occurred to me,” said the Curé, after he had finished saying his *Ave*, “that we have been sent for—of course, you must understand that I have no authority for my idea; I am merely expressing what has passed through my mind—that we may be asked to consult with Mademoiselle Prenderghast on the subject of Monsieur Jean’s future.” The Curé coughed.

“There’s his uncle,” growled the doctor. “He ought to settle the question.”

“I think the boy’s taste should be considered,” suggested the Curé. He thought that he had formed Jean’s taste, and that he might safely leave it to settle matters his way.

“I wish he could have done his military service,” said the doctor. “If I had been the fool at the Maire de Valbranche I would have passed him; he is delicate, but it’s only raw, untrained nerves and morbid religious fancies. The old adhesion in the left lung they thought themselves so clever in spotting, why, it’s nothing—nothing at all, I tell you; just the result of that English spinster’s notion of how to treat a delicate child with measles. But there! modern science only goes by what’s at the end of a stethoscope, or a microscope, or a misanthrope,” said the doctor. He was not quite sure what a misanthrope was; however, it sounded all right, and, after all, the Curé wouldn’t know any better. “It doesn’t allow for life forces.”

“I have often told you that,” said the Curé complacently; “only I expressed it better. Science has tried to lead faith when she should have knelt before her.”

“Rubbish!” said the doctor.

By this time they had reached the house. Ucelles did not look quite so grand on a near approach. The long French windows opening on the *terrasse* had a cold and vacant air, most of the house was closed, so that it appeared half blind and wholly dumb; it needed all the sunshine of summer to help the observer to bear the freezing sense of departed life. When the doctor rang the bell it echoed hauntingly through the empty corridors, and it was a long while before Miss Prenderghast’s reliable English maid answered it. She did at last, and received the men’s greetings with all the sourness of an exiled mind. If Miss Prenderghast was not at home in France, Elizabeth was still less likely to be so. Miss Prenderghast regarded it with suspicion, but Elizabeth with open-eyed hostility. Everything was different from what Elizabeth had been accustomed to, and Elizabeth knew that everything which was different was wrong. But all human consistency breaks down somewhere; Elizabeth’s broke down over Jean. When she first saw him he was a little French boy, very French indeed, and a Catholic; and he was not the less French now nor less Catholic at twenty; but Elizabeth was human and she loved him. That was why she stayed in a heathen country.

“If you will please to come this way, sir,” she said, addressing the doctor—she pretended not to see the Curé, she was Protestant to the core; then she led them along the polished parquet corridor, till at last they reached the smallest

of a suite of reception-rooms. It was full of sunshine and golden dust that glistened in the sunbeams between the ceiling and the floor, but there was very little else in the room except Miss Prenderghast; she was knitting.

“You can serve lunch, Elizabeth,” she said, before she greeted her visitors.

“Yes, ma’am,” said Elizabeth, but she did not intend to serve lunch until Jean came; her idea of veracity was as strictly relative as if she had been a Jesuit.

Miss Prenderghast’s dress was very high about the neck and rather short about the ankles. Her nose was her most prominent feature, and she looked as if she felt cold but would have thought it extremely foolish to take any precautions against it.

It is easy to distinguish in the faces of the middle-aged those from whom life has receded from those, in whose existence, it has never played a formidable part. It was to this latter category that Miss Prenderghast belonged. From her earliest years she had been taught to repress all her emotions, and she had repressed them so thoroughly that at times it seemed even to herself as if she no longer had any to suppress. She had put her heart into her sense of duty, a performance which had resulted in developing her conscience at the expense of all her natural instincts. Nobody likes having to deal with a robust conscience and anæmic emotions, the Latin races least of all. The two men, who bowed low, and obediently took the two small cane chairs provided for them, never considered Miss Prenderghast in the light of a human being. She appeared to them as a natural

phenomenon of a disagreeable nature, such as a land-slide or a series of bad harvests.

“English ladies can have no temptations,” thought the Curé. “That is why they are Protestants.”

“We shall have trouble with Jean sooner or later,” the doctor said to himself; “he has his father’s blood in him, and he has been brought up by a stone.”

“It was very kind of you both to come,” said Miss Prenderghast coldly; “you must have found the walk from St. Jouin long and dusty.”

“On the contrary,” said the doctor politely, “where the destination is agreeable the path is scattered with flowers.”

“The wild flowers in this part of the country are remarkably scarce,” observed Miss Prenderghast. “I have often regretted it.”

A silence followed. The Curé drew out his handkerchief and spilt some snuff on the floor. The doctor sneezed and Miss Prenderghast frowned. She disliked French habits.

“I have received a letter from the Comte D’Ucelles,” she observed finally; “he is, as you may remember, Jean’s nearest relation upon the French side—in fact, his only near French relation.”

“*Parfaitement*,” replied the doctor, “he is a gallant man and has had a certain success in Paris. There is a remarkable resemblance between him and the late Baron.”

“Ah!” said Miss Prenderghast thoughtfully, “I trust it is only superficial. Still it cannot be helped; he is Jean’s uncle,

and he has at last chosen to intimate some interest in the boy's future."

"Very natural, very natural indeed," exclaimed the Curé. "Nothing could be more *convenable*, madame, the true spirit of a good Catholic and of an uncle!"

"It may be as you say," replied Miss Prenderghast, with knitted brows. "In any case, he has waited long enough before showing either of them. However, it is not easy for me to make up my mind what it is best to do."

"And Jean, what is his opinion?" asked the doctor.

"I have not consulted him upon the question," said Miss Prenderghast. "It is possible I should have done so, in which case I should hardly have troubled you for your advice; but yesterday a very, very painful incident occurred, which has greatly shaken my intention."

Both the doctor and the priest started; they did not look at each other, though they were thinking the same thought.

"He has fallen from grace," the priest said to himself.

"He has become a man," thought the doctor.

"He has written an opera," said Miss Prenderghast impressively. Neither of the men could help looking a little disappointed.

"You may well be surprised," said Miss Prenderghast with satisfaction. "I was myself perfectly unprepared for this blow. I knew he was musical and that—as I thought most unnecessarily, Monsieur le Curé—you had encouraged it by allowing him to play the organ in your church." The Curé collapsed, the doctor looked radiant. "And you, doctor," said

Miss Prenderghast, “have not improved matters by insisting upon him attending the meetings of a disreputable orchestral society! This is the result.”

“Well, well,” said the doctor bravely, “his mother was a neurotic!”

“There are certain professions,” said the Curé mildly, “in which a knowledge of music is not altogether a misfortune. I have myself studied harmony for a fortnight during my training at the Seminary. I have never regretted it.”

“No, but your congregation has,” snapped the doctor.

“What do you suggest?” asked Miss Prenderghast.

The doctor looked at the Curé. He really had no idea in his head at all, but the Curé looked so full of his own importance and so determined on making Jean a priest that the doctor found himself saying:

“Paris!” He only meant it as a joke.

“Paris?” said Miss Prenderghast thoughtfully.

“Paris!” echoed the Curé in horror.

“Paris?” said a clear boy’s voice just behind them.

It was Jean himself, fresh from a morning in the woods, with a retriever puppy gamboling at his heels. It was youth, and hope, and ardour, and all incredible, dauntless things! It was the spirit of growing life and spring, and it was followed by Elizabeth, who promptly announced *déjeuner*, half an hour after the usual time.

“We will finish this discussion later on,” said Miss Prenderghast.

Jean greeted his two old friends cordially.

“But what is all this about Paris, Aunt Anne?” he asked, smiling a little as he held back the *portière* for her to pass out. “Have you and Monsieur le Curé and the doctor just discovered it?”

“You should not come into rooms suddenly,” said Miss Prenderghast coldly. “Then you would not overhear parts of other people’s conversations which were not meant for your ears.”

Jean frowned and apologized. Miss Prenderghast resented the frown, and ignored the apology.

It is so seldom that the very observant observe the right things. It was a dull lunch party; the doctor was a little frightened at Miss Prenderghast’s reception of his suggestion; the Curé was thinking how bad the lunch was, and how he could influence Jean to accept his point of view. Miss Prenderghast was greatly annoyed with Elizabeth. And to Jean the word “Paris” was like a lighted torch to a bundle of dry hay. Suddenly all his ideas had taken fire—but like all the fires of youth it burned silently, and none of his elders had the least idea that they were attending at a conflagration.

CHAPTER II

AFTER lunch Jean went to Elizabeth. She was washing up the dishes, or she preferred to let Jean think she was; as a matter of fact, she had been having what is known in servants' quarters as a "snack," but like all healthy, properly brought up English servants, she liked her employers to fancy that she lived upon air alone. Jean sat on the kitchen table and swung his legs to and fro in a confidential manner. He had an implicit masculine confidence in Elizabeth's sympathy—Elizabeth was perhaps only a sour old maid, but she would know that he was there to have his grievance produced, and she would in time produce it for him. So he took a cigarette and waited.

"Oh, Master Jean, if Miss Anne should see you now!" said the scandalized Elizabeth. Jean was forbidden to smoke, but he knew Elizabeth admired it. His melancholy deep brown eyes had a sudden charming twinkle in them; he had a curious face, irregular as to its features, but very much alive; it reminded the observer of a young wild thing in the woods absorbed in the deep business of life.

"Though you do look nearly a man now," went on Elizabeth, "and are grown so lately, Master Jean, and if I may say so, a thought more English about the shoulders."

"I am a man," said Jean. "I'm twenty, Elizabeth, and they've turned me out of their consultation as if I were a schoolboy, and I'm positive it's about me."

“There, there, Master Jean!” said Elizabeth soothingly. “You know you can get it all out of the doctor afterwards; ’e’s as easy to get into as a tin of apricots—’im and ’is professional secrets!”

Elizabeth snorted.

“I don’t like getting things out of people when they’re the things they ought to tell me any way,” said Jean. “When I went in this morning, Elizabeth, they were all saying ‘Paris’ as if they’d heard of it for the first time.”

Elizabeth looked at him thoughtfully.

“There was a letter from there this very morning,” she said, “with a seal on the back; perhaps it’s a fortune, Master Jean, come from your rich uncle in Paris.”

“More likely a misfortune, I’m afraid,” said Jean gloomily. “Well, Elizabeth, I think I’m going off to the woods again. Put something cold out for me to-night; I shan’t be back till late.”

Elizabeth looked anxious, but she knew better than to expostulate with her idol. She was allowed to worship only on the distinct understanding that she never interfered. A worshipper that tries to manage his god is confusing the situation. From his tenth birthday on, Jean had ruled Elizabeth with a rod of iron. It was a small kingdom, perhaps, for the little lonely boy, it only contained his dog and Elizabeth, but he ruled it well, and there had never been a hint of rebellion. Elizabeth knew that Miss Prenderghast had noticed these increasing despotic absences of Jean’s. He went away almost daily now for hours at a time, and gave no account whatever of his proceedings. Miss Prenderghast

shook her head over them; she had a shocked suspicion, not unlike the priest and the doctor, that he might be meeting some woman; but she would have been even more shocked if she had known he was meeting his own soul. A woman would not have prevented Jean from becoming a bank clerk, but no one knows what a man's soul may prevent him from becoming. It has led him before now to become an artist, and it has even taught him (and this is the hardest thing perhaps for thoroughly good, religious people to understand) to develop into a saint.

But Jean wasn't going to become a saint, he was only born a musician, and he had inherited on both sides of his nature a certain recklessness, only thinly covered by a reticence which was not natural to him, the inevitable result of a sensitive nature that has not found in its early years any direct response.

His mother had had a romantic zest for all the adventures of the spirit, even her broken heart had not checked her dauntless craving for the impossible; she had ceased to look for it in her husband, but she had never found that the world was small. The Baron on his side had a lucid, unwavering instinct for pleasure, it was his intention to make everything serve his senses. This instinct had descended upon Jean in the shape of a fierce desire, of which he was hardly conscious, to tear something living and responsive from the grip of his future. As he strode off once more upon his innocent adventures his mind was fiercely and ardently awake and busy. "What had he done with his life?" he asked himself, in frenzied self-reproach. Here he was at twenty—no older, no more experienced, no more active than many a boy of fourteen. He did not take his attempted opera nearly

as seriously as Miss Prenderghast had taken it; he was possessed by melody, he always had been; ever since he could remember he seemed to have been listening to a tune, but he hardly knew that he was peculiar in this, and he knew enough of the music to which great musicians had listened not to think too much of his own ambitious flutterings. “I have done nothing,” he said to himself bitterly. “I am nothing—I have no powers!” And he flung himself face downwards on the dry, dead leaves of the late summer in the terrible abandonment of youth. To have never left Ucelles in his life, to have been brought up a good Catholic, to have no friends but a sour-faced English cook and a few inarticulate peasants (it is sad to say that Jean forgot the Curé and the doctor), wasn’t that a certain proof of his failure in life? He thought of Maurice Golaud, that magnificent young man he had met at the Choral Society. Maurice had all the world before him—money, a family of admiring sisters, and that unacquirable self-confidence which the artist, except in rare moments of creation, never knows! Jean had tried to play to Maurice once, but he had broken down in the middle; it was the only thing he could do—play—and it had come over him suddenly that Maurice did not think much of playing. He thought a great deal more of how to curl your moustache and look at a woman, and for the moment Jean was not sure that Maurice was not right.

Jean buried his face in the long dried grass, and drank in the haunting, fresh scent of the dead leaves; the air was full of a faint, warm haze that crept across the distant fields and hung above the trees. The leaves that were still upon them were very dry with the heat and rattled a little as the soft breeze shook them together. The birds spoke in sharp,

disconnected twitters; all the sounds and all the life of the earth seemed interrupted now, and yet urgent. The swallows flung themselves in long, unsettled curves about the sky; everything was changing, moving, departing. Jean alone must stay here always to the bitter sound of his own wasted life! He watched himself grow tamely, narrowly old, through the coming years; there would be nothing in him to challenge life. Maurice and his fellow-officers and their fun would go out once more into the merry world, Jean would remain. In time he would cease attending the Lycée, he would come home and farm Ucelles. In the evenings he would play a little if he was not too tired, but never his own music any more! Why should he shame the divine flickering gift within him, which he could never develop, nor yet throw away? He wanted to be a musician—he wanted only that—and he buried his face in the friendly dry leaves that scratched his cheeks, and wept.

"I shall never be able to do anything," sobbed Jean. "I shall never be able to go anywhere, and I shall never meet anyone to love."

Miss Prenderghast waited half an hour for dinner. It was an unfortunate half hour; in it all the sacrifices she had made for Jean increased with the inroad he was making upon punctuality.

For the last ten years Miss Prenderghast had been practising the stoic virtues, and though these are probably the hardest of all the virtues to practise, they rarely, if ever, make the possessor lovable. In this one half hour Miss Prenderghast saw their worthlessness, but she could not admit that she was to blame; surely the guardians of youth

only owed to their special charges the one great duty of correction, to be met by youth in its turn with implicit obedience? And Miss Prenderghast knew that she had corrected Jean and that he had usually obeyed her. Between them these two admirable virtues had destroyed any human relationship. “He is lacking in consideration,” said Miss Prenderghast to herself, and she wiped her glasses. She had given Jean a gold watch for his birthday present, and he had not kissed her. She had told him at the time that she hoped it would make him more punctual.

Elizabeth brought in the soup at nine.

“Master Jean is very late,” said Miss Prenderghast; “put something cold on the sideboard, Elizabeth, and go to bed. I will sit up for him.”

There was such a tone of finality in Miss Prenderghast’s voice that Elizabeth almost obeyed her. She put some soup on the kitchen fire and began to do her hair in curl-papers on the stairs.

Jean came in a few minutes afterwards. He apologized perfunctorily for the lateness of the hour, and his aunt remarked that careless people always gave trouble. Jean accepted the thrust in silence; he did not think it fair to receive an apology with further correction; it had the result also of drying up any possible springs of remorse.

“He is becoming hardened,” thought his aunt miserably; then she advised him not to take butter with meat; she said it was an extravagant habit and un-English. Jean took more butter.

Miss Prenderghast sighed and shook her head.

“Well, Jean,” she said at last, “I daresay you wonder why I have been sitting up here for you, just as I have been wondering what has made you so late. Have you no explanation you can offer me?”

“No, *ma Tante*,” said Jean, without lifting his eyes from his plate. He looked very guilty.

“I would have forgiven him anything if he were not so secretive,” thought his aunt; aloud she said, “I am afraid you have been idling—or worse! You are twenty, old enough to be doing some good in the world if you have any capacity for it. The time has come for something to be decided about your future.”

Miss Prenderghast was only expressing in her own familiar way the very thoughts that had kept Jean lingering in the field, but it is extraordinary how very different our own thoughts about ourselves can sound from the lips of our nearest relatives! Jean had not felt in the least hostile to himself as he lay in the long grass, speculating as to his lack of the talents necessary for life, but he felt very hostile to Miss Prenderghast now; he kicked the table leg.

“I daresay you hardly remember your Uncle Romain,” she went on, with a grieved glance at the furniture; “you are hardly likely to, as hitherto his only interest in you has been displayed by his remarkable confidence in my powers of bringing you up. However, it appears he has suddenly remembered that he is your natural guardian, and has written to suggest a profession for you.”

“I remember my Uncle Romain extremely well,” said Jean with more haste than accuracy, “and I am grateful to

him for his interest. What profession does he suggest?”

“The Banque de Paris et des Pays-Bas,” said Miss Prenderghast. “You are to receive no salary for the first six months, and your uncle does not apparently intend to offer you his hospitality. I cannot congratulate you upon the generosity of your French relatives.”

Jean said nothing, he looked more than ever like a trapped wild thing in the flickering candlelight. His brown eyes shone with a fierce glint peculiar to them in moments of excitement, his thin, long brown hands moved with nervous gestures, and his nostrils quivered and dilated like those of an excited horse. It seemed a good moment to his aunt to make an appeal to his feelings.

“My dear boy,” she said, “if you go to Paris, as I fear you must, I foresee great temptations for you. I have done all I could to bring you up a decent, respectable member of society, and to bring out in you the strain of your English blood; but several things have been against me, your Roman Catholic religion and your naturally difficult temper. I have never quite felt as if you understood me, but that doesn’t matter now. Try to be honourable, straightforward and economical, and whatever you do, don’t be like your father —I don’t like to mention such horrors, but there it is; you have that to fight against as well as the temptations natural to any young man—the poor man came, as we know, to a shocking end.”

Jean flung back his chair and sprang to his feet. He spoke in a tone Miss Prenderghast had never heard him use before, and he lapsed into quick, explosive French, which she always found it difficult to follow.

“Do not dare to say these things to me, Madame,” he said hoarsely. “Respect my father’s memory, if you respect nothing else that is mine. He had courage, he was a gallant man, he never did a dishonourable thing in his life—he died sadly!”

“He died by his own hand,” interrupted Miss Prenderghast dryly, “after he had lived what, in my religion, would very rightly be termed a life of sin.”

“*Mon Dieu!* you shall not say these things to me,” cried Jean, and suddenly he caught up the plate nearest him, and with the quick gesture of an angry child, flung it through the nearest window-pane. It crashed through the glass of the long French window, out on to the terrace beyond. The boy trembled all over with excitement and fury. Miss Prenderghast regarded him with scandalized contempt. He had really startled her, but even in her astonishment she was scornful. Shame overwhelmed him; he rushed past her out into the long corridor, and tore upstairs to his room.

Elizabeth heard him; she ran out of her room to intercept him in a sulphur-coloured dressing-gown, her gray hair hanging about her head in rigid wisps.

“Ah, Master Jean! Master Jean! Whatever in the world ’ave you been and done?” she moaned in terror.

“Let me go! Let me go, Elizabeth! or I shall go mad,” gasped the boy.

“There, there! don’t you take on so, Master Jean,” said Elizabeth softly, but she let him go—she knew that there is one thing a man prefers even to a woman’s sympathy, and that is his own freedom.

Jean reached his room and flung himself headlong on his bed, shaking with sobs. “Why should he feel so—why should he always feel so much too much?” he asked himself. “He had acted like a bad child, like a mere boy; his aunt despised him. Who was he to go out and face the world, to see Paris—a man who could not keep his temper with his aunt?” Even lying there alone in the dark he felt the hot waves of colour rushing over him afresh. He had been rude to her, and she was a woman, and she had done so much for him! How he hated her having done so much for him—why couldn’t she have left him alone?

He raised his eyes to where he knew his mother’s crucifix was hung, but his Aunt Anne had said such things about his father—his poor father whose beautiful, unharassed eyes Jean so well remembered; and Jean had adored the father, who came so seldom but so grandly to Ucelles. His mother had been his life’s companion, but his father had been his dream—at the thought of the words his Aunt Anne had used about the late Baron the tears dried on his cheeks.

“No, I won’t apologize to her. I won’t,” said Jean, looking in the direction of the crucifix. Then he went on his knees and took out his rosary and prayed afresh all those special prayers the Curé had taught him to pray for his father’s wandering soul.

He felt vaguely comforted when he lay down again. His window was wide open and his room was full of the autumn evening. The night was very still; high above the avenue of whispering limes the waning moon slid idly through the sky. She was warped and twisted and out of shape, and silvery pale—she stood to Jean as a symbol of all perverted, tortured

lives, his father's, and his own too, perhaps; who knew what would happen to him in Paris? Not what his Aunt Anne thought, nothing ever happened quite as she thought, because life always leans a little to the side of the ideal, even in its ugliest moments; but strange things other than Jean could yet imagine? He prayed again that he might not disgrace his name and his blood.

Even his Aunt Anne had good blood, he remembered; she had never stirred when he had looked his savage rage at her and flung the plate through the window. No! he could not apologize to her, but he would pray too for his Aunt Anne. He was not quite sure what form his prayer should take—the Curé had told him always to pray that Miss Prenderghast might become a Catholic; but Jean had never felt that this was quite fair, for he knew how very little his Aunt Anne herself wanted it; at present, too, he particularly wished to be fair. So he decided at last to pray to St. Joseph, who was well known to be particularly benevolent, to grant his Aunt Anne any good thing that she might want. "And if she doesn't want any good thing," he argued to himself, "it really isn't my fault!"

He would have been very much surprised, and even a little touched, if he had known that his aunt was at that very moment praying for him.

"I do not think I have been very wise," Miss Prenderghast prayed, "but I cannot approve of his French relations, and I knew it was my duty to warn him against his father's awful example. If I have done aught amiss—and I do not think the boy's temper entirely his own fault (the Prenderghasts, too, always as a family had hasty tempers)—

forgive me—lay his temper to my charge, and protect him, if it is possible, from Paris!”

As for Elizabeth, she prayed that Jean might enjoy himself. (In spite of her appearance, there was something rather Greek about Elizabeth.)

CHAPTER III

THE doctor gave Jean a thermometer as a parting present, and the Curé brought him a little medal of St. Francis; he gave it to Jean after mass on his last morning.

"Always wear this, my son," he said, "it has been blessed by the Bishop. I tried to get a eucalyptus rosary which had received the Holy Father's own touch, but it had been sent by mistake to Adélaide la Court, who is just going into service. It was necessary for her to be safeguarded in every way. I think, however, you will find this medal very efficacious. Do not forget your prayers, go to Mass regularly, and never miss a fast. You will find Paris very different in some ways from St. Jouin, at least I have always gathered so; but the Church is the same, nothing ever changes that. Keep your vocation."

Jean nodded—he was not quite sure what his vocation was, but he foresaw no difficulty in keeping it.

Miss Prenderghast had been lying awake half the night, thinking how she should say good-bye to Jean. She said it very badly; he was all she had in the world, and she had never really had him. Jean made her a polite little speech in which he thanked her for all she had done for him, and Miss Prenderghast said, "Nonsense, somebody had to do it!" and "For goodness sake, boy, don't gush; it's not English."

Jean hesitated for a moment, bowed, kissed her hand and left her. Then he ran into the kitchen and threw his arms around Elizabeth.

“For shame, Master Jean,” cried Elizabeth, with gratified horror. “You a great big man, how could you go for to do such a thing?”

“Oh, Elizabeth,” said Jean, and he was laughing and almost crying at the same time, “a man must kiss somebody, you know. You’ve been very good to me, Elizabeth!”

“There! there! Master Jean,” said Elizabeth, who was wholly crying. “You’ll take care of yourself, my lamb, now, won’t you? And don’t pay no attention to what nobody says to you in that there wicked Paris full of hussies and what not? You go your own way, Master Jean dear, and if you’re ever in want of anything you’ll write and tell me, won’t you? I know what young men and short commons is, and I’ve saved my wages for many a year a-purpose!”

“Oh, Elizabeth!” said Jean at last, “but you know a man can’t take money from a woman!”

“Can’t ’e though, my dear?” said Elizabeth grimly. “Then all I can say is ’e can take many other things which are a sight worse for ’im—for ’im and for ’er too, for the matter of that! Don’t you go muddlin’ yer ’ead with them notions, and oh! for ’eaven’s sake, Master Jean, don’t sit in yer wet feet or go short of your food!”

Elizabeth hadn’t any parting present to give Jean—but when he went out of the kitchen, he ran by a back way across the fields, because he did not want anyone just then to see his face, and Elizabeth sat at the kitchen table with her head on her arms, and refused to answer the bell to clear away the breakfast. She was the only person in St. Jouin who realized that Jean would never come back again—someone like him

would return, no doubt, with his eyes and his voice, but the Jean D'Ucelles who ran across the wet, wind-blown fields that autumn morning would be a different person altogether.

On the railway station Jean found several of his class-mates from the Lycée, and among them Maurice Golaud, the young officer who was quartered at St. Jouin.

"Ah, you lucky beggar!" he cried. "Just to think that in seven hours' time you will be in the heart of the universe, while I am wasting away in this old, aimless penitentiary of a spot. You don't know what's before you, my boy! The cafés, the good little drinks, the fine little dinners, the dear little women! I am sick for the sound of the streets and the lights down the Champs-Elysées in the evening! What a world, and what a place this country, where you go about knee-deep in mud to each other's funerals, with only the cows to look at! But you'll be strange at first, *mon cher*! Look here, I know what I'll do," and he took out a card with an address on it and pushed it into Jean's hand. "Go and call there," he said, as the train started. "If I can't run up and put you through your paces, you'll see someone there who's worth seeing; at least she is usually considered to be so!" Maurice gave a significant twist to his moustache as he spoke. He was really more proud of the lady who lived at the address than of that extremely handsome feature, in fact he considered them both his features, and he thought he was very generous to let Jean have the unexampled opportunity of observing them. As for Jean, he put the address carefully in his pocket; it seemed to him that after all he should not be so very friendless in Paris.

The train took its short, uneven way through the flat lands of France.

Poplars and a pale sky, with peasants working in the fields, stretched through an eternity of daylight.

Here and there towers of grey stone and groups of tall, narrow houses broke through the long monotony of the fields, and Jean's heart beat faster with the hope that this time it was really Paris.

The rain came on again, and the short day was closing before Jean realized that the sudden stream of grey houses was after all not going to break again into empty fields, but was Paris herself, the great insignificant fringe of the world's enigma, the city where there is most pleasure and least happiness—the cleverest thought and the vainest action—where more ideas are born and more perish in their tarnished bloom than any other place on earth. None of these things did Jean dream of, as out of the grey evening the lights of Paris broke, wave after wave of them, through the curtain of rain, like handfuls of splendid jewels prodigally flung into colourless mud. And with the lights came the sound—the sound of Paris, which is so different from the soft, dull roar of London or the sharp, hysterical scream of New York, the sound that is pitilessly light and infinitely gay—the voice of Paris, which is like the laughter of a heartless woman mocking at a life she has wrecked. And when Jean heard it he drew his breath in for a moment and felt afraid.

Jean had never seen so many people in his life as he saw at the terminus of the Gare St. Lazare, nor had he ever seen people move so freely and so quickly; there was neither stiffness nor bustle in the swiftly circulating crowd. He dragged his valise on to the platform, feeling strange and isolated in this new, bewildering world.

“I beg your pardon, sir,” said a voice behind him, “but I think you must be Monsieur le Baron. I come from the Comte D’Ucelles, sir.”

Henri would have liked extremely to have come to Jean’s assistance, but beyond seeing after his scanty luggage and placing the oldest rug over him in the motor as comfortably as possible, there was nothing he could do. Still, Jean saw the friendliness in his eyes and liked it. It was the only friendliness he was to see for some time.

As he was dressing as quickly as he could for eight o’clock dinner (his train had been late and Henri had warned him to hurry) the Comte D’Ucelles tapped at his door and entered. Romain was a man who wore fifty years easily, he had a most charming manner and a perpetual smile; what he looked like when he wasn’t smiling no one ever knew, for no one had ever seen his face in repose. He smiled when he was pleased, when he was bored, and when he was angry. He did not smile when he was amused, because he had not been amused for some time; he had long ago worn out his capacity for amusement. He met Jean with a generous outburst of reproach.

Upon his honour—was this really Jean? And why on earth hadn’t he seen him all these preposterous years? Jean had really behaved abominably to them; and how immensely he had grown, and what a charming time he would have in Paris! He asked after Miss Prenderghast, he rallied Jean on the broken hearts he was certain to have left behind him in the country; he made the most lavish excuses for having put Jean into such a wretched room, though it was the handsomest Jean had ever seen.

“It’s intolerable, my dear fellow, that I can’t put you up permanently,” he went on, with his hard, light eyes wandering about the stately apartment and taking in the shabby luggage, the shy youth, the pitiful, small appearance which made Romain after all think that his wife had been right; “but as a matter of fact, you know, your good aunt is a little strict—young men will be young men, and in Paris—well! well! Paris isn’t a young man’s class of the Catechism, and the home is sacred! I assure you, my dear boy, I keep it so, and so must you, you know, when you marry; and meanwhile have rooms—have rooms—they’ve fascinating places in Paris to be had for almost nothing; we’ll look into all that to-morrow. And now we mustn’t keep your aunt waiting. To-morrow I’ll send you to a decent tailor; that suit won’t quite do for Paris, you know!”

Jean felt it wouldn’t. He had thought it very smart before, but he was broader and taller than his father, and the sleeves were too short, and the back too tight; besides, it looked different from his uncle’s.

Romain laughed genially, not cruelly, at Jean’s embarrassment; still Jean felt that he had disappointed this brilliant being; he wished he could think of something suitable to say, something dashing and witty and in the tone of his uncle’s talk; but he could think of nothing. He had always fancied before that conversation was a means of expressing what you wanted to say, a direct channel, as it were, for some very definite idea, but this hardly seemed Romain’s notion of the art. His words seemed to stand like a screen between Jean and his thoughts, and to take the place of some hard, light enamel covering a hidden substance. He ran on with his continual easy banter, quite as if he were

Jean's age, or as if Jean were his; and as if nothing in the world mattered, or could be worth a moment's uneasiness or discomfort.

"We've very few people to-night," he said. "I would have kept you quite to ourselves, you know, if I could, but one's funny little social life here beats up like a tide; you cannot keep the waves off your particular piece of shore without being as ridiculous as King Canute was with the Atlantic, in your charming old England—which reminds me, my dear boy, I am sending you in to-night with an American girl; she can't talk French, of course, or at least we hope against hope that she won't try, and no one else can talk English, so you'll have the very great honour! Make an impression upon her, I assure you it's quite worth your while; she's immensely rich and immensely handsome, and is going to be, I believe, quite the rage. I must confess to you American women don't suit me, I prefer flesh and blood in a woman, not sawdust and cold steel. All the same, she has a ravishing figure, and I believe the figure of her income is still more magnificent. They may both be quite natural, for all I know to the contrary, but your dear aunt has made certain of the money!"

Jean was accustomed to a large house full of old things, but they were an entirely different type of old things from that of which his Uncle Romain had acquired possession. They were old because they were worn out and shabby, they were not old because they were precious and rare. The reception-rooms through which he passed with Romain to the drawing-room, where Madame D'Ucelles awaited them, were not larger than those he had left behind him, but they seemed so, because of their extraordinary brilliant emptiness. The first that they passed through had nothing in it but

portraits, and a wonderful old bronze on a pedestal; this opened into another, with very little, very perfect Louis XVI. furniture. The chimney was in marble, with a delicate Sèvres china clock; in the corner was a grand piano covered with ancient jewel-encrusted embroidery. A screen of painted leather stood by the side of the fireplace, and one wall was entirely covered with shelves of oriental china. Madame D'Ucelles and a small group of friends stood by the fire. Jean had seen evening dress before in a provincial theatre, but it was not in the least like this. He hardly recognized his aunt in the bedizened, exposed, and highly coloured lady leaning over an old rose-pink sofa in an attitude that she tried to make as gracefully light as she could.

Madame la Comtesse D'Ucelles was extremely handicapped in the social race by a hopeless lack of the *souplesse* she adored.

One of Romain's friends said of her: "Our poor Marie would so love to be thought indiscreet, but what can one say? She fights hard to produce the appearance of evil, but the upper lip and the stubborn *bourgeois* blood refuse to permit such laxity. She is hopelessly *bonne femme*, she cannot be anything wilder than a dear old cow. It is true that she can, if she likes, kick over the pail, but what she can't do is to produce champagne instead of good rich country milk, and that, poor dear, is what she wants to do! She cannot go to anyone's head, she is not intoxicating, she can only (look at our good Romain) help to create an *embonpoint*!"

Madame D'Ucelles' upper lip might be against her, but she and her dressmaker had fought hard to defeat it! Of all the little group around her, she most looked to her nephew

from the country, the extreme presentment of the ultra-fashionable life he had heard of and read about. Perhaps if Marie had known of this impression she might have allowed it to soften her manner a little; but as it was, she fixed her small, round, brown eyes on Jean, and despised him.

He was all the things she hated—poor, young, without even an incipient material value, and yet, even in his badly-fitting clothes and in the midst of a room full of strange sounds and light, and critical human beings, there was in him that ineradicable ease of race.

He was shy but he was not awkward; he was embarrassed but he was not as the men of her class would have been, clumsy. He did not, indeed, know quite what to say, but he lifted clear eyes to her face; and if there was anything that Madame D'Ucelles never forgave, it was dignity in an inferior. Jean had not felt his uncle's light laughter at his appearance half as much as he felt the scornful glitter in his aunt's eyes. Without moving her elbow from the sofa on which she leaned, she gave him her heavily bejewelled fingers to kiss.

"Your train must have been late, I fancy," she said. "I hope you left your aunt well in the country; we must discuss our family affairs by and by. Miss Vanderpool, let me introduce my nephew to you—le Baron D'Ucelles, Miss Vanderpool. Romain, dinner has already been announced."

Jean turned his attention to a magnificent young woman who seemed to take instant possession of him with a flicker of her stony, flat, grey eyes.

“I am delighted you can talk English,” she said to her companion. “My! I do get so weary of trying to slip into French; not that I ever do try very hard, though I take lessons every day, but one has to understand a bit, so as not to be taken in.”

Jean did not imagine that the young woman beside him would ever run much risk in that direction. Pauline Vanderpool was indeed, as Romain had told him, a very handsome young woman, but Jean thought she could never under any circumstances have been a young girl. She was dressed with consummate taste, though she wore rather too many pearls. She had the finished manner of a woman who is accustomed to admiring obedience, and he could never imagine anyone venturing either to deceive her or to disagree with her.

“I think the Comtesse is a real smart woman,” she obligingly added to Jean, as they took their seats. “She’s your aunt, isn’t she?”

“Yes, she is my uncle’s wife,” said Jean.

“Well! that’s a good enough aunt in America,” conceded his companion. “She says she likes me, she says she adores me; do you think she’s sincere?”

Jean looked rather helpless.

“I don’t know my aunt very well,” he said at last.

Pauline threw back her head and laughed.

“Well, it’s easy to see that your mother was an Englishwoman,” she said. “Why, if I’d given your Uncle

Romain that opening, he'd have sent me blushing into next week."

"I'm afraid I am very stupid, mademoiselle," said poor Jean. "I've only just come to Paris." It was evident that whatever blushing there was going to be, would be entirely on Jean's part.

Pauline laughed again.

"I suppose you are going to live right away with the D'Ucelles, aren't you?" she asked curiously.

"No, I don't think so, mademoiselle," said Jean.

"My! but that's odd," cried Pauline, regarding him closely. "Why ever not?—where are you going to live, then?"

"I shall find rooms to-morrow, I imagine."

"You people over here are funny," said Pauline. "I suppose as your uncle and aunt haven't any children, you are their heir, aren't you?"

Jean shrugged his shoulders; he was getting angry, and it improved his manner.

"I am really afraid you must ask them, mademoiselle," he said gently. "I know so very little myself about their affairs."

"I suppose you have money of your own, then?" inquired the relentless Pauline.

"Mademoiselle, I have enough," said Jean, trembling with rage.

“All the same,” Pauline went on, “I think it’s real mean of them not to keep you on here. Why, their house is as big as an hotel. Doesn’t it make you mad?”

“If you do not mind, mademoiselle, I should prefer not to discuss my relations in a language that they do not understand,” said Jean, biting his lip.

Pauline stared at him.

“Goodness me!” she exclaimed. “You wouldn’t discuss them in a language they *could*, I suppose?”

Jean hesitated.

“In France,” he said gently, “it is not our custom to discuss our relations at all.” And this time Pauline did understand. She did not blush, nor did she show any sign of displeasure. She measured Jean with a calculating eye; he was a negligible quantity, poor Jean—he was not even good looking; his face was too thin and too pallid, his features too angular, only his clear-cut, sensitive mouth and a certain shining eagerness in his vivid dark eyes held the observer’s attention, but they did not hold Pauline’s.

“In America,” she said, with calm distinctness, “we discuss what we choose, and I guess I intend to allow myself the very same licence over here!” And she turned a beautiful white shoulder upon Jean and devoted the rest of dinner to her other neighbour.

It was the second time that evening in which Jean discovered that if you have no material value you are not supposed to claim the right of a spiritual one.

Romain laughed at him after dinner.

“My dear boy!” he said, “what on earth did you say to La Belle Américaine to make her deluge poor Le Blanc with her atrocious French. He says she gave him a tooth ache; were you trying to snub her?”

Jean flushed scarlet.

“You did not tell me she had no manners!” he muttered.

Romain laughed again.

“My poor child,” he said, “good manners are historical nowadays; they are the survival of race. One does not expect them from Americans; they have—those charming children of yesterday—nothing to survive from. It is true one hears of the Pilgrim Fathers, but that can hardly be looked upon as a satisfactory pedigree, particularly as one gathers from the absence of all allusion to the mothers that ‘ces gens-là’ married beneath them! I don’t offer people advice as a rule, it might bore them and it would certainly bore me; still I will go so far as to say to you that you mustn’t think too much about manners. You see the rich have inherited the earth, but they’ve kept, poor dears, the manners of the soil, and it’s considered a little diplomatic just now to meet them half way. You take me, perhaps? An air just a little less rigid than your own, my dear Jean, will find itself more at home in Paris. Don’t trouble to go into the drawing-room again; if you’re tired go to bed.”

Jean escaped with relief. He thought his Uncle Romain fascinating, but he felt horribly raw and exposed, and quite appallingly young. When he reached his room he found that Henri had unpacked all his things, and put the thermometer and the medal on the dressing-table. There was an absence of

direct utility about these memorials that went to Jean's very heart.

At the sight of his incompetent treasures, all the jumbled impressions of the day rose up before him, the surprises, the shames, the bewilderments, and the loneliness. He too, like them, had nothing about him that seemed fitted to shine in this new existence; but they were more fortunate than he, for they did not lie awake far into the night wishing that they were ten years older, and could talk without meaning anything, and had a new dress-coat.

They lay on the dressing-table surrounded by beautiful silver ornaments, quite as if they were on the old wooden washing-stand in St. Jouin and not in the least aware of any depreciation in their value.

CHAPTER IV

"MY dear fellow," said Romain, wandering vaguely into the breakfast-room at about eleven the following morning. "I really am quite desolated, but I find I can't take you to the Bank to-day. It appears that I promised your aunt in some dreadful forgotten hour to go to a wedding, a funeral, or a christening—I never can keep any account of church functions, can you?—of a distant cousin on her side of the family. You and I, my dear Jean, manage better; we keep, as it were, our relatives down—between us I doubt if we could raise half a dozen; but I have always noticed a terrible tendency in families such as your aunt's to have relations, here, there, and everywhere, and such substantial people too; and one can't get away from substantial people in church. For my part I am a good Catholic, I think I may fairly say. I have the mind of a Byzantine, but I do not like the personal note in religion. I would so very much rather not know whom I am praying beside. A smart wedding is one thing, but your aunt's relations do not have smart weddings. One goes to out-of-the-way churches where large, red-faced women in purple dresses weep into their handkerchiefs. I do not find myself inspired to comfort them. No, I have had my déjeuner, thanks, in my room—and you?"

It seemed that Henri had brought Jean something more than an hour ago.

"Yes," said Romain thoughtfully, "Henri is an excellent servant, he thinks of things. Do you know I have such a good

idea. He shall take you to the Bank this morning, and afterwards find you rooms! After all I do not think I should be of the least use in looking for rooms, candidly—I am not a man of affairs, and when it comes to questions of money I am very like the lilies of the field; as I have neither toiled nor spun, you know, I don't quite appreciate how to economize. I daresay Henri knows a great deal about Paris, and I recommend you to find out what. Henri, take Monsieur le Baron to this address, and afterwards put yourself at his disposal to look for rooms. Now, my dear Jean, I don't think there is anything more I can do for you, is there? Your aunt finds herself a little fatigued this morning, and I believe will not be able to give herself the pleasure of seeing you. That matters the less as I shall expect you, of course, to look on this house as your headquarters; come in and out whenever you like, you know. Au revoir!"

It would hardly be worth while relating the parting blessing of Romain if Jean had been so fortunate as to see him in the weeks that followed; but though he called six times upon his uncle in the next fortnight, he never found Romain in. Once indeed he met him in the evening entering a café, but Romain did not seem to see him. He was very much pre-occupied at the moment, preserving in his own inimitable way the sanctities of the home; but there was something in his eyes as he looked at Jean without seeing him which decided Jean not to call again without an invitation; and the invitation did not come. It was to Henri instead that Jean owed his introduction to Paris.

So this was Paris—Paris the siren city of all the world—this drenched, grey, violently noisy spectacle. The streets were full of thick and greasy mud, a multitude of shrieking

taxis, thundering drays, and bustling tradesmen's carts flung themselves fantastically through the crowded thoroughfares. The shrouded, dripping houses seemed to Jean to look disreputably, unwholesomely fatigued; the raw, heavy air made him shiver, and hurt his chest.

"Could we," he asked Henry, "go by the Louvre and Nôtre Dame?"

Henri looked surprised, but he only replied:

"Where you wish, Monsieur; that you see away there on your left is the Louvre. Myself I think it *triste*, but it is worse inside; there is a cemetery there, and a cemetery indoors—there is something about it that chills the spine! Monsieur does not want to enter now, does he?"

"Just a minute," pleaded Jean, "only a minute, if we have time."

"But yes," said Henri, giving in with a good grace when he found he must. "All the time in the world, only Monsieur le Baron must not expect to find much to amuse him in the Louvre; places of that kind in Paris are chiefly valuable for the English and the Americans—for that, yes, they are useful; but for us, I assure Monsieur, they are not at all considered the thing. There is the Luxembourg, now, which is far more gay, and one need not have been dead many years before one appears in it. But Monsieur will please himself."

Jean did please himself; he left Henri in an outer court, and hardly knowing what led him, Jean went straight through the long corridor to the little room at the end where against her red curtain the Venus of the soul leans a little forward in tender welcome to her worshippers. Jean stood there for a

long time, his hat in his hand, his eyes full of tears, looking at her. He felt as if amongst a crowd of hostile strangers he had seen his mother's face.

There are certain moments in life that can never be repeated—one's first great sorrow—one's first great temptation—and one's first sight of a divinely beautiful created thing.

Henri regarded Jean with perplexity when he came out of the Louvre.

"Monsieur le Baron has perhaps met a friend?" he asked inquisitively.

Jean blushed a little.

"Yes," he said simply, "I have met a friend."

"Monsieur begins well," replied Henri with relief. "In Paris one needs friends. And now for the Bank, Monsieur le Baron. This to your left here is the Luxembourg; in the summer the garden has a most *chic* appearance. One finds there the smartest nursemaids in Paris; there are also pictures within. I have an idea that we may find Monsieur rooms behind the Luxembourg. I shall make the endeavour; since Monsieur is to be alone at first, cheerful surroundings are of importance. Here is the Banque de Paris et des Pays-Bas, as Monsieur le Baron sees."

Jean hesitated a moment before the heavy front of his future prison. He knew quite well it would be to him a prison, and he feared his first deliberate entrance into it. He had not realized how he had counted on his light-hearted, unembarrassed uncle to help him make the first plunge into a serious life, but he remembered that he was after all Jean

D'Ucelles, and that he would not have liked the Venus of Milo to be ashamed of him; so he pushed back the heavy doors and entered, presenting his letter quite firmly to a youth who was under the impression that it was his place as doorkeeper to impede as far as possible anyone who wished to go out or in. After a contemptuous stare at Jean, he turned the letter over, whistled, and vanished. By and by a much more important individual requested Jean to follow him; and he passed through a green-baize door shrouded in mystery, and found himself in the Directors' room.

The Director gave him fully five minutes; he told him where to go next morning, and said that he might begin his duties then, and that the head clerk would tell him what to do. The Director asked after the Comte D'Ucelles and suggested that some day Jean might dine with him. Then he rang the bell and dismissed him. The one idea that had come to Jean during this important interview was that there was something the matter with his clothes. He explained his fears to Henri and consulted him about Romain's tailor, though he thought he would probably prove too expensive.

"Why should Monsieur le Baron pay for his clothes at all?" asked Henri. "The name is the same."

Jean was very indignant with Henri, which was a mistake, because Henri instantly retired into his shell.

"*Mon Dieu!*" he said to himself. "They come from the country with their eyes glued shut and their mouths open, and then wonder why they remain hungry! It is, after all, only in Paris that we know how to get the world between our teeth! Let him learn this! For myself, I shall do better to keep

my mouth shut. It is a terrible task to teach a fool." And so Jean lost his only friend in Paris.

In the end Jean ordered the suit, and was relieved to find that he should not have to pay for it at once.

"He has come to Paris straight from the *bon Dieu*," thought Henri. "*Quelle bêtise!*"

"Monsieur le Baron will get very wet if he wishes to go as far as Nôtre Dame," he remarked aloud. "But from this bridge here across the Seine we can see it very well. I should say if anything better; it is not a fashionable church!"

Jean strained his eyes through the curtain of rain to catch the towers of Nôtre Dame. To-day there was no sunshine, and the cathedral crouched menacingly under the dispirited sky, a big, colourless block of time-defiant stone. Henri shivered ostentatiously—he did not wish to encourage Jean to remain out longer in the rain. He ventured to suggest that rain in Paris being, as a well known fact, highly dangerous for strangers, Monsieur le Baron would do well first to get something of a cordial nature to drink, and then to find his lodgings as soon as possible. Jean obeyed both suggestions, and Henri benefited, as he had intended, by the first.

It was not, however, so easy to find lodgings; everything—even the least attractive rooms at the top of the steepest flight of stairs—seemed to Jean's country mind wickedly extravagant.

"But one cannot need to pay all that just for a room to sleep in?" he expostulated over and over again.

"In Paris," observed Henri, "the very air is worth more than elsewhere, but, Monsieur le Baron, I grieve very much

to have to say it, hitherto we have made an attempt to keep to the fashionable quarter. I know very well where we can get rooms cheaper, but I had not wished to mention it. On my return, Monsieur le Comte will snap his fingers and say to me, 'Then you have buried Monsieur my nephew in a neighbourhood of greengrocers; I am to fall over cabbages in order to see him, *hein*!' And yet if one cannot have Bohemian pheasants, one need not starve on soup made from bones! That is how I look at it, Monsieur le Baron. Shall we try another quarter?"

"Yes," said Jean impatiently. "Any other quarter. I do not wish to be fashionable to sleep! Anywhere that I can find a clean, decent room, and get into it out of this noise and rain, I shall be satisfied."

"Noise, Monsieur?" said Henri, a little shocked. "What you hear is not noise, it is Paris. Down here by the river then and across the bridge. There, Monsieur, is the Académie Française. People think very much of it, I am told. I prefer Les Capucines, but *chacun son goût, non*? And here in the Rue de Seine is perhaps something for Monsieur."

Jean was by this time so tired that even if Numéro 5, Rue de Seine, had been more grey, more dirty, more coldly stuffy and draughty than it was, he would have closed with it thankfully. Henri persisted in seeing the bright side of things—there were but four flights of stairs—the room was, he really thought, a marvel of cheapness; the concierge's wife said so—there was a café opposite, so convenient for the meals of Monsieur—and then the view! Monsieur, being fresh from the country, would appreciate the fact that it was at the back of the house, where it had the quiet of a desert

and a view of the sky itself. Henri thought there was something very cheerful about so many gilt mirrors, and he pointed out to Jean that with the help of a few photographs of beautiful women and a chair, which he could hire for a trifle from Henri's nephew only two streets away, the room would have a distinguished air that would impress his uncle; in short (with a wink at the concierge's wife) he thought that Monsieur le Baron was to be congratulated; and now was there anything more that he, Henri, could do for him?

No, Jean thought there wasn't, and he was very grateful and shook hands so cordially with Henri, not forgetting either to give him ten francs, that Henri felt quite cross and bitter as he went downstairs; he almost refused the ten francs, and all the rest of the day he was sorry he had not refused them. However, he eased his conscience by speaking very handsomely of Jean to the concierge's wife, and telling her it would be well worth her while to look after Jean as if he were her own son; and he arranged that Jean should have the armchair for less than his nephew would have wished to charge.

As for Jean, left alone in the gathering dusk of the autumn afternoon, there was nothing more anyone could do for him, and he realized, as he had never done before, what a very great deal there was left for him to do for himself.

CHAPTER V

JEAN tried hard to be interested in his daily work. The day after Henri left him he went to the Bank with the greatest punctuality, and had in consequence to walk up and down the pavement for half an hour outside, before the door opened. It was a chastening experience and Jean did not repeat it. He worked with diligence and industry at the tasks the head clerk assigned him, and found that by so doing he had hours on his hands with nothing to do at all; he also annoyed his fellow clerks, and they told him so. Jean was an extremely good-natured person upon all indifferent subjects (and like all artists, most subjects were indifferent to him). His pride was far too deep-seated an affair ever to appear in the presence of his inferiors, so that he gave up any inordinate desire to distinguish himself among columns of figures and bundles of cheques, and wrote bars of music on all available scraps of paper instead. This amused Jean and appeased the clerks, and the business of the Bank, not being entirely in the hands of these young gentlemen, went on in much the same manner as before.

After a fortnight the clerks decided that as Jean had shown no nonsense about him, had borne ridicule with indifference and accepted tips of the trade with a clear desire to show himself amenable, he might, if he responded favourably, be introduced into their real life.

Jean was intensely anxious to see real life and without the remotest notion of what it meant, so he responded with

enthusiasm. He was invited to dine with three men at a café and go on to a few little things afterwards.

It was then that Jean made a most shocking discovery—he did not like life!

No! there was no doubt about it whatever; he was twenty-one, and in full possession of his faculties, and this presentment of existence so handsomely offered him by these junior clerks of the Banque de Paris et des Pays-Bas did not amuse him at all. It even appeared to him ugly, meaningless and vulgar. This then was what the Curé meant by temptation, and what the doctor meant by "life," and what his Aunt Anne would doubtless mean—a little sweepingly perhaps—by "sin." And it was this kind of thing which destroyed his father?

It could not help surprising Jean; and it did not occur to him that there are as many forms of one particular kind of temptation as there are shapes of one particular feature, and because you do not admire a snub nose there is still the possibility of submission to the shape of a perfect Greek. At first Jean thought that perhaps the world was right and he was wrong (this is a great admission for any youth to make) and that the only difficulty lay in amusement being an acquired taste. So without confiding to his fellow clerks how extremely he disliked their little parties (which were for the most part harmless enough and not more vulgar than the extremely small salaries at their disposal warranted) Jean set himself to acquire the missing flavour. He was very much in earnest about it, and he spent an awful evening trying to entertain a little lady, who sang at a café, and to whom he had been introduced as a great and enormous privilege the

evening before. The little lady had one idea of amusement and poor Jean had quite another. She wanted to attract attention, and it appeared that Jean did not. When at the end of the evening she got up on a table and danced, Jean would have liked to get under it and be no more seen.

It was then that he made his second decision. He saw that he was meant to be a hermit. It was quite probable that the lady would have agreed with him.

Jean set about altering his life as fast as possible; at twenty-one there is never any time to lose. So far his religion had been as natural as the air he breathed, but it had not been, so he owned himself, very practical. He had been born a good Catholic, as he had been born a gentleman, and he had considered his faith in the light of spiritual good manners. One fasted on Fridays and vigils and went to Mass on Sunday; it would have been extremely bad form and regrettably republican not to do so; still Jean felt that there were depths he had never plumbed. He told his Confessor this, and he pointed out to him that he was drawn to a higher life; he also added that he could not for a moment understand a taste for any other. The Confessor was an old man, he knew a good deal about life, and he listened very humbly to Jean. He saw that Jean was suffering from a feeling that the Church had hardly done its duty in permitting sin at this time of day to exist, and that something ought to be done about it at once. Jean explained to the Confessor that he thought the world, the flesh and the devil overrated as temptations, and if only the Church would show people how dull and vulgar all life that was not a direct spiritual vocation was, hermits would increase from that moment. The Confessor did not say that this, to him, would hardly be a desirable termination. He

was not at all a sarcastic Confessor, and he was very fond of young men.

“I think, perhaps,” he said rather cautiously, “you do not know all about it yet. There are”—he hesitated again; he seemed a painfully slow old man to Jean—“so many different kinds of things.” He finished very lamely, Jean thought.

“To me there are only two kinds of things,” said Jean firmly—“what is beautiful and what is not. I have chosen.” He expected the priest to say something more, something a little appreciative perhaps, but he only sighed. “Of course, other people may be different,” added Jean, who was afraid he might have sounded intolerant.

“But I do not think they are,” said his Confessor gently. “My dear son, I think we are all very much alike. I have lived a long while, and I have seen very few different people, and those who have sometimes thought themselves so have not always proved very wise.”

Jean let this pass, it did not sound to him very probable.

“But you approve of my desire, do you not, father?” he added with impatience; he was beginning to think he had not made a good choice of a Confessor.

“I do not think I know quite what it is,” said the priest, after a pause.

“I mean to join the Third Order of St. Francis, and, while endeavouring, for a year at least, to stay in the world, to be preparing myself possibly for a sterner vocation.” How proud and pleased the good Curé at home would have been if he could have heard Jean, and how disgusted the doctor! But

Jean's present auditor was neither pleased nor disgusted, nor even very much surprised.

"I should not join any Order yet if I were you," he answered. "You have told me that you are twenty-one—no, I should not join any Order; but for the rest I approve, my son, only——" The Confessor paused again.

"Yes, my father?" said Jean. He felt that every moment was wasted in which he was not leading the higher life, and he was impatient for the Confessor to give him some rules.

"Only," said the father at last, "I think we should all beware of spiritual pride, it is apt to weaken the mind. I fancy we cannot see very clearly what is right if we are too sure about what is wrong. I fear I express myself very badly."

Jean privately thought he did, but he could not very well say so; besides, he knew that he was in no danger from spiritual pride, he meant to be very humble and absolutely obedient, even to this rather foolish old man. It was a great sacrifice to Jean not to join the Third Order, but he never dreamed of doing so after his Confessor had advised him not to.

"If you can help it," added his Confessor, "do not make up your mind very much about anything else, just now."

"But do not you think it well to be definite, my father?" Jean asked, in great astonishment.

The old priest spoke quite firmly this time, it was the end of the interview.

"No, my son," he said. "I do not think it well to be very definite; I think it better to be obedient. We all know a great

deal—that is our danger; let us see that we do a little of it—this is our security.” And he dismissed Jean, to whom he had not given a single rule, at least Jean could not remember that he had.

CHAPTER VI

JEAN bore his new resolutions very easily at first; they filled up his days and they gave him an incentive, and for a time he did not come into contact with any other point of view.

"*Voyons*," the concierge's wife exclaimed to Henri, "you have sent us a saint. I am not the less careful of him on that account, you may imagine. For myself, I believe there is luck in such things. My husband is, as you know, a sceptic; he says that it will not last. Poor young man! I sometimes think to myself it is a little sad—so young and with so much to see, and always to be looking at Heaven!"

But Jean did not find it sad; he thought it was well to keep up his music—monks have been composers before now. So he spent all his spare time at the piano and bought the latest compositions of a famous Russian composer. One could hardly call his music strictly religious, perhaps, but Jean felt confident that it could be religiously applied. Then it occurred to him one day that he was a little selfish. Here he was, professedly conscious of a new truth, leading a splendid and invigorating life and making no attempt to share it. It was not that Jean wanted to preach; he was not a prig, even though he was very much in earnest; but he did want to do good and communicate, and he also wanted sympathy, but of this he was perhaps hardly aware. At twenty-one we are not likely to know very much about our own characters. We are too busy making them. Jean was extremely susceptible to sympathy. Appreciation and approval were like wings to his

efforts, even opposition made life easier to him than indifference.

He could not really enjoy being a hermit without someone to say that it was, if not a great success, at least an astonishing attempt, and so far Jean had not surprised anyone in Paris. It came to him one Sunday afternoon with a flash of inspiration, why should he not reveal his new way of life to Maurice Golaud? He was almost certain to be in Paris now; he had said he would, as a matter of course, come up for the winter, and it was already late in December. It was improbable that Maurice would at once desire to share Jean's austere existence, but he could discuss its charms with Maurice, and point out to him how disappointed he had been in what Maurice had called "life." Perhaps by this time Maurice was disappointed too. At any rate, it would be very jolly to see Maurice again. He ought to go and see Maurice, and he re-read the address. The name Mademoiselle Liane de Brances meant nothing at all to Jean. He did not know that she was a lovely French actress, almost of the first class. How should he? As a hermit he had never entered the theatre, and in his pre-hermit days his fellow clerks had introduced him chiefly to music halls. He did think that it was a pity he should have to find Maurice at this lady's address; he even thought of writing and arranging an appointment in his own room; but there was that fatal and entrapping confusion between desire and duty. Surely he ought not to waste any time in going to Maurice? He would waste no time—and he went.

Everything was different from what Jean had expected. To begin with, the maid did not think it necessary to inform Jean that Maurice was out; she knew her mistress to be alone

and in a bad temper, and in these circumstances she had experienced before the extreme efficacy of a young man. He acted upon Liane's nerves like a sedative, and Liane's servants made a point of considering her nerves. So she took Jean's card straight to her mistress and left him to make what he could of a fashionable actress's boudoir, while he waited.

Maurice had often spoken to Jean of his "little place" in Paris, but Jean in his wildest dreams had never imagined a little place like this. The room was not very large, but it was extraordinarily light and gay. Great bowls full of scented flowers stood everywhere. Signed photographs of names that had reached even to St. Jouin were flung carelessly about, exquisite small ivories and dainty *bonbonnières* were set out on little tables. By the delicately curtained windows stood a screen of very fine old miniatures, and on a long, narrow table was a valuable collection of old snuff-boxes.

Everywhere were mirrors—long mirrors, short mirrors, round mirrors, oval mirrors; the tables and chairs were white and gold, and here and there on the walls hung toneless Japanese prints, pale grey, or white with wavy black lines.

There was only one painting in the room—it hung over the mantelpiece, and after Jean had looked at it he saw nothing else.

It was a painting of a woman. She seemed almost to speak as she leaned with bent head out of the picture. There was no smile on her face—lovely and blooming and intensely gay, there was about her an enormous and unlimited satisfaction. She seemed, as it were, clothed in a dauntless confidence. There she sat with uplifted shining

eyes, waiting for her opportunity, and relentlessly competent to take it.

Jean heard a faint sound behind him, and turning, he saw the original of the picture.

Liane was fifteen years older now, and she was no longer waiting for her opportunity.

She was a tall woman, whose figure already required care; she had thick coils of magnificent chestnut hair, much of which was still her own.

Her arched eyebrows gave a questioning, mysterious look to her wide grey eyes with their deep bisque shadows. She had the most beautiful mouth in Paris, and she had been famous for her smile. Poets had sung of it, artists had tried to paint it, lovers had sworn they would die for it. They had not found that necessary, but many of them had found it remarkably expensive.

Ten years ago that smile of Liane's was the talk of Paris, but perhaps rather too many other things had been talked of since. It was by now a little blurred, tightened by repetition, and hardened by inevitable usage, still even now it was a work of art, and, without the stage, it would have afforded Liane a handsome income. It was perhaps no mean test of a hermit.

Jean stood watching her with a hypnotized air; it was a great tribute to Liane, but as an attitude in a Parisian boudoir it was a trifle awkward.

Poor Jean! How beautiful this woman was,—and he had never seen a beautiful woman before.

Liane hardly seemed to move as she approached him; her figure glided through the room like the idle wing of a bird in slow flight across a summer sky. It had taken a *danseuse* two years to teach Liane how to walk.

She was dressed in a pale dove-grey tea-gown, with a knot of violets at her breast. It was not surprising that Maurice admired her more even than his own imperially cut and waxed moustache; nevertheless, he had gone to the *courses* this afternoon without her, and Liane de Brances did not like being left alone.

"*Vous êtes le bien-venu*, Monsieur," said Liane, in the modulated musical tone which she had learned for the theatre. It was not her natural voice, and she looked at Jean with a soft enclosing look which seemed to shut out the world.

No woman is very dangerous to a man unless she is a little self-conscious, and Liane was so completely self-conscious that she could afford to be perfectly natural. She knew herself as an artist knows his picture or a captain his ship.

"I think you have fallen from heaven!" she said, sinking into a *chaise longue* and patting the cushions left and right of her into a suitable background. "Or if you have come from the other place that will be more amusing still! Think of it, Maurice has gone to the races, and left me alone in the rain! It was clothes of course—the clothes of a woman, Monsieur, are her tragedy. *Mon Dieu!* the life one leads! I can assure you, it is a slavery, and yet what can we do? For if one does not strain every nerve to succeed, it becomes a massacre! I believe I may truly say that every woman in the company

would murder me with a new costume to-morrow if I did not put myself in the hands of the greatest tyrant in Paris. You know Madame Berthe, of course? She dresses half the world, and we must attempt to accommodate her. I was, then, at her house, if you will believe me, at ten o'clock this morning—an hour when I am never awake—I must have been driven there in my sleep, I fancy, and if I have caught a cold and ruined my voice, one sees very well why! And after I had sat there an hour—an hour!—and I am without exception the busiest woman in Paris—I am sent a message that she cannot see me until three! I assure you that for two pins I would have burst into her private room and destroyed all the costumes within sight! But I was handicapped by thoughts of the future; I restrained myself, and I return here furious. Maurice appears. I cannot accompany him to the *courses*; instead I have to go back to that infamous woman, or she won't have the second act ready at all; as it is, I shall have to run in and out in pins. And they accuse us of being gay. What a calumny! No housewife works as I do. I have three parts a mile long to learn for next week, and I haven't looked at one of them! Costumes! Costumes! And then a silly author appears at lunch expecting me to know his twaddle by heart and praise him for it. Oh la! la! the vanity of these men who expect gratitude in return for parts only fit for a sick crow! You have seen *La Fin de l'Amour* of course? I ask you frankly, how do I appear in it? You like it, *hein*? I assure you I can do better than that; but one is ruined of course by the rest of the cast. I told Colin so yesterday—the *premier* is so careless, he forgets half his words and apparently he imagines that the front of the stage was meant only for him. The less said of the women the better, it is a marvel to me

they are not hissed off the stage. But my public are always good to me. You like it?”

How was Jean to explain that he had never heard of it, that even if he had, he should have avoided it, that this lady’s whole profession appeared to him to be wrong?

He hesitated, but he did not explain; he said:

“Then, Mademoiselle, you are an actress?”

Liane flung back her head and laughed and laughed.

“Oh, *Mon Dieu*! An actress—I?” she cried, when she could speak. “But do you not know me, then? Have you never heard of me? I am Liane de Brances? *Ma foi*, I did not expect to have to explain myself at this time of day! I am not a vain woman, but, Monsieur, Paris knows me!” And she dropped her eyes and lifted them again, with her head bent like the girl in the picture. She spoke no more than the truth. Paris did know her.

“Maurice told me you came from the country,” she added. “But it appears I had over-estimated what the country amuses itself with. Perhaps you have never seen an actress before?”

“Oh yes, I have,” said Jean, flushing a little, “but I have not before had the pleasure——” and he broke off, for Liane was laughing again.

“I am the first, then?” she exclaimed, with caressing mockery. “Really the first? And you are not afraid to meet a lady who is to be seen on the posters? *Quel courage*, Monsieur!”

Here was Jean's opportunity presented to him afresh. Now was the time for him to tell Liane that he had come to see Maurice, and Maurice alone, and that his views of life were so different from her own as to make all future communications impossible between them.

Jean saw himself telling Liane this, he saw the incredulous amusement, the offended dignity, and his own ignominious retreat; and then, after all, would it be *right* to leave her like this? Perhaps if they became friends she might listen more sympathetically to his point of view. It never did to be premature. If he had but known it, this was his one opportunity of escape—women like Liane do not give a second opportunity. But he was fated never to tell her his point of view. He hesitated and was lost.

"Now you must make up for all you have not known, Monsieur," said Liane, with her enchanting smile, "and I myself will teach you."

It was a little difficult for Liane to talk to Jean, still for another quarter of an hour she tried. She really made an effort, because she was grateful to him for the passionate adoration in his eyes. It renewed her youth and gave her a feeling of ease and comfort. It was the sensation of a tired swimmer when the breeze drives back the salt water from his mouth, and nerves him afresh for the struggle. Liane was thirty-five, and lately the salt waters of life had risen threateningly close to those still perfect lips. In the end she knew she must yield to age, and she liked Jean because he made the end seem further off.

She asked him about his uncle, whom everybody knew and who was so charming; she asked him about his aunt,

who of course was charming too, but whom unfortunately Liane had not happened to meet.

She was interested, to the point of stifling a yawn, in the Banque de Paris et des Pays-Bas; and where Jean lived and what he thought of Paris. It was rather like talking in letters of the alphabet to him instead of using civilized words.

But behind the talk she was busily thinking. Who was it Jean reminded her of so much? Someone she had known very well, whose little habits and tricks of talking were familiar to her; she must remember, and yet the name would not come back to her mind. Then her eyes fell on Jean's hands and she started, they were narrow, well-shaped hands with long fingers and a wide gap between the thumb and the hand, and they were exactly like the hands of a musician—a musician whom Liane would never forget—the only real figure in her life, perhaps. Certainly the only man for whom she had really cared, and oh! how he had cared for Liane! It was long before she was famous, or it would never have done at all. He was poor and struggling and the most unpractical person on earth; he had no idea of what was due to a woman, but he loved fiercely, with the wild, unappeasable hunger of the soul which Liane never attempted to satisfy. Still he had made her laugh and cry, and in the end he had made her famous; because he killed himself for her. It was all a mistake really—it came of his taking things so seriously. He never had any *souplesse* about him, and men who will not bend, break. She had only made an appointment to meet a friend; it was certainly unfortunate that he should happen to hear of it, and then he had promptly and publicly shot himself in her presence, and Liane became the talk of Paris. Through it she was offered the engagement

which gave her her great opportunity. Certainly he was not a man to forget. Liane smiled a little as she thought of him, not cruelly at all, but with a feeling of grateful security, and amusement at her own power. She had many rivals on the stage, but she did not think that any woman had ever made men feel so much. She was a queen of the emotions. She leaned forward and laid her soft, perilous fingers on Jean's.

"You have a musician's hands," she said. Jean did not attempt to return the pressure of her hand; it would, he felt, have been taking advantage of her heavenly kindness.

"I am not yet a musician," he said, "but it is true that is what I want to be. It is the thing I love best and understand most in life."

Had he already forgotten his new vocation? It would have astounded Jean to know that he had.

Liane considered; she could not talk to him any more, and he was obviously unfitted at present for any other form of amusement; perhaps he could play, she was really fond of music.

"Play to me then," she said very gently. Jean drew in his breath. Play to her! Oh, if he could! He who was so little accustomed to play to anybody, how dared he play to her—to the exquisite and angelic human being whom merely to look at and speak to was a delicious and mysterious fever?

"Do you—do you really want me to?" he asked. For of course, if she really wanted him to, he must! Liane smiled.

"Well, yes," she said. "I really want you to, Monsieur. Do you know 'Les Jeux d'Eaux,' that has an especial appeal to me, or better still, Debussy's 'Les Jardins sous la Pluie?'"

“I don’t know either of them,” said Jean.

Liane thought him an idiot.

“Play, then, what you will,” she said, and resignedly wondered if she could safely light a cigarette, but she decided to wait. However, she leaned back on the *chaise longue* luxuriously and closed her eyes. Unless he played too badly she could perhaps go to sleep.

Jean found himself trembling all over when he rose to go over to the piano. Liane had talked to him so cleverly that it had not appeared to him that he had failed to amuse her. On the contrary, he had enjoyed their conversation intensely. Elizabeth was the most sympathetic woman he had ever met, but her conversation was not nearly so interesting as Liane’s. But music! music was different; here he was really afraid to fail, because he knew what good music was, and he knew nothing about amusing conversation. In half an hour’s time he felt he would be eternally disgraced in his own eyes and in Liane’s. Then he began to play some of the Russian music he had just been learning by heart in his rooms as a hermit. In a moment he realized that the music expressed Liane, expressed the wonder of her, the sacred beauty, the incredible force and joy! He was not nervous any more after that, the music became a communication between them, and he let himself go. Jean’s music was an original and instinctive note. He had spoken the truth when he had told Liane it was the only thing for which he cared. It was his only personal channel of expression, roughened by inexperience and without the bell-like clarity of disciplined practice, but it was an authentic, living talent, and it shook the artist in Liane wide awake. She sat up suddenly and opened her eyes. Who

was this young man who was playing to her? This quite ordinary, inarticulate young man, with his *cachet* of *fils de famille* written all over him? The little Baron D'Ucelles, who oughtn't by all the rules of the game to do anything better than anyone else?

He had caught at her heart and was holding it with those hands of the master; he was making her think and feel and forcing her back into the currents of life. The notes flowed from his fingers like fire and dew, his vivid impetuosity awaked and astonished her. He had come out of the world where, to Liane, men were as trees walking; and he had become a distinct value. When he stopped playing and came back to her, she looked straight in his eyes.

"*Bon!*" she cried, "you deceived me, my friend. I thought you were a young gentleman, it appears you are an artist. What, may I ask in the name of all the blessed saints, are you doing in the Bank?"

"Ah!" cried Jean, exhausted but triumphant. "Then you really think I can play? You really believe in me?" Liane looked at her watch.

"I have listened to you for an hour, my child," she said; "do you not call that belief in you?"

"Oh, but Mademoiselle, I am ashamed, horrified—I have played to you for an hour, a thousand pardons!"

"A thousand nothings of the kind," interrupted Liane impatiently. "We drop all this now, you know, you and I—we are artists, and artists, as you probably don't know, are very simple people when they are together and attend strictly to business. You will, of course, throw up this performance at

the Bank to-morrow. You had better come here on Sunday at ten o'clock (the evening, you know, *mon petit*; nothing is done at ten o'clock in the morning but the saying of one's prayers, unless, indeed, one is under the tyranny of a dressmaker). Then you must play to Cartier; he will take you in hand, I fancy. I will have some other men here too; this affair of yours must be well looked into—and fancy that that *crétin* of a Maurice hadn't the sense to tell me you were an artist, and there I was stiffening my jaws with the rubbish of an afternoon call."

Liane spoke to him simply, plainly, and like a man. The awe of her exquisite manner fell away. She no longer seemed to Jean like a mysterious and potent being from another world; but he had no time to regret the destruction of his illusion. For the first time in his life he was talking to a real comrade. Bliss had come out of solitude, and submitted joyously to the reinforcement of humanity. The names of great musicians flashed between them. Liane flung her experiences into his hands and drew out of him in return his ambitions and desires; these at present, it seemed, did not include retirement into a monastery or the rules of the Third Order.

"You are one of the emotional players," she said to him. "Not the great, broad interpreters who give you the picked bones of a musician's work—but one of their own brothers, who fire you afresh with their laughter and their tears. You will play Chopin most, I fancy. Schumann and Grieg, and the Russian men—our French moderns too, of course, Debussy above all; for there is so much dream in you—but Cartier won't let you specialize yet. What he'll give you is Bach and Mozart; he'll stuff it into you by the yard. You must meet

some singers, too, and play for them. Often one must begin this way."

In the middle of their talk the door opened and Maurice Golaud stood there, tired and wet from the *courses*, but looking at them nevertheless with curious amusement in his eyes.

Jean stood up half embarrassed, with the burden of his youth upon him, and as he did so he saw Liane's face change; it was as if she had covered herself subtly and suddenly with a veil of intangible gauze, the artist had retreated once more. She was the beautiful woman with the lure in her eyes. Her lips parted, and a glance ran between her and Maurice which seemed to Jean like quick flame. The smile in Maurice's eyes deepened.

"Ah, you have found us at last, *mon ami*?" Maurice said to Jean. "For my part, I was fancying you must have picked up some pretty amusements elsewhere, since you have been in Paris nearly a month before looking us up. You should have been at the *courses* this afternoon; it was really not half bad. No, it wouldn't have amused you, *ma chérie*, no one was killed and no one was ruined, and the ladies' clothes looked *passés* in the rain. You really did better for yourself remaining here, and entertaining my dear old Jean."

Liane smiled, but she did not say anything. She no longer looked at Jean.

He got up to go; they both of them urged him to remain, though Maurice went to the door with him in a bland cordiality of farewell.

“Well, and now you have found your way here you must come often,” he said. “I can see already that Liane likes you.”

It was not easy for Jean to explain to Maurice about his vocation now, but Maurice was, after all, only another man, and Jean was not a coward.

“This is not the kind of life I have been living,” he began lamely. “You see, Maurice, I am bound to say so, I don’t like the—the ways of Paris.”

“No?” said Maurice cheerfully. “Well, that is a pity! Still, if you have been leading a dull life and not mixing with clever people like ourselves—one understands. We must alter all that, you know; I’ll talk to Liane about it. *Au revoir*, Jean.”

The rain had stopped, and for the first time Jean discovered a charm in the streets of Paris. There was something mysterious and beautiful in the air to-night. The faces of the women in the crowd seemed as fresh as summer flowers, the lights along the Seine wound their way into the heart of the city like a string of fallen stars.

Jean held his head up as he walked; he felt an indefinable sense of youth and vigour in his veins.

He noticed that one or two of the women as he passed looked at him; and he no longer felt like a ghost.

After dinner he went back to his rooms, but he could not stay there. He was dissatisfied with himself and he did not want to think. He went to the window and looked out. It was ten o’clock; if he was going to early Mass to-morrow as usual, he had better go to bed.

La Fin de l'Amour was on at the Odéon. Jean had never been to the Odéon, but he knew where it was. If he went at once he would be in time to see Liane in the last act.

After all, he had decided nothing, he had taken no vows. How wrong it was of the old Confessor not to let him join the Third Order! If he were living under rule now—then for one moment Jean faced his own soul and would not lie to himself. "If I were living under rule now," he said beneath his breath, "I should break the rule." After that he thought no more about the higher life.

"*Bon!*" said the concierge's wife, as she saw him swing off down the street. "One knows very well when they begin to walk like that what has happened to them; but that will not make him better off; one must be careful now about the rent," and she sighed. She was really at heart rather sad to lose her little saint; her husband, she knew, would triumph over her.

For the concierge's wife, too, realized that Jean had ceased to be a hermit.

CHAPTER VII

JEAN did see Liane in the last act of *La Fin de l'Amour*, and Liane saw him.

Up to that moment she had no very definite intentions about Jean. She thought if she wasn't too busy she would really give him an "evening" to meet a few artists. She was good-natured and liked to do inexpensive good turns, and if there was really anything remarkable in Jean's powers it would decidedly prove something of a *réclame* for Liane herself. But it had never occurred to her to regard him more personally. Now as she looked over the footlights and saw in one of the front stalls the fierce ardour of his eyes, another idea occurred to her. She was extremely sentimental and not a little superstitious. "My first musician brought me luck," she said to herself, "why not try the second? It is of course an extravagance. He has no money and no importance, but one never knows what may come of a good action."

From this reflection it will be seen that Liane's moral code was a trifle perverted. Still she had a moral code, as most of us have, and Liane's took the form of occasionally doing things that did not pay her. It almost seemed to Jean that Liane's smile was specially for him; perhaps it was. The next evening he came in time for the first act of *La Fin de l'Amour* though he could not again afford the stalls. It was all very wonderful to Jean, but it soon became merged and forgotten in the central wonder of Liane.

To Liane acting was a business, but it was a business brought to such perfection that it became an art. It is not

enough in Paris for an actress to be beautiful, she must also act, and Liane on the stage was a very tremendous power indeed.

It seemed inconceivable to Jean that he should ever have had the privilege of words with her in private; his love became an effortless, impassioned dream. It was no use his thinking about her, so of course he thought of nothing else. Then one night he actually received a message from behind the scenes:

"Won't you come and see me? Liane de Brances."

He followed her messenger, though he still believed there was some mistake. Liane could not have seen him, and if she had, why should she remember him? It was five days since he had called upon her, but it had seemed like five years to Jean. The Odéon is a very big theatre—old-fashioned and given up to long passages and bare rooms; it lacks the exquisite arrangements of the first artists' boudoir, the colour schemes and artistic furniture of the more modern theatres, but to Jean it all seemed magnificent enough, and Liane's room of white and gold, stiflingly hot and brilliantly lighted, with a small dressing-room leading out of it, astounded him by its importance. Nothing could be too important for her, but he had never known that artists' dressing-rooms would be the least like this. Liane was giving the little finishing touches to her third-act costume. The dresser was still in her room, passing her all the things she might want, and receiving a running fire of dispassionate abuse for her pains.

"What animals these women are!" said Liane, giving Jean her left hand, while she touched up the thick bisque of her arched eyebrows. "They are born clumsy, awkward,

infuriating—now you may go," she added to the impassive dresser, "and don't forget to come in time for the next act; if I have to ring twice for you again, you shall be sent to paint the clown's cheek in the next pantomime! Well, Monsieur Jean, do you realize that to-morrow is Sunday and that I wish you to meet all those grand music-makers I told you about at ten o'clock, *chez moi*; and how do you find *La Fin de l'Amour*? I perceive you have been here often enough; am I to congratulate its author on having at last found his public? The same piece five nights running—that I call faithfulness! And it is evident that no woman has influenced you, for you have never been seen in the green room!"

"I have not come to see the play," said Jean quite simply. "I have come to see you." He looked a little frightened at his boldness, but Liane only laughed, and ran a powder-puff lightly over her cheek and lips. "And I shall go on coming to see you," he added firmly.

"But of course; it would be dreadful if you stopped!" said Liane, "that would be the end of the compliment; but does the front of the house satisfy you?"

Jean trembled. He could hardly believe his ears, but his eyes were more faithful witnesses, and he saw that Liane was still smiling.

"Not now," he interposed, "not now, Liane."

An electric bell rang out with a terrible persistent sound, close to Jean's ear. Liane caught up a soft gauze wrap that lay on a chair.

"I must be off," she said placidly. "*A demain, mon petit*; run away now, this passage to your right. But yes, you may

kiss my hand if you like. *Au revoir!*" And Liane sailed swiftly off, leaving Jean to find his way back to his seat in the house, dizzy and stunned with emotion.

He did not ask himself what she meant; he did not ask himself what he meant. There are times when we do not care to look too closely at our intentions. He only said to himself: "I shall see her again," and it appeared to him as if the entire theatre and the whole of Paris could read this splendid promise in his eyes. A week ago and the thought of actually seeing—and more tremendous still—playing before *des hommes arrivés* in the musical world would have absorbed his every thought. But at present he did not greatly consider these gentlemen—he was to see Liane again, and not once only. And every word she had said in their short interview wrote itself across his brain and heart like fire.

Liane's Sunday evenings were famous all over Paris. She was in the habit of gathering together a brilliant circle of writers, musicians, artists, and actors. Maurice was seldom made particularly welcome on these occasions. Liane preferred to keep her *intimes* separate, but she could not very well refuse to allow him to attend Jean's début, so that when Jean arrived the first figure his eyes fell on was that of his old friend, trying to play the experienced host and man of the world to a group of men who were more successful in ignoring him. They did not want Maurice to put them at their ease, for they were at their ease already, and they still less cared to be entertained, for they were more than capable of entertaining and being entertained by each other. Liane was dressed in a close-fitting gown of sea-green satin, without a single ornament. She was not in the very best of tempers, but that hardly appeared for the moment, though Maurice, who

saw that it would probably manifest itself to some purpose in the future, felt extremely nervous and kept pressing earnest offers of food and drink upon everyone he could get to listen to him.

"Ah, my dear fellow!" he cried, with real delight, when Jean was announced. "I am so glad to see you. Come here! come here! You needn't be alarmed with all these big-wigs; they are very good friends of mine and Liane's—and I'll introduce them all to you presently. Come into the dining-room and have a drink—you can smoke here also, you know."

Liane's velvety voice cut across Maurice's bluff hospitality with merciless softness.

"Monsieur D'Ucelles will stay here with me, Maurice," she said gently. There was a little silence for a moment. Maurice bit his lips and escaped into the dining-room by himself. He was relieved later by the appearance of two actress friends of Liane's who greatly preferred his company to hers. At another time Liane would have resented this, but at present it suited her purpose, and she let it pass. Even the attraction of other women can be useful sometimes.

"Here is the Baron D'Ucelles," said Liane, after Maurice's disappearance. "He really plays, you know, and you must listen to him, *comme de bons enfants*. Afterwards," she said smilingly to Jean, "you shall hear their names, but not until you have made your own. Have I not put that prettily?" And as all Liane's friends were *bons enfants* and quite acknowledged Liane to be one too, they prepared to listen.

Jean, seeing the keen, impassive attention on the faces before him, felt physically incapacitated to move. There were no young men present, the youngest could not have been under forty. Life and struggle and success were written in the lines of their faces. Liane had more than kept her word to him, these were all *des hommes arrivés*—the picked brains of Paris, which is the brain of the world. Liane glanced at Jean impatiently, but one of the men near her came forward and put his hand on Jean's shoulder. He looked quite as confident and sure of himself as the other men did, but he looked something else too, he looked confident and sure of Jean.

"We've all of us been through this, you know," he said, with a charming smile. "It's deuced uncomfortable, of course, but it doesn't last; nothing does, you know. Come over by the window, and when they've all forgotten what we're about, you can make a start." Jean obeyed him mechanically. The other men nodded, and began to discuss with neat, finished phrases the last great exhibition of Van Gogh; it seemed that they knew all about pictures. The room was full of smoke and soft light. Liane lay back on her *chaise longue*, just as she had done when Jean played to her a week ago, only this time her eyes were open; she kept them away from Jean, though, for she was annoyed with him for not playing at once.

This did not have as devastating an effect upon Jean as it might have had—for once Jean had succeeded in forgetting Liane, as a man will always forget a woman when he is face to face with the thing to be done. He could not so easily get away from the piano. He looked hesitatingly at his companion, Jacques Cartier.

“Our good Liane tells me you are fond of Russian music, it seems,” he said. Then Jean, hardly knowing what he was doing, found himself on the music-stool at last. “I, too, am very fond of it; we go to the Russians, we Frenchmen, to learn what is primitive again—for ourselves we have none of that *genre* left, you know. We can only create complications, and complications are a purely modern note, don’t you think so?”

“I don’t know,” faltered Jean stupidly. He was trying to think of the first bar of anything; it seemed to him as if there were no first bars left. Then he began to play; he was not quite sure how it happened, because he didn’t consciously remember the first bar even then, but it appeared as if his fingers took volition into themselves and began without him. There was an instant lull in the conversation. Cartier leaned forward a little, listening. They all listened as men in Paris listen, with ruthless criticism and quite deadly lucidity of brain. Jean played nervously and unequally at first, but he soon began to gather strength out of the very thinness of the sound, and at last he made his attack, stung to desperation by the fear of failure, and flung himself headlong into the music, dragging out from his inmost being his own authentic note.

Then the listening artists nodded across Liane to each other. “She has found someone, the good girl,” their eyes said; and when he finished they attacked him with one voice.

They pointed out that he couldn’t play a chord; that that wasn’t the way to strike a note; they assured him that his style was feeble and that his conceptions wanted training. As for Jacques Cartier, he was the most merciless of all.

“What you want,” he explained, “is brain, pure brain, Monsieur; feeling runs about on the surface like a dog with a tin can tied to his tail. Anyone can hear him howl, yes, but that obtained, what follows? With brain it is different, that is walking about inside of yourself, and arriving at something.”

“Practice is what you want,” said an old man on the other side of Liane. “Practise eight hours a day; you were born with velvet in those finger-tips of yours; practise till one feels the steel behind them.”

Then they all began together again, and pointed out to Jean that he wouldn’t do at all as he was, and that he must take instant steps towards becoming different, and Jean was overwhelmed with delight, because he saw that they really took him seriously, and that they meant that he could one day do something after all, and behind them was Liane smiling at him, as if she were pleased (as indeed she really was). The hubbub of sound drew Maurice and the actresses into the room again, and then Monsieur Cartier got on to the piano-stool and played an imitation of Jean, just to show him where his faults were, and it was quite screamingly funny, and not at all unkind, because everyone took Jean into the joke and chaffed him unmercifully in the jolliest, friendliest way, as if they were all schoolboys together, but none of them praised him and said flattering things. They took him far too seriously for that. Maurice clapped him on the back, and the actresses made eloquent eyes at him, when they thought Liane couldn’t see them. And Liane found out, and there would have been terrible trouble, only that Liane discovered that Jean hadn’t known they were in the room; how could he look at anyone but her? Which made everyone begin

laughing except the two actresses, who were naturally a little annoyed.

And Jean was so glad, so relieved, and so bewildered with their friendliness that for the first time in his life he got very drunk indeed, and Liane and the two other ladies, with the help of Maurice, who had at last begun to enjoy himself, had to put him to bed in the flat, where he fell happily asleep to the sound of immoderate laughter, and it was no wonder that the head clerk spoke to the Director about Jean's appearance at twelve o'clock on the following morning.

It was really a very happy time if one swallowed the bad moments quickly and ran on fast enough into the good ones. Monsieur Jacques Cartier gave Jean lessons every Sunday morning for nothing, and the other men were always sending him tickets when they were going to perform, and often asking him to play for them. It was a fascinating world, but none of it meant money, and all of it meant life. So that at the end of just six months in Paris, neither the Curé nor the doctor would have recognized Jean. Miss Prenderghast might have done so, because she had made up her mind that Jean was going to change very much, and that all of it would be for the worse.

CHAPTER VIII

LIANE was not fond of preliminaries. She considered that life was short and that love was infinitely shorter, and she thought that the best plan with both was to live in the present.

Jean perplexed and amused her; he adored her ardently and blindly, and yet he seemed reluctant to give himself up to the elements which drew him. He was caught off his feet, but he struggled and fought with the power that held him. He had scruples and he wanted time. Liane gave him no time and she laughed immoderately at his scruples.

"You do not deceive your friend, *mon ami*," she said one night as they were returning from the theatre. "If there is any deception on hand, it is certainly my own. But, I assure you, your friend Maurice does not consider me a nun, as you appear to do. I do not know that I have given him, or you either, any reason to suppose that I find myself at home in a convent! He is a man of the world, the good Maurice, at least he wishes to be thought so. *Bon!* he must accept the world. It is doubtless as the good God made it, and he did not make it expressly for the *jeune fille*! In Paris we get out of it what we can. Maurice is the size of his income, neither larger nor smaller, and I give him his money's worth, rest assured! Why should I give him more? He is not an object of charity! For myself I am an artist; I should bore myself prettily if I sat and pined all day for your little man of the world! I need a friend who is also an artist. It is you to-day; I remind you, though

you do not like it, that there have been yesterdays, and that if you are not very good, there will be to-morrows."

Jean closed his eyes. He hated what Liane was saying, and he thought if he shut his eyes he might not see her words. He loved Liane best when he was away from her and she could not disfigure herself in his eyes; when he was in his dark and lonely little room, and could feel a passionate impatience and disgust with Maurice, his old hero—who had long ago ceased to be a hero in Paris, where young man at twenty-five, with moustaches, self-importance, and a sense of life were not particularly rare.

But when Jean found himself with Liane in Maurice's motor, he was apt to feel the disgust and impatience with himself, instead of with Maurice, and he was far too proud to like to feel himself to blame. Liane saw this quite plainly, even though she did not understand it. To-night she had decided to cure it. She laid her hand on his arm.

"*Alors*," she whispered, "is it for me to tell you to profit by to-day? I give you all that an artist should give an artist; but, Jean, that is not all I have to give!"

Jean's eyes were drawn to her face; she knew that was the way to make him forget all inconvenient ideas; and he forgot them. He looked at her and everything vanished, the cold of the night around them, the flashing lights, the swift, sharp cries of the streets, the softened whirr and buzz of the passing cars, the houses, those sheltered screens of human life, standing between them and the sky—all these outer things, and all the inner things too, Jean's scruples and his struggles, his reluctance, and the safeguard of his pride, failed and fell away from him, under the spell of Liane's

eyes. A hard compulsion came upon him; at that moment he ceased to worship Liane, he wanted her. He ceased to reflect; he could not speak. He put out his hand and caught hers. He hurt her, but she did not wince; like the girl in the picture, she met his demand with serene, satisfied eyes, waiting for inevitable surrender.

"Maurice is away to-night," she whispered. Jean followed her into the flat without a word.

The fortnight that followed Jean never cared greatly to recall. There was still the Bank in the daytime; sometimes he fell asleep over his work, but his fellow clerks were very kind; they woke him up and said to each other: "See how he has begun to live, this little one!"

When he was roused, Jean used to shiver and feel horribly sad; at these times he wished that he had never seen Liane; a fierce thirst for loneliness, and freedom for his soul, possessed him; he hungered to shut out Liane's face and get back to his piano, his empty room, and the liberty of his dreams. The long, dull day cramped and stiffened him, and the money that ran through his hands seemed to his nervous fancy to stain them like an unclean thing. It was as if in its monotonous reiteration it spelt Liane. It was for her that it came there, for her that it increased, and then ran back into the streets of Paris, a golden, sordid stream. The sound of the money made Jean yearn for the sound and smell of the earth at St. Jouin, for the clean air and sweet loneliness of the woods. But when evening fell and the lights came out, and Paris awoke, when the streets filled with the stir of a well-dressed, living throng, then Jean's heart quickened, and the Bank and St. Jouin, and even the piano and its dreams, sank

back into a hidden place in his soul, and he became the happiest and gayest young man in Paris, inconceivably loved by the most splendid woman in the world.

It was not possible that he could wholly succeed in hiding from Liane his intense separation of spirit. She knew, indeed, extremely little about spirit, but on the other hand she knew a great deal about lovers, and it did not escape her that Jean had, at moments, the power of estranging himself from her possession. At the end of the fortnight Maurice returned from the provinces, and Jean explained to Liane in her dressing-room at the Odéon that he had met Maurice.

"Well," said Liane impatiently. "I do not see anything very extraordinary in that. I have also met him, *mon cher*; what then?"

"But you must not meet him again, Liane, not now," said Jean quietly. "You say the flat is your own, so I shall not ask you to leave it, but you must not allow Maurice to visit you there again."

Liane was silent a moment from sheer astonishment. It was true that with a desire to spare Jean's feelings she had told him the flat was her own. It was equally true that it was not—not in the sense in which she had led Jean to believe it to be.

"Must not, Jean!" she repeated, laying down her powder-puff and regarding him with blank amazement. "Are you mad? What has this poor Maurice done, then, that I am not to receive him?"

"Liane! Liane!" cried Jean, taking both her hands in his. "Why do you pretend that you do not understand me? You

do! you do! you do!”

Liane withdrew her hands and returned to her powder-puff.

“You are absurd,” she said coldly. “Do not enrage me with your virtues from the provinces. I will not be taught how to live by a chicken whose shell I have just broken. I shall receive whom I like when I like. One would think, Monsieur, that I was your wife. Let me hear no more of these impertinences!”

Jean went to the window and opened it; something in his brain seemed to be burning to escape; he felt hot, savage, and reckless. No, she was not his wife; he supposed if she were he might have trusted her, he might have respected her. As it was, he did not, he hated her. All his heart seemed filled with a hard exasperation. When he turned to face her again, his eyes were fierce.

“I told him he could not come,” he said; “if you receive him you do it at your own risk.”

“You told Maurice—told him he could not come?” Liane gasped.

“I told him you must choose between us,” Jean continued doggedly. “I know he has all the things I have not got. I have nothing to offer you—yes, that is true. You see me here, Liane; how much do you suppose I have in my pocket? I think I have three francs. Well, it is all I shall have till the end of the month. Maurice is, I believe, rich; but there is one thing I have which I will not give up, and that is my pride. Now which is it to be, tell me. If it is Maurice, I go!”

Liane contrived to stare at him for a moment without speaking. She could say a good deal, but she was not going to say any of it at present. Jean with his ardent eyes full of fire and tears charmed her jaded senses. He was a new experience, she valued him. As for Maurice, that was another story. She could, she fancied, make some arrangement about Maurice. He would not cry for the moon, and she could manage for him to have something short of that commodity. As far as Jean was concerned, it was quite unnecessary that he should know anything about her arrangements. The blank look passed out of her eyes, she opened her arms to him and he knelt beside her, a child in her hands, trembling with distress at his own temerity.

"Only trust me, Jean," she whispered. "You do trust me?"

"You won't see him, Liane?"

"Selfish little boy, to please you then—no."

Jean gave a long sigh of relief. Where was his hatred now? His bitter antagonism? that feeling in his heart of remorseless hardness? It seemed impossible that they had ever existed and incredible that they should ever exist again; but even now they were only hidden, like the sharp teeth of rocks covered for the moment by the rush of the incoming tide.

Liane carried out a suitable arrangement, and Jean believed that she had obeyed him; it made him extraordinarily humble and tender with her; he could not do enough to show his gratitude; and Liane was not always easy to serve, she required so much and she had a most terrible temper. Jean set himself to please her with an almost

feminine gentleness and tact. He did not ask from her refined sensibilities or quick perceptions. He called her to himself a great artist, and he made himself believe that this excused everything.

He was very young and he loved her, and the young cannot love without the divine fire. They must look for their vine to bring forth grapes, and when it brings forth wild grapes they shut their eyes.

They will believe in beauty though they must go blind to keep their vision; they would rather enter into the kingdom of heaven maimed than know it is not the kingdom of heaven.

Jean persisted in believing in Liane in spite of Liane, but sometimes she made it very hard for him.

"There is still an arrangement we must make," she said to him one day. "I cannot have anyone going about with me who is dressed like a piano-tuner. You carry yourself well, it is true. You have the good little air which says: 'I own myself,' but that is not enough when you are with me. It is necessary that you show a great deal more importance, you must, in short, look as if you owned me! and for that, *mon cher*, you will require clothes. I cannot put a placard on your back—'*I beseech you, here is a man who is about to become a great musician; refrain from regarding his cravat!*' And I will not be seen with a nobody! In Paris it is necessary to have a note, a tone, to express one's self in such a way that the world cannot readily overlook you."

Jean looked dogged, he did not wish to say he was too poor. He had already been forced into this confession rather

frequently by Liane, who never understood anything about money, except that you spent it—yours or any one else's—like water, and that when it was finished you made yourself excessively agreeable or disagreeable (according to the requirements of the case) till you were given more. There is more than one way of paying for your fun, and since Jean's pockets were empty, he had had to pay for it lately with his pride, and he had several times made a stand about the price. He did not like supping here and there and everywhere at enormous expense, for which Liane paid; he did not like the invariable use of the expensive motor, and Liane never walked a step and never used anything else. He did not like his position as the man who carried things, shared things, bought things, and for none of which his whole salary (he had just been started on a hundred francs a month) would have covered the tips for one busy night. Cravats and tie-pins he had hardly seen his way to escape, but he drew the line at a silk hat for the Opera, and a new suit, and took the first opportunity during a short afternoon's shopping to say so.

Liane stared at him.

"*Pourquoi, mon ami?*" she said, in a voice of toneless gentleness, which Jean had learned to dread as the preliminary of a rising fury.

"*Pourquoi pas?*" And she went out of the shop where she had turned over everything and bought nothing—she was a difficult shopper—with the air of a tragedy queen.

If she would only be angry, Jean thought he might manage to keep the little golden coin of his pride, but she wasn't only angry. She was angry at first, splendidly, furiously angry, till she saw it was no use. Then she melted

and entreated Jean with that flexible, dramatic tenderness which attacks all the weak places in a man's heart and tyrannizes over them; but still Jean held out. She made him feel that he was a brute and know that he was a fool, but he clung to his pride and faced her with drawn lips and haggard eyes.

"Please, please don't tempt me, Liane," he pleaded. "I literally haven't a penny except some money, a very small sum, my mother left me, which I have promised to keep intact for an emergency. You don't want me to use that? I don't even know if I legally can, and you certainly can't suppose that I will accept clothes from you. It's just like you to be generous enough to offer anything you have, but it would be impossible for me to take it. I know I'm not very smart, my poor Liane, but try to put up with me as I am! Perhaps I shall make something by playing soon, and every bit of it shall go to a jeweller for you, and a tailor for me; only have patience."

Unfortunately Jean asked Liane for the quality she most despised and least possessed.

"So you will not even do this one little thing for me?" she said, gazing tragically in front of her.

"I would do anything in all the world for you, Liane," said Jean, his voice trembling, "but I can't take money!"

Liane flung her pathos from her as if it were an old shoe.

"Bah!" she said. "That same old story, then! The things a man will do for you! How often have I not heard them! *Hein!* What are they, *mon ami*? First, die for me! You would naturally put this first, as it is the last thing I should ask of

you! It is true you could die for me in any old suit, but how would it profit me? I am not a cannibal, nor am I a murderer. I do not desire the death of my friends! It would not contribute, this sacrifice of yours, anything to my safety, my comfort or my amusement! Anything! I again ask you—will you give up your Bank for me? No! You have already said that you cannot risk having no profession. I do not know what you call ten sous a month, but it appears that it may pass for a profession. You cannot offer me money—you have not got it. Talent? You will not use it. Beauty? Your friend Maurice with his ox eyes, his butcher's moustache, his figure enlaced, presents something better to the eye than you. What then? Your wit? My poor Jean, you have just given me, it seems, a specimen. Pardon me if I prefer my own. You have not the sense to see that there are only two things worth having—money and life—and that one pays for the other! What can you do for me, then? I will tell you. You can take things when I want you to take them! But that, it seems at present, you can only do when you yourself want them! You are willing enough to take my time, for example, and also what you are so good as to call my charms? I introduce you into the artist world, I lift you here, I lift you there, I carry you about, I get myself even laughed at. They say: 'The good Liane has turned nursemaid; behold how she trains her little one!' I ask in return what? That you should not go about with me in rags from a country village. No, I do not care if the chauffeur hears or not—yes, rags! Yes! I say a suit left over from the year of your first Communion, and you say 'No! this I will not do; this goes too far; this risks too much!'——"

“Liane,” entreated Jean. “The people on the pavement, everyone is staring at us!” Liane was enjoying herself. What if everyone was staring at them? She preferred an audience. She did not lower her tone at all as she continued:

“*Mon ami*, I am very reasonable. I am very calm, I am quite patient, *moi*! I say only this—” and she made a superb gesture with her hands which took in half the Bois de Boulogne, through which they were dashing at a magnificent pace, “which of us two is it, then, who asks too much?”

Jean capitulated. He answered that he would try and draw out the sum his mother had left for the special emergency.

Liane became pacific; they would dismount, she said, and take a stroll in the Bois, where they would have tea—the whole world was out this afternoon.

She did not at all mind what money Jean used, the great thing was that they should both be well dressed and that she should have what she wanted without any dispute about it.

“Now, *mon ami*, are you happy?” she asked Jean, with the acquired sublimity of the Liane smile as she led the way under the sun-touched, wintry trees of the Bois. Jean could not honestly say that he was happy, but he was at least glad that Liane should be so. Lately, he was beginning to realize that the desire to appease her was taking the place of finding in her his own tremendous joy. Instead of rapture at the miracle of her presence he felt relief if they succeeded in spending a peaceful hour together; and once or twice he had not been quite sure that the relief was due to the peace so much as to the fact that the hour was over, and he could go back once more to his stolen moments at the piano, the only

free ones of his life. He began to think, too, more good-naturedly of Maurice, and less—very much less—proudly of himself; but he still thought that he loved Liane. It takes a great deal to kill love, for after the glory of the individual has faded, there still remains the inmost unquenchable fire—the love of love. Perhaps it would not be true to say that Jean still loved Liane. She had very much disgusted and distressed him, but she could still make him love love, and while she could do that there was no real danger of his escaping her.

CHAPTER IX

IT was the night of the presentation of Liane's new play. Jean sat down on a box in one of the wings; he could see part of the sloping stage from where he sat, and far up above him in the distance the pale gleam of the footlights, with now and then the graceful sweep of a woman's dress.

He heard without listening to the words the sound of Liane's rich, penetrating voice; it did not seem to him as sweet as usual. There was a strange sense of fatigue and bitterness upon him to-night, in the moments when he had time to think, his life seemed cheap, he could not forgive the world its failure to meet his passionate expectations. It was not remorse that possessed him, but the revolt of the soul against the senses, which is sometimes more bitter even than remorse.

Had he reached the truth, he asked himself, about Maurice? Surely Liane had kept her promise not to see him again? But had she? Did people in Liane's world ever keep their promises?

For the moment Jean shrank from asking her, he dared not put his love to the test of her possible treachery; it seemed to Jean like undermining something already frail. He was sick of the great foyer of the Odéon—everyone had business there but himself. He had to stand aside while the stage carpenters made their way here and there in the busy scene-shifting foyer behind him, pulling great planks forward, or manipulating yards of rope with one hand while they pushed the next scene's furniture further forward with

the other. The supers hung about, giggling as loud as they dared, and every now and then, one of the more important artists swept in and out of the distant dressing-rooms.

A voice sounded at Jean's shoulder; it was low, but pitilessly distinct and sharp, "*Voyons* Selba," it said, "we have gone through this before, and I am telling you now for the last time, I cannot employ an untrained voice here. It is not any use for you to say you cannot afford to have it trained; you have lived long enough in Paris to know that is not true. There are Marcet and Dubarras—have they not both made you offers? *Eh bien!* accept, then, one of them. Accept, or leave my company. I am giving you this one more chance because there are qualities in your voice that please; it is a pity, too, for so young a girl to throw away a career. Go to Torialli or Barrière and learn the new part. Do not dare to come here again without an idea and stand up on the stage like a charity-school girl saying her prayers!

"I tell you, my girl, this is Paris! This is a theatre! You don't come here to be prepared for your first Communion. I do not care whom it is, it is all one to me, Marcet or Dubarras, take your choice. But you must have money, you must have lessons. Now pull yourself together—there is your first call—go!"

Jean recognized that it was the voice of Monsieur Picot, the Régisseur of the Odéon. He turned his head to see to whom the succinct advice had been given, and saw just behind him the small figure of what seemed to him to be a little child. In another moment Jean saw that she was, after all a grown-up young girl, but her obvious fear, her tiny stature, the great fawn-like eyes, the freshness and innocence

of the round little face were astonishingly out of place in the Odéon. She did not see Jean. She looked over her shoulder at the manager, who had turned his attention to a clumsy scene shifter. "*Mais* Monsieur," she whispered, stammering and trembling, on the verge of tears. Monsieur Picot turned his back and walked away. A second sharp electric bell rang out her call, she drew herself together, and hurried past Jean on to the stage.

Jean leaned forward, excited and curious; who was this little girl with her untouched bloom and her frightened eyes?

He caught a glimpse of the huge stage and Liane standing with easy majesty, her head bent low, her smile fixed, heavily rouged and over-emphasized. He could not see Margot Selba, but in a moment he heard her; her voice rose against the heavy background of light and heat, the thick scents and the rich, dead gleam of jewelled stuffs, like the voice of a bird when spring is young. It seemed the only living thing in a dead world to Jean. The tears came to his eyes as he listened, good, honest tears, that washed away the bitter sense of degradation from his heart. He felt himself back in the country again, with the freedom of the fields before him and the greater freedom of his own unstained, innocent heart. The song ceased, and Liane's powerful voice took its place, showy, flexible, practised. She did what she liked with it and the scene before her, but it seemed to Jean like the change from a hillside into a hothouse. The girl crept back into the wings again; no one took any notice of her; she found a corner where an old box had been left by the scene-shifters, and then she crouched down on it, burying her face in her hands.

Jean moved quickly towards her.

“Mademoiselle, Mademoiselle,” he whispered, “do not cry so, do not be distressed—tell me about your troubles?”

The child lifted her head with a frightened movement.

“It is nothing, it is nothing,” she muttered between her trembling lips.

But Jean sat down on the box beside her, and would not be denied. “It is not nothing,” he said firmly, “that you are here in trouble and alone! It is not nothing that you, who are no more than a child, should be spoken to as I have heard Monsieur Picot speak to you to-night. *Mon Dieu!* I had no idea such infamies could go on here in Paris! Mademoiselle, I implore you, trust me! Speak to me, tell me what I can do for you, and believe that is the only advantage I will take of your confidence.”

“Help me, Monsieur?” asked Margot, sitting up straight and regarding this strange young man with wide-open, astonished eyes. “Why, what should you do for me? Are you not a friend of de Brances?”

Jean shook his head impatiently. “What difference does that make?” he exclaimed. “Am I not a man and an artist; do you suppose all men are inhuman and monstrous like that *crétin* who spoke to you just now? My poor child, I will prove to you that all are not!”

“No, no,” said Margot quickly, “indeed I do not think it. I know that you, Monsieur, are for certain different. You have not seen me before, perhaps, but I have seen you often; you are not like the other gentlemen who come here and never leave us alone. I have often wondered what you came here

for, but of course de Brances has many friends who like to see her on the stage, some of them may be—" Margot hesitated; it looked a little ungracious to admit to a friend of de Brances that some few of that lady's intimates might behave with tolerable decency behind her back!—"may be artists," she finished instead, "and that makes always for a kind of sympathy."

"I am a musician," said Jean with emphasis.

"A musician," echoed Margot very softly.

"And I am very poor," Jean continued, "I am a struggling artist!"

Jean announced this statement as if it were a proclamation of ascent to the throne. He succeeded in startling Margot, to whom, however, poverty did not appear to have quite the same meritorious halo that it wore to Jean's less accustomed eyes. But then Margot knew what real poverty meant.

"But that is a misfortune for Monsieur," she said gently.

"No, it is not," replied Jean impatiently; "if I were not poor I could not offer to help you, you would very justly refuse me; but now I have a plan that I think you will be willing to accept."

Margot's eyes grew rounder and rounder; she was not quite sure that this strange and attractive gentleman sitting on the box beside her was sane, but she was quite sure that he was kind, and that it was extraordinarily interesting to listen to him. Margot thought he must be rather like an angel; but it is possible that Margot would have felt uncertain how practical an angel's plan would be for Paris. She knew her

Paris, and she did not fancy that the heavenly powers made much of a success there.

"Monsieur has a plan, then?" she murmured.

"I must explain myself," said Jean, leaning forward with intense excitement, and stabbing the air with his forefinger. "I have said that I am a musician! More than that, I am the only kind of musician who can help you! When I came to Paris six months ago I met Cartier. You must have heard of him, his touch is famous in Paris—you'll have to know him—there is a man who has a soul of gold! He gave me lessons for which he never charged me a penny, and then he sent me out to listen to all the best singers in Paris. He told me to study a method of teaching, and how to accompany the voice; he gave me introductions to several singers, and I have already accompanied Lucien le Page and Madame du Buissant. *Enfin!* I have fitted myself to train a voice. That is what you need, is it not? Very well then, I will give up my Bank and train yours!"

"Pardon, Monsieur, your Bank?" exclaimed Margot. "What Bank?"

"It is nothing," said Jean, with great calmness. "It happens to be my profession at the moment, but I have been meaning to give it up for some time. Now it is done! You will trust your voice to me? You consider my plan good?"

Margot gasped. "But, Monsieur," she said, "I am not rich! I am not a Bank! I would gladly let you train my voice if I could afford to pay you for it; but alas, it is just there that your plan breaks down."

“Not at all,” said Jean impatiently. “If I make your voice a success that will bring me into notice. It is a bargain, it is purely business, I assure you. Money—what is money? There will be no difficulty about that—what I want is fame.”

“But, Monsieur, meanwhile you must live,” expostulated Margot.

Jean looked annoyed; for a moment he was not sure that Margot was really an artist.

“That will arrange itself,” he said indifferently; “the great thing is we are agreed upon my plan?”

Margot hesitated, then she suggested a compromise; if Jean really didn’t care about the money, and since nothing would induce her to take up his time and skill without some form of a return, would he care to occupy her mother’s free room in their little apartment which had just been vacated by a theological student? It was really very convenient, as they were so high up he could practise as much as he liked. He would of course take the room for nothing, and she would then feel free to accept his lessons.

Still Margot urged him very forcibly not to give up the Bank. She seemed to attach an absurd importance to what Jean felt to be an overrated institution. Jean was in the mood for renunciation, and it seemed to him a small thing to burn this particular boat; he was in the act of wishing he could burn a larger one when Margot exclaimed:

“Ah! here comes Madame de Brances. *O ciel!* What a splendid creature she is! Do you think we are in her way?”

Jean did not answer Margot, he was looking at Liane. Yes, there was no doubt that Liane looked splendid. She was

advancing towards them like some stately Atlantic liner bearing down upon a small sea tramp, serenely conscious of her powers. She swept towards them, her lips set and her great bisque-fringed eyes shining like figured Chinese lanterns under the tightened rope of her marked eyebrows. Jean glanced from one woman to the other. Margot looked like an unformed child beside Liane; she huddled a little awkwardly on her wooden box, the colour going and coming in her round cheeks. She had no weapons to match the finished vision before her, nothing but the honesty of her heart, and yet to Jean that one small jewel outshone the whole golden argosy bearing down relentlessly upon them. At least, for the moment Jean thought it did. Meanwhile, even in that moment of recognition, he slipped back into the mire. Liane leaned forward a little as she reached them; she seemed to gather Jean up and hold him in her passionate deep eyes, those terrible possessive eyes that knew how, not in vain, to slip the snare of the fowler over the fluttering bird.

"*Allons, Jean, viens-tu!*" she whispered in her tenderest voice, as soft and sweet as honey in the south. She did not look at Margot at all, but she had seen her.

Jean turned and followed her without a word.

CHAPTER X

THE trouble with keeping a cat in the bag is that, however good it may be for the cat, it is seldom good for the bag, and the less accustomed the cat is to this method of confinement, the worse it will be for the case containing it. Liane was not in the habit of muzzling her temper; on the contrary, she asked nothing better than a tolerably good opportunity for letting it fly. To-night, however, she had kept her temper admirably, first, when Jean had appeared pre-occupied on the way to the theatre, and secondly, on the stage when her familiar presence was greeted with less applause than Margot's little song. She had made up her mind instantly that the song must go; but she had not allowed any hint of the intention to appear. The song could easily be cut, and once it was cut, she would keep no grudge against the absurdly fresh-looking little person who sang it. But Margot Selba humbly retiring from her part and Margot sitting on a box with Jean were two different persons. One needed chastening and the other called for annihilation. The cat could bear it no longer, it tore its way out of the bag.

The first creature that it came across under these circumstances was sure, of course, to get the worst of it—an enraged animal strikes at what is nearest. In this case it happened to be Jean, and not Margot. Liane reached her dressing-room in solemn silence; she looked at the watch on her wrist and saw that she had half an hour. Then she turned on Jean.

“Never speak to that girl again!” she cried fiercely. “Do you suppose I bring you here with me to make love to a *cabotine* behind my back?”

Jean drew back in anger. So this was what he got for sacrificing the first decent feeling he had had for an age! He had given up his happy little moment of virtue simply to have Liane fly in his face! He put on the air of a hard man of the world; he felt a rebuffed boy.

“Really, Liane,” he said, making a pretence of lighting a cigarette; “one would suppose you had no discrimination. Can’t you see I was merely being polite to a little girl who sang well?”

Liane flung off her Cleopatra robe and began making-up for a fresh scene, while she tossed her words at Jean over her shoulder.

“A pretty fool you must think I am!” she said disdainfully. “You were being polite to a girl who sang well, were you? One would suppose you had been calling on a *jeune fille* of the provinces to hear you! No, no! my friend! this is a theatre and that girl there is a *cabotine*—a pinch of dust—a little worm under my foot! Sing well indeed! What next? They will have crows for Opera before you hear Selba on these boards again! You suppose yourself to be a musician already, it seems, and you are *not*, you are nothing! I take you away from your cows in the country, I lift you to an honour many men would perish for, yes, and have perished for in vain! and I have to see you in my own theatre treating a woman of my position to the very last indignity—the very last, I would have you know, Jean, that a woman of my spirit will put up with. Selba indeed!” She flung her powder-puff

across the room, and touched up her left eyebrow in a dramatic but carefully measured fury.

Jean felt sick. He did not believe in all this nonsense about Selba; he felt instead the sharp return of his former doubt—had she kept her promise about Golaud?

It was not the most auspicious moment to ask her, and yet the pressure of the unendurable was upon him. He felt himself boxed up with a lie; there was not one word of reality in Liane; she was a splendid vision as she sat there facing the mirror, but her very beauty seemed to set his teeth on edge. Was not this false too, upheld by the paraphernalia of little boxes and paintbrushes, of long, fine coils of false hair, without any of that tender natural grace which had not been enough to keep him by Margot's side a few minutes ago? He was ashamed of himself. He paced to and fro in the tiny, hot little room and thought of all his fine principles with a fierce disgust.

"*Eh bien!*" said Liane. "Have you nothing to say for yourself; are you dumb as well as blind? You could talk well enough, it appears, to that piece of rubbish downstairs."

"Liane," he jerked at her quickly. "Have you seen Golaud again?"

Liane stared at him.

"What?" she said, twisting a pearl net in and out of her hair. "So you think to get out of it that way, do you? Seen him again? Of course I have seen him again, and why not, I should like to know! What do you stare at me like that for, with your mouth open and your face white, like a foiled villain in the fourth act who sees his wife's ghost? I told you

once before I was not a nun. I see whom I please, I do what I like—and I amuse myself! I like you when you are good, because you are poor and an artist. I like Maurice Golaud because he is rich and *not* an artist. He does not object to you; why should you object to him?"

"But, Liane, your promise!" cried Jean. He was terribly shaken, the world seemed to be falling to pieces about him. Where was this dream that he had thought so magnificent a mystery? this romance to which he had dedicated himself as a worshipper at a shrine? His romance was a pricked bubble, the thing he worshipped a monstrous farce.

Some of these thoughts with their roused horror and disgust struck at Liane out of his expressive eyes. They made her angrier than ever; she should have received gratitude, and she felt reproach. That he should dare to reproach her when she had been so good to him! She almost shrieked at him in reply.

"You are an insect!" she cried, "a bit of dust! a scrub! I snap my fingers in your face, I despise you! Let me tell you that I have had enough of this folly; never speak to me of Golaud again, and if I find you with this woman Selba, you leave me for ever!"

"That is an ultimatum," said Jean very quietly. "Your words to-night have given me no choice, Liane, except to take it. I except your dismissal, then; I go."

This was not what Liane had meant at all. She had no intention of dismissing Jean. A woman can hold a proud man only so long as he is unaware that he is being held. Liane had made the mistake to-night of showing Jean that she

considered his liberty was in her hands. It set the last touch to his freedom. Passion, which had been her tool, became his weapon, it entered into his natural distaste for her, and it turned his emotion into cold hate.

He thrust his chin forward a little and looked at her with half-closed eyes. She saw what she had done, and she trembled a little, for she was by no means tired of Jean. The end would come, of course, but it was impossible that it should come from him; this was an outrage to her pride which she could not suffer. She appealed to his heart, which she knew to be tender, but in doing so she overlooked the fact that the cold water she had flung on his passion had frozen his heart to silence.

"*Mon petit!*" she said gently. "We must not speak to each other like this, must we? I am tired to-night, forgive me. You know you are precious to me. Let us turn away from words. I do not talk very well, I know, Jean."

Jean still looked at her with imperturbable, cold eyes. Thwarted passion makes a woman mean, it makes a man cruel. Jean felt very cruelly towards Liane; for the first time he realized that she was thirty-five. "She is already an old woman," he said to himself. "I am a young man; soon she will grow fat." He was ashamed of himself for thinking this, but he could not stop his thoughts; they came to him with the lucidity of reason stripped of glamour.

Liane saw the look in his eyes; it almost frightened her. It was as if his thoughts had become a tangible presence, and she seemed in her own heart to hear the echo: "You are growing old." She closed her eyes for a moment, the taste of life was bitter on her lips. Age was her arch terror; once it

had clutched her, there would be no release, her world would be dead, and she would be a creature without power, sick with her own insignificance!

Then she played her last card and it was a very good one. She rose with infinite grace and dignity and her most touching smile.

“Do not kiss me to-night, my friend,” she said. “Our spirits are not near enough to each other.” It was the most unfortunate reference she could possibly have made.

“Our spirits!” said Jean, and his lips curled. When had their spirits ever been near each other? It was horrible for him to think how far. The lie was an abomination to him, and he was quite merciless to Liane, as only youth, ignorant and powerful, can be merciless. He looked her full in the eyes and shrugged his shoulders very slightly.

“You do me too much honour, Madame,” he said. “I had not the intention of kissing you!”

In a moment he was ashamed of himself; the colour rushed into his face, he would have given anything to recall his words.

Liane had looked so bewildered and so hurt: her eyes fell on the innumerable little silver boxes before the looking-glass; they wandered listlessly, as if she were looking for something she had forgotten. She drew her breath painfully, it fought in her throat like a wild thing imprisoned. Jean had hurt her cruelly, and Liane was not easily hurt; only the sight of her own face in the glass behind Jean saved her from hysterics. It was magnificent, she had never equalled it on

the stage. The relief was immense: the dresser entered, bringing back to her the full sense of her own importance.

"But Madame is a wonder to-night—she has veritably the look of a great queen, has she not, Monsieur?" exclaimed the quick little dresser, who saw at once that something was wrong, and guessed that flattery could put it right. "Never have I seen Madame in such form; I think these pearls suit her—here is the cloak of Madame, and the scarlet slippers. Yes, and if Monsieur will just hand me the powder-puff on the floor—a million thanks, Monsieur! Madame has just a little—a little too much colour. *Voilà, Madame, c'est tout, vous y êtes!*"

It was quite impossible that this obscure young man should cease to care for Liane. Her fears had been absurd, it was only a momentary madness of the estranged senses; she had spoken very roughly to him, she remembered. She looked at him gravely for a moment, his head was bent, he was frowning, and he looked young and awkward—a mere shaken boy.

"We will not part like this to-night, *mon petit*," she murmured with caressing gentleness. "Wait for me as usual, only this I think I have the right to ask you; do not again speak to that silly little nobody, the daughter of a washerwoman, who sings out of tune," and Liane laughed contemptuously. That, after all, was the right way to treat the situation.

It was perhaps the right way, but Liane had lost sight of the fact that the right way used too late has much the same effect as the wrong way. Her eyes held Jean's for a moment;

she did not quite understand the look in his, but she had no time left for explanation.

He bowed, and went straight back to Margot.

CHAPTER XI

MARGOT woke next morning to a premonition of disaster. She had foreseen that she might lose her job last night; but this morning she realized it, which is quite a different affair. The evening before, life had seemed very large and golden, with plenty of opportunity for heroism on a grand scale, and without the practical peril of misfortune. She had felt the keen thrill of danger before it had lasted long enough to attack the nerves. But the hour of sleep had robbed her of her gaiety of heart. Even the treasures of which it was her wont to take stock every morning ceased to-day to give her any moral reassurance.

The little room which Margot shared with her mother always filled her with a sense of pride and protection. It held all the substantial remnants of Madame Selba's country furniture. It contained an immense bureau, four looking-glasses, and three gilt clocks. None of the clocks would go, to be sure, but one on a handsome blue mat on the mantelpiece was surmounted by a dome of glass and flanked with terra cotta vases filled with artificial flowers. It was a magnificent affair and had been presented to Monsieur Selba on his having passed ten years in one particular firm. The other two clocks had been gifts to Madame Selba on her marriage, but the mere fact of the ceremony had appeared to startle them to such an extent that they had never given a tick since. Still they were undoubtedly extremely handsome, and there was room for one on the window-sill, and for the other upon a bracket above the washstand.

There was a crucifix and a prie-Dieu, given to Margot by her school friends at the Convent which in her luxurious youth she had attended for two unforgettable years, and she herself had bought the holy-water stoup which hung above it, upheld by two slightly irrelevant angels a little loose of wing, out of her first earnings. There was a linnet's cage in the window, built in the shape of a palace, a present to Margot from a young ironmonger, a man in a social position so inferior to her own that she had had to discourage him; he had such nice curly hair, too! But she had prayed for him, and she always took peculiar care of the birdcage. The bird had died and she had not been able to afford another one. She looked at it with some impatience this morning: "*Moi, je trouve que c'est déplacé*," she said to herself as she got up.

She cast an eye almost depreciatingly upon the heirloom of Madame Selba's heart; this was a superb bedstead with brass knobs and a spring mattress, a bed which had struck the concierge's wife with envy and was by no means the secret pride of Madame Selba's existence.

"You can figure to yourself," she used to say, "when you look at that bedstead, that there was a time in my life when I wanted for nothing."

Margot had to keep the room very tidy, or else there would not have been much room to move about; the bureau and the bed between them having rather the air of two prize-fighters getting ready to be at each other's throat and only prevented from carrying out this intention by a small strip of rag carpet and a cane chair. Mother and daughter could not by any possible means have dressed at the same time, but

that hardly mattered, as Margot got up early to make her mother's coffee and went to bed late because of the theatre.

You could see twenty-seven chimney-pots out of the window, and by sticking your neck at an uncomfortable angle you could catch a distant view of some green trees not half a mile away. It was, as Margot used to say, when she felt homesick for open fields and a wide sky, almost like the country. Madame Selba preferred a view of the street, but that she could get from the window of the living-room. There was a handsome public house opposite.

Madame Selba united two passions with equal ardour, a passion for Margot's success, and a passion for brandy; that the two passions might occasionally conflict did not appear to occur to her; but she found it was more practical to work for the second and to dream of the first. In her way, Madame Selba was an idealist.

Margot loved her mother deeply, because she was her mother, and it never occurred to Margot not to love her, because she had always taken care of her, and because it was Margot's nature to love.

"What I should do without Mother!" she had often said to herself; sometimes people said this for her, but with a different meaning.

Madame Selba was a stout woman, who ate heartily; she had never been able to work. She referred vaguely sometimes to internal troubles. Margot said, "Mother must be very careful not to overdo herself," but no one except Margot ever felt it necessary to urge this caution upon her.

This morning everything had a most dreary and unreal air (for Margot felt it extremely unusual not to be cheerful); even Madame Selba, sleeping heavily upon the pillow with at least three-fourths of the blanket wrapped about her substantial form, appeared slightly unattractive. A dreadful idea occurred to Margot—suppose that Jean should not admire her mother! She reproached herself for thinking it possible, but she did think it possible.

"I wonder if I should have made that arrangement with him," thought Margot as she prepared the coffee. "In the long run I shall make more, of course, but meanwhile we shall be hard up. I must be more careful, that is all. It is an extravagance this taking of trams; from henceforth I will walk to the theatre, and I will not buy a new hat." Margot sighed; to buy the new hat would have been flying in the face of Providence, but not to buy it was to fly even more relentlessly in the face of pleasure; and Providence might not have minded as much as Margot.

She tried to sing over the coffee, and she kissed her mother's very large and rather unappetizing cheek with the heartiness of inveterate affection; and then, with sheer terror in her heart struggling against the dauntless courage of youth, Margot set off to the theatre.

It was an icy winter morning, and it is doubtful what would have happened to her courage if she had not fortified it by an imprudence. On her way she passed a flower-seller and bought a bunch of violets. It was an imprudence, as she confessed to herself, but like many other imprudences it really looked very well, and it gave her a sense of defiance.

If she was to have her head cut off, she would at least appear at her best for the execution.

There was a sense of quickened suspense in the very atmosphere of the Odéon. The great empty theatre resounded to the angry explosions of Monsieur Picot, the Stage Manager; the retreating charwomen with dirty buckets almost hurried to get out of his way. The gathered artists in the wings or on the stage seemed dipped in whispering gloom. They were all waiting, it appeared, for Liane, and Liane was late.

Monsieur Picot looked at Margot morosely—she had really done well the night before, several people had congratulated him about it. It did not occur to him to repeat the congratulations; he merely remarked that he supposed she thought he liked wasting his time, for the pleasure of seeing how late feather-headed nincompoops cared to be! She was mistaken if she thought so, because he held everybody to witness that he did not! Everybody had been witnessing it for half an hour and knew in addition that Margot was not wanted till the fourth act, which was not timed to take place for another hour but there was a general assent, and everyone cast looks of scandalized indignation upon Margot.

Then Liane arrived. It at once became obvious that the morning's work, if it took place at all, would hardly be pleasant.

Liane had a peculiar strained and nervous look in her face, like that of a horse laying back its ears preparatory to kicking the trap to pieces. The manager rubbed his hands together and his back cringed with precautionary amiability.

He did not dare reproach Liane for being late, so he scolded the whole of the rest of the company, who had been early.

"Now, perhaps, since you are at last ready, you set of wooden-heads!" he observed with bitter scorn, "you will no longer trespass upon the patience of Madame!"

Liane raised her head and drew back her lips as if she were smiling.

"First I must ask permission for a few words with Monsieur le Régisseur," she said, with terrible humility. Monsieur Picot shook in his shoes; he begged his *chère* Madame to do him the great kindness of waiting until after the rehearsal.

"Until we have those few words there can be no rehearsal, Monsieur," she replied, still in the deadly undertone of controlled rage.

The Manager gave himself up for lost.

"Madame!" he said, and bowed the way into his office. The rest of the company looked at each other and at Margot. They had never liked Margot, her manner of life disgusted them. A *fille de théâtre* should behave like a *fille de théâtre* and not like a *fille du monde*; surely the profession was hard enough without that clumsy addition!

Within the Manager's small office, Liane addressed herself to the mirror and put an ostrich feather straight; she was never more terrible than when she was arranging her appearance.

"*Bon!*" she said. "You will have the kindness, Monsieur Picot, to instantly dismiss the little one who sang last night!

her song is not necessary to the play that is now on, and her taking any part in the new piece is quite out of the question. I don't know her name; her voice is execrable, she puts me out."

Monsieur Picot shook his head.

"But, Madame," he said persuasively, "I am simply desolated if she has displeased you, this little Selba; to tell the truth, I do not find that she sings so badly. We cannot all have the charm of a De Brances. But you are fatigued this morning. Sit down for a few moments, try this armchair, a cigarette *Non*? Ah! I find them such a rest for the nerves! Your triumph last night, now that was a sensation! In all probability you suffer this morning from a reaction. Ah! you geniuses! All alike, all alike! You conquer the world, but that is not enough for you, if you fail to find yourself amused next morning!"

Liane sat down, but she kept tapping her foot and playing with her muff during the manager's speech; at the end of it she breathed quickly.

"A thousand thanks, Monsieur," she said. "I repeat, I cannot continue to play a part subject to such interruptions from a cat that squalls, a toneless vegetable, a dreadful *gauche*, clumsy little insect!"

"Ah, we must arrange something," said the manager soothingly. "Yes, yes, we must make a little alteration. I think you only come in together during the fourth act, before you wind up that magnificent scene of yours under the pyramid. The voice is that of the little Circassian slave, which reminds the princess of her youth. Ah, yes! I thought it went very

well last night. I might tell Selba to sing just a little more slowly, perhaps. You find the tune too light, too gay? A suggestion of the Princess's tragedy, *hein*? Madame has always such talent for *les nuances*. One cannot expect a young girl like Selba to make the most of her part. They are as ignorant as fleas, these young girls, all of them! It must often appal the creative genius of Madame!"

"*Mon Dieu!*" said Liane, with a brusque movement of her whole body. "It is useless that you should try to put me off! You enrage me with your stale compliments! Make them to this season's *ingénue*, not to Liane de Brances! You have heard what I have to say; nor am I alone in saying it. I do not come before you with personal complaints, I speak always for the good of the theatre."

"The consideration of Madame touches me to the heart," murmured Monsieur Picot, who detested her. Liane gave him a baleful look and swept on with her speech.

"It is possible that you have some respect for the opinions of Manet of the *Comœdia*, and Danton from the *Journal*; they took supper with me last night, they were trembling with rage. 'Madame,' they said, 'that little one distracts the part. The song is an intrusion—it is a thing behind the age, totally unworthy of the Odéon and of you! It is an atrocious blunder, an infamy!' I have only this to ask you, Monsieur Picot, am I to be exposed to the blunders of underlings in this theatre? If so, let me know it at once. I suppose there are possibly other theatres in Paris where the name of Liane de Brances is not utterly unknown, nor her capacities entirely despised."

Monsieur Picot turned sulky; no man likes to hear his flattery taken for what it is worth, especially if it is worth nothing, and no Parisian manager will bear to be spoken of as old-fashioned.

"*Voyons*, De Brances," he snarled viciously, entirely dropping his voice of oil and honey. "There are such things as contracts, I would have you remember!"

Liane rose from her seat with a magnificent gesture of scorn.

"You appear to forget," she said, "that for the new play I am *en représentation*, and that the present one runs, I think I am not wrong in saying, for ten nights longer. I have not as yet signed the contract for this fresh play. I wish you all success in it! No doubt Marguérite la Vaillance will make her name and yours in the principal part. She will render you famous, *parbleu*, that fine, fat, forty-year-old hack! It remains only that I felicitate you, Monsieur. I take pleasure in doing so before the public, who will, without doubt, be swift to follow my example."

Monsieur Picot wrung his hands in a confusion of rage and terror. How he would have loved it to have been the neck of the brutally indispensable woman before him! He had never dealt with any actress so insolent, so jealous, so terrifically shrewd about business! She had none of the pleasant failings of the real artist; only success, a success that reduced him, cowering and malignant, to any terms, even her own.

"Madame!" he cried, as Liane swept past him towards the door, "pray do not let us part like this. You know well

that Marguérite la Vaillance is incapable, or any other actress in Paris, of undertaking a part written especially for you! As to this affair of little Selba's song, it is true I should regret greatly having to dismiss her. I tell you frankly she will get a better place elsewhere if I do. She has a voice like a little country bird, and in Paris just now they have a rage for simplicity. Of course, if it is your wish to push her into notice, I say no more. But you know, De Brances, as well as I do that it is just these little things—a dismissal on the heels of a success, a story of jealousy and revenge, that send the public wild about an actress. If Selba succeeds after I send her away, she will owe her success to you! *Voilà tout!*" And the diplomatic Manager, certain of his triumph, shrugged his shoulders. Liane hesitated.

"No one who knows me could suppose me capable of jealousy," she said, in a disturbed voice.

The manager's eyelids fluttered; he bowed.

"Still," she continued, with more determination,—then the door opened, and Margot herself appeared. Monsieur Moncet, the *jeune premier*, had sent her to ask Monsieur Picot to begin the rehearsal, as he had an urgent appointment to keep and had waited an hour already.

It is a curious thing that the more depraved and cold-hearted human beings are, the more passionately sentimental they become. Liane was incorrigibly sentimental, and Margot owed her dismissal entirely to the bunch of violets. It had been Jean's custom to present Liane with violets every day, and for Jean's sake Liane had temporarily thrust aside all the more expensive tributes which besieged her door. She drew

back for a moment like a creature about to spring, then she rushed forward on to the middle of the stage.

"Dismiss that girl!" she shrieked to the Manager over her shoulder. "What!" she cried, turning on the company. "Am I to be badgered and interrupted in private conversations by the off-scourings of the theatre? Has it come to this, that not a rehearsal can be conducted in a decent manner so as to suit the convenience of the leading lady, only too patient, only too submissive to the whims of a troupe of dancing marionettes? Monsieur Moncet, you have a very important engagement to keep, I hear? Do not let us detain you! Pleasure before duty is the rule of this company! It would be perhaps a trifle more *convenable*, Monsieur, if you refrained from sending one of your young women to interrupt private interviews, with which your affairs—however pressing—have nothing whatever to do! What, Marie Hauteville, you are amused!"

"Madame! Madame! *je vous en prie!*" wailed the manager. Liane waved him contemptuously aside.

"Mademoiselle Hauteville is amused!" she went on, with terrific irony. "Let the whole theatre wait, then, until she has digested her joke. What is the rehearsal of a new play compared to the inimitable humour of Mademoiselle? Cat! Daughter of the devil! Spot of infamy! It is a joke, then, that I am bullied, betrayed, infuriated by this *canaille* of a company! Oh, yes!" shrieked Liane, her irony breaking into wild invective, "it is very amusing, very!" And she collapsed with a scream of rage into the nearest chair.

"I should like to know what I have done to justify Madame's attack," said Marie Hauteville wrathfully. "I have

not taken away any of her admirers! Thank Heaven, I have no need to adopt *enfants* from the country."

"Mademoiselle, *taisez-vous*!" shrieked the Manager, shaking his fist in her face.

Liane sprang to her feet.

"What does she say?" she cried. "Is she about to give us a list of her admirers? I beseech you, let us listen. It will not take long!"

"*Malheur!*" moaned the manager, burying his face in his hands.

"Is this a rehearsal?" shouted the *jeune premier* "or is it Pandemonium?"

"It is what you make it," flashed Liane, turning swiftly upon him, "with your *cabotine* messengers and your little *affaires de cœur*, which you cannot keep to yourself, it seems, but desire to intrude upon women of reputation!"

"*Et quelle réputation!*" murmured Marie Hauteville, who had found her voice.

"I will not stay here to be insulted," said Moncet, who had been burning to get away for the last half hour. "Mademoiselle Hauteville, allow me to suggest that you follow my example. Madame de Brances is suffering from losses; she is not herself this morning."

"Go, both of you!" said Liane, with a superb gesture of dismissal. "You are not wasted upon each other."

The manager raised his head from his hands.

“There will be no rehearsal this morning,” he announced coldly. “To-night at half-past eleven, please, without fail.”

Then Liane turned to Margot; she felt all the resistless hunger of the vulgar and violent to wreak their spite visibly upon their victim.

“It appears,” said Liane, regarding her slowly from head to foot, “that you are to go. It will be a lesson for you, perhaps; a girl like you, with her way to make, should at least study to appear respectable.”

“From Madame such a warning has special significance,” said Margot quietly. She had been sick with fright through the loud scene which had followed her unfortunate message, but when she saw she was herself to bear the brunt of Liane’s fury, all fear left her.

Liane drew her lips back from her shining white teeth; they looked long and savage like a wolf’s.

“It is not you alone who will find the significance, *ma fille*,” she hissed. “Run and tell your silly little Baron that he shall not forget he has lost a friend and found an enemy.”

Margot put out her hands suddenly, as if something precious which she held near her heart had been assailed. Had she then brought trouble upon Jean? Liane laughed. It was a horrible laugh; it made several people who had not particularly kind hearts feel quite uncomfortable.

As for the Manager, he was so uncomfortable, that when he dismissed Margot he gave her a hundred francs more than was due to her. Jean scolded her seriously for taking it. He said she should have had more pride; he had such an heroic way of looking at things. He did not know that when Margot

had taken the money she had been thinking that she could feed him up very nicely on that without depriving her mother of anything. If he had known, he would have been more angry still.

Margot was very unhappy, because she was afraid that Jean despised her, but she did not return the hundred francs as he suggested. She preferred that Jean should despise her, than that he should go without extras for his meals. There was nothing at all heroic about Margot!

CHAPTER XII

JEAN felt no delight at having given up Liane, nor more than a passing flicker of gratified self-esteem at giving up the Bank. He waited with hostile eagerness for the expostulation which he expected would follow; but when no expostulations took place, he deeply resented his immunity from interference. When you have burned your ships it is only natural that you should wish to see someone watching the flames; unfortunately for Jean, no one seemed to notice that there were any. The Director made no reply to Jean's announcement, and the Comte D'Ucelles went on preserving the sanctity of the home and disregarding the obligations of relationship, with his usual nonchalance.

Jean found himself left to conquer Paris entirely in his own way. His freedom, was limitless and he could satisfy his craving for music all day long. The only trouble was that he hated his freedom now that he had it, and he seemed to have entirely lost his craving for music.

He had made a desert, and he could not even begin to call it peace.

Liane sacrificed was Liane present, and the presence of Liane crowded out every other possibility. Everywhere Jean saw her face, not Liane's face as he had last seen it with the cruel, narrow eyes and the cutting oblivion of her stare, but Liane's face as it looked out of her picture with the strange entrancing smile, Liane's eyes as they melted into his, and all the miserable memories of his happy, passionate hours!

Jean began to discover that it was not very easy to give anyone up. He had always considered memory a pleasant faculty belonging to the old; he found now that it was a relentless spirit which pursued the flying soul even of the young. They would not let him go, those cruel hours of joy; they came back upon him pure from the clumsy touch of reality, refined by his own imagination, vivid as visions only can be vivid, in anticipation or in memory. He tried hard to reason with himself, to urge that Liane had never been as beautiful as that, never so tender, and never for a moment half so true; but passion with delirious eyes and empty hands pushed him into perilous falsehoods, and dazzled him with wild desires.

He felt incredibly bitter cravings for the sight and touch of Liane. What freedom does a dog desire who has lost its master? and what music was left in a world so empty of delight? And Liane was not only a woman, she was a life; she had dragged him from the sordid sadness of his poor room; she had given him his first taste of luxury and the natural love of living as his own class lived, hours full of beauty, and within reach of their own satisfaction.

He had lost Liane, and he had lost through Liane everything else; was it any wonder that he cursed himself for his incredible folly, kicked his piano, and looked at Margot with hostile, vindictive eyes?

Margot lived in three badly-furnished rooms on a *sixième étage*. There was the kitchen, sitting-room, dining-room, all in one. It was filled with crude attempts at a useless prettiness and pervaded by an odour of perpetual cooking. Leading out of it was her bedroom and her mother's, from

which there came the unwholesome smell of one of Madame's hidden bottles. Jean's room across the passage was furnished with Spartan simplicity, but irritatingly full of Margot's desire to please him, which took the form of religious pictures and many superfluous small pieces of embroidery. He would gladly, he assured himself, have borne with poverty—he had simple tastes—if only there had been some escape, some world of sympathy and thought into which he could step down as into a stream, and refresh his parched and jaded soul. But there was no such stream, there was only Margot's sitting-room.

In the first moment of his new life, Jean had received two disagreeable shocks. Margot's mother was one; how could he have expected Margot's mother to be like that?

Somehow or other he had fancied Margot's mother to be an older edition of Margot, a creature aged and softened by time; he was more inclined now to think that Margot was merely a younger edition of her mother, temporarily consecrated by the freshness of her youth; he was, of course, wholly unjust in both surmises. Then he was very naturally shocked and horrified at Margot's dismissal from the theatre. It was an inconceivable and disgusting incident; it looked almost as if he had caused it; it certainly put him under an obligation to the girl. The worst of it was that he saw no way at present of compensating her for the sacrifice (he meant freeing himself from the obligation, but the other way of putting it sounded better). So that he was naturally extremely annoyed with Margot, and ready to quarrel on the first provocation.

“Do you know I have been here three days, and I have not yet given you a lesson?” he observed sternly, one wet morning on which he saw that he must practise, or else face the fact that he hadn’t a career at all. Margot was ironing a tablecloth and her mother was sleeping out, with a systematic zeal which crept through the wall, an unfortunate meeting with a too generous friend the evening before.

“It takes time to settle in,” ventured Margot, looking up from her ironing.

“Of course, if you do not wish for one,” began Jean with great dignity.

“But I do!” cried Margot with immense eagerness and no dignity at all.

“You might, then,” said Jean reproachfully “have said so before.”

Margot hung her head penitently and began to fold up the tablecloth; she hadn’t finished it, but she saw Jean was not in the mood to be kept waiting.

“I think you had better bring your music to my room,” he said, after a pause. “We might disturb your mother.”

Margot flushed. She had not expected Jean to like her mother, but she had hoped that she would not have to see quite so plainly how much he didn’t.

“Very well,” she said simply. She was dressed neatly and prettily, as she always was, and her hair curled over her fresh white forehead; her cheeks were a little less rosy and round, and her eyes looked larger—but this was becoming to her rather than otherwise, and it was perhaps unnecessary for

Jean to compare her mentally to Liane, wholly to Margot's disadvantage.

The truth was that Jean wished to be fascinated by women, not to be mothered by them, and though Margot did try very hard to please him, she did so intermittently and without calculation, because the desire of her heart was to do and be what was best for him; and that was hardly the kind of thing that a man of Jean's age could be expected to appreciate. Even as Margot followed him into his room her whole being was absorbed in the consideration of how to cook eggs *à l'aurore* for déjeuner. It was Friday, and Jean had said he hated plain eggs. For three days she had been on tip-toe with desire and expectation for this lesson, and now she was hopelessly absorbed in eggs! She looked at Jean with unintelligent eyes; tomato sauce was so expensive, would not a dash of vinegar in thick brown gravy do as well?

"Mademoiselle," said Jean, with awful calm, "is this what you call your music?"

"*O ciel!*" cried Margot in horror, throwing her hands above her head. It was the cookery book; they neither of them laughed!

When she returned with her songs, Jean took out a cigarette and looked through them with critical eyes.

"Bah!" he exclaimed. "Haven't you anything better than these?"

Margot had, after all, some spirit; she did not like Jean's tone of contempt, and she thought he should have asked her leave to smoke. She was far more particular about such things than Liane.

“Music is not very cheap, Monsieur,” she said, a little sharply. Jean shrugged his shoulders.

“Good music is, however, cheaper than bad,” he said indifferently.

“Not unless you are paid to sing it,” replied Margot, with admirable common sense. Common sense is a quality all women who desire to please should learn to avoid, or at least conceal; they may use it in their private judgments, but it should never be allowed to appear in their conversation. It annoyed Jean extremely.

“*Allons!*” he said; “*commencez donc!*” And he pushed all the music on to the floor and began to play scales.

Margot was disappointed, she did not wish to sing scales; her mind returned to the eggs. Did he, she wondered, like them lightly cooked?

“Mademoiselle,” said Jean turning round on the music-stool. “What are you doing with these notes?”

Margot blushed guiltily.

“A note,” said Jean severely, “has a middle, a beginning, and an end. It is not a ghost, that you can run over it without disaster. Strike the middle of the note with your full voice, I entreat; you are fumbling and creeping up to it, and then when I expect it to come out—*voilà!*—you have swallowed it completely, there is nothing left to come. Try these arpeggios now. *Attendez!*”

Margot shut her eyes and drew frowning brows together to show how hard she was trying. Jean looked very cross this morning. He had not slept well and his conscience had worn

his nerves to threads; having done the best he could, he felt terribly guilty and disheartened.

“That is better,” said Jean; “but it is not good; one would say your voice was wool-gathering this morning! Now try these chords.”

Margot tried them mechanically. La Mère Pelous at the corner bought fresh eggs from the country twice a week, but then they were very dear; on the other hand, two streets away Madame Claire had a large assortment which she said came direct from her nephew’s farm, only——

Bang! came Jean’s hands down on the keys, a terrible discord!

“You are not singing at all!” he said in a fury. “You are piping! What are you thinking of, then? Are you in love?”

This was really very rude of Jean.

“Monsieur!” said Margot, at once upon her dignity. Jean felt extremely ashamed of himself, far too much ashamed to apologize.

“You must excuse me,” he said sarcastically. “You see, I have supposed you wished to work.”

“I do,” said Margot, with a tremor in her voice. Jean heard the suspicious little break and hurriedly caught up one of the songs. He had not meant to be a brute! Well, not so much of a one as to make her cry, at any rate.

“*Bon!* let us try a song, then,” he said more gently. “Here is the one you sang the other night. We must have more tone in it and less effort. Now take a long breath, Mademoiselle,

before you begin; stand naturally and at rest, and then open your mouth wide. *Allons!*”

Margot pulled herself together for a final attempt, her knees shook under her and it seemed as if a knot came into her throat. A horrible fear assailed her that she might be going to lose her one talent; she forced her voice against her breath, and it came out a loud, wavering sound without form or music. She was so completely unnerved by the result that she covered her ears with her hands and gazed at Jean with wide-eyed despair.

“But you are not well,” said Jean, as soon as she let her hands fall. “You are upset about something, and you are frightened! Come, tell me what is it?”

Margot, overwhelmed by this sudden return to sympathetic relations, burst into tears.

“Oh, Monsieur,” she sobbed; “do not blame me, I am quite hopeless, I know. You will despise me utterly, but—but I have a question to decide, there is something I must ask you, Monsieur. Oh! Oh! I am afraid you will be very angry with me!”

“But, Mademoiselle Margot, sit down; tell me what is it?” said Jean, now thoroughly roused and touched by her evident distress. “As if I could be angry with you! There! there! dry your eyes. It is you who should be angry with me, then, for being such a bad-tempered brute of a master! If you cry any more, Margot, I shall think you hate me.”

Margot stopped crying—it would be dreadful if Jean should think she hated him! So she dried her eyes in her handkerchief and smiled at him through her tears.

“It is only like this, Monsieur!” she whispered confidentially. Jean leaned forward to hear; perhaps like him she also had a tragedy, poor little one! “I—I wanted to know if you liked eggs *à l’aurore*,” she explained with trembling lips, “so that I could go out and try to find some fresh ones!”

“Margot!” cried Jean, and for a moment he said nothing more.

“You’re—you’re not angry, Monsieur?” she pleaded.

Jean laughed.

“Simply horribly angry!” he said, smiling into her eyes. “How dare you think of eggs in the middle of your singing lesson? I’ll eat them any way you like.”

That was the end of the lesson. Jean was very kind to Margot about it; he ate an excellent lunch, but he could not help feeling that she was less of an artist than he had hoped.

Familiarity is a deadly touchstone to the imagination; only the best and noblest impulses can survive it. To continue to admire what we see daily and know thoroughly we must be either very humble or very loving, and Jean was for the moment neither. He had not yet begun to exact very much from himself, but he expected a good deal from others. The critical instinct is generally vicarious.

Unfortunately Margot belonged to that type of woman who loves to have demands made upon her. She liked Jean to use the best she had to give as a sofa cushion; she was only too glad that it could be used at all. Her mistake lay deeper than his, for she did not realize that she loved a man who did not care very much for sofa cushions, and who would therefore never use even her best for long.

CHAPTER XIII

IT was a cold, damp day in the middle of February. Paris had for the moment borrowed a fog from her neighbour across the Channel; and habituated as she is to sunlight and clear air, she looked dirtier and far less comfortable than consistently and imperturbably grimy London.

"It is the kind of day," said Romain D'Ucelles, looking out of the window, "in which one might as well do one's duty; anything else would be equally unpleasant. My angel," he added to his wife over his shoulder, "do you require the motor this morning?"

"Yes," said Madame D'Ucelles, without looking up from her correspondence.

"But I am desolated," said Romain, "because I shall have to deprive you. I am about to go out in it myself."

"In that case," said Madame, "you might have spared me your offer!"

"I don't think it was exactly an offer," said Romain, with a thoughtful smile. "I merely wished to show you a little graceful consideration. You should, of course, have said that you did not want the motor, and then you might always have believed in the consistency of my good intentions. But alas! you have acquired that fatal habit of saying the wrong thing! It is a habit that goes with economy and all the domestic virtues. It explains much, and you will forgive me I know, my dear Marie, if I say that I think it excuses more!"

“I don’t know what you mean,” said his wife coldly, “but the bills you have been running up lately are simply disgraceful. Here are three from the florist’s. I don’t ask where you send these flowers, but the account comes to more than a thousand francs!”

“Dear, dear!” said Romain, humming a tune. “Do you not remember, my life, that I bought you some on the anniversary of our wedding? That was an expensive affair, I grant you!”

Marie shot a glance of rage at her husband; she would have liked it to be hatred, and she often thought it was; but he had too charming a smile.

“The expense of that affair,” she said bitterly, “was altogether my own!”

“Do not let us quarrel, my adorable one,” murmured Romain, who by now had reached the door. “It sounds as if we were on our honeymoon. But there is, you know, after all, more than one way of being expensive!”

“There you speak truly,” said Madame, “and you have shown me them all!”

Romain laughed out at this sally, and under cover of his laughter brought off his retreat. He enjoyed an occasional conversation with his wife; he said that it added so to the charm of the conversation of other women.

It was three weeks since he had received Miss Prenderghast’s letter imploring him to do his duty about Jean. He had been extremely amused and a trifle annoyed by it; during the three weeks the annoyance had worn off, and

now only the amusement was left. He rang for the motor and drove at once to Jean's new address.

Margot opened the door to him. She was quite overwhelmed by the gorgeous person in the fur-lined overcoat who asked for Jean. This was the first of Jean's friends who had called upon him, except his fellow artists, and Margot had not a high opinion of artists.

Romain looked at her with amused eyes under his heavy eyelids. "So this was the successor of Liane de Brances!" he thought. "Pretty, decidedly, but not worth six flights of stairs."

Aloud he said he was shocked at having given her so much trouble; he should suppose from the loud sounds over the way that his nephew was practising his new and rather noisy career?

"Yes, I think he is," said Margot flushing delicately.

Romain gave her a charming confidential smile. "My dear child," he said,—"you will allow me this familiarity, for I feel that we already know each other through Jean—do not, I beg of you, encourage this career! Oh, yes! You see I know your influence is great. It is delightful for my nephew to be here, and your room—well! one can see you have a taste. But you want to do what is best for him, do you not?"

"Oh, yes, yes!" said Margot, with a quick catch in her breath. "Only indeed you mistake; I have no influence, none at all!"

"Come, come!" said Romain, laughing. "Do you want me to believe my nephew a perfect fool? I grant you this piano-playing is an absurdity, but if that is his only attraction here, I

must give him up altogether. I assure you, you under rate his judgment! I could prove to you very speedily, Mademoiselle, that such judgment as that does not run in our family, but I greatly fear I must leave pleasure for duty, and go in to my nephew. I can count on you, though, can I not, to support my plans for him? They don't exclude, I assure you, his having charming friendships!"

Margot blushed very deeply and her eyes fell before the laughter in Romain's. She felt as if a clear, hard light had fallen upon a little shining secret of her own, a secret that lived best in the dark, and which she herself had turned her eyes away from, lest they should see that which desired to escape.

Of course she would do whatever Jean's uncle thought best for Jean; and naturally a future which promised fur-lined overcoats and a motor would be best for Jean, but they couldn't, poor Margot knew, be reconciled with singing lessons on the *sixième étage*, so that her heart sank a little as she knocked for admittance on Jean's door.

Jean had given up expecting his uncle, and he was not particularly pleased to see him. There was something in the contrast between Romain's air of finished ease and prosperity and Jean's poor little room and inexpensive appearance which made Jean feel rather ridiculous. One might be superior to Romain and disagree fundamentally with his sense of the values of life, but there was something about his bright, amused incredulity in the presence of a higher standard which was apt to make the higher standard look a trifle flat.

Romain sat down carefully in Jean's only armchair, and regarded his nephew, who clung to his music-stool as if it was a banner, with tolerant amusement.

"My poor boy," he began, "all this is very sad, isn't it? Shall we smoke?"

Jean felt a renewed pang as his uncle drew out his gold monogrammed cigarette-case and passed it to him. He was determined to resist Romain to the death, but he wished he had not to resist him to the point of being laughed at!

"I've seen the little girl," Romain continued, leaning back as luxuriously as he could and letting his eyes wander over the embroidery mats, the religious pictures, and all Margot's ambitious attempts at embellishments. "She's charming, my dear boy, charming! The upper lip is too long, the figure a little too straight, I should imagine that after forty she might have to take precautions against a moustache; but where there is freshness and bloom it does not do to look too critically into these things. Yes, on the whole, I congratulate you!"

"I don't know what you mean, *mon oncle*," said Jean impatiently. "There is nothing to congratulate me upon, I assure you! If you suppose that Mademoiselle Selba——"

Romain waved his hand gently in the air and half closed his eyes.

"Ah, yes, yes!" he said. "Of course, you take the proper attitude; only between ourselves, you know, Jean, a *fille de théâtre* is one thing and a *femme du monde* is quite another; one alters one's tone accordingly. But I have come to speak seriously to you. You have made a fatal mistake. I was really

distressed to hear of it. A big folly has about it something that attracts the eye—the world will forgive much for the sake of an adventure; but a little folly—an obscure intrigue with an unknown singer—my dear Jean, it is not a sin, it is a muddle! When I first heard of your inconceivable good fortune in a certain quarter, I was delighted, a little amused too at your precipitate good fortune—the luck of the first throw! but grateful to the good Liane. '*Enfin*,' I said, 'this begins his education, he is at the height of felicity; work below his intelligence and happiness beyond his means! what farther can a man desire?' But, my good Jean, you lack discrimination. This is a very grave fault. Let me implore you to be careful! I used often to have this very question out with your father. 'Let me tell you,' he used to say, 'that with me, it is all or nothing.' I regretted it, for those who take that tone invariably begin with all and end with nothing. Violence is a mistake, it destroys the senses. In pleasure, my dear boy, as in delicate health, a little and often is the best possible prescription. Now this kind of thing," said Romain, fingering a blue bead mat, "this kind of thing is very extreme; it leads you nowhere."

"I must protest, Uncle, once and for all," said Jean firmly, "that I am not here for my pleasure, and that my connection with Mademoiselle is wholly innocent. I stay here with her and her mother because it happens to be the only possible means of carrying on my career; but music is absolutely the only tie between us."

"Your career?" said Romain, and he looked at the piano, he looked at Jean, and he looked at the rain on the window-pane. "If what you tell me is true," he added after a significant pause, "it is very much more regrettable than

anything I had supposed. A mistaken passion can be rectified, but a mistaken virtue is apt to remain upon one's hands. Pray do not lose your temper; I take your word for it, of course. It confirms me in my opinion of innocence. It is a quality which damps the imagination. It reminds me of a wet day I once spent in the country. Well, my dear Jean, you have, I take it, innocence and your career and six flights of stairs to climb daily; pray, does it amuse you, this combination?"

Jean had prepared himself, or thought he had, for the shafts of his uncle's wit, but he was hardly prepared for the unconscionable fit of laughter in which Romain proceeded to indulge. He felt bitterly exposed to the crudity of his inexperience. Romain did not dislike his nephew, but he resented him a little; in the first place, he felt that he ought to have done more for Jean, and in the second place, he envied him his youth with that deep resentment of a man who has outlived his own primary emotions without having found anything to replace them. Jean blushed hotly, but he managed to keep his temper.

"I don't know that I expected to be amused," he said. "Of course, it's all ugly enough, and hard enough too, perhaps, but I'm very keen about my work, Uncle Romain."

"Yes," said Romain. "So one gathers, and may one ask, do you live on that appetite without satisfying any other?"

Jean hesitated. To tell the truth, he hardly knew what he did live on. He had three pupils beside Margot—a hairdresser's assistant and two extremely stupid young women, the daughters of the friend of Margot's late father. These lessons appeared to pay for his board, which was

incredibly small, but Margot said that it was really quite as cheap to feed three people as two.

"I have made a small beginning," he said, looking down at his boots. They shone beautifully, almost as beautifully as Romain's; for the first time it suddenly flashed into his mind to wonder who had cleaned them.

"I don't know that, if I were in your place," said his uncle thoughtfully, "I should care to have that little one provide for me. Perhaps I am hardly the person to point this out to you, but at least I gave Marie a fair equivalent. One can marry a rich woman—there isn't that possibility in your case!"

Jean sprang to his feet as if Romain had shot him—indeed, for the moment he wished he had; the thought that shook him was an unbearable agony, it had struck straight at his pride! Margot provide for him?

"*Mon oncle!*" he said, stammering with rage and terror, "you make it impossible for me to answer you, for there is only one answer I can give to such a suggestion."

"One answer, my dear boy?" said Romain coolly. "There are at least a hundred! However, I assure you I don't want any of them. It is a pity to take this tragic note. If my suggestion is not true—all the better; but let us admit for the moment that it is true, all may re-arrange itself. I have in my mind a little plan that offers you a way of escape. I have talked it over with your aunt, and I have at last won her consent. It was not altogether an easy thing to do, for I foresaw that it might include a small sum of money to your little friend here—one must free you from obligations in that quarter! And your aunt—like the good woman that she is—

does not enter readily into a man's obligations to other women. However, I pointed out to her that in the long run you would be in a position to repay her handsomely, and really, my dear Jean, it only depends on yourself how soon!"

Jean leaned forward eagerly; his uncle's words gave him a sense of escape from the shame that was burning at his heart. He could pay Margot back! And he thought that money could do it!

"You remember that night you dined with us?" Romain continued lightly. "Your aunt sent you in with a rich American. You were shy then, and I was afraid you would not be a success with women. It appears, however, that I was mistaken. Now, this American is very rich and consumed with a desire to become one of us. I don't know who her people were; in America, I take it, there are no people, only parents. Your aunt has pointed out to the girl that young unmarried women entirely unsupported by suitable relations do not find an *entrée* into the best French houses, and that there is one way, and only one, of her arriving at her purpose. She must, you perceive, naturally enough, marry one of us. Do not be startled, my dear Jean, and above all do not be precipitate. I daresay you wonder what the fair Pauline should see in you. To tell the truth, I fancy she does not see very much, but you have a certain value—you are my nephew, you have a good old name, and (for these Americans are so like children) it appears that your little title is not indifferent to her, and then there is your aunt. The poor girl considers your aunt to be the ideal French *grande dame*. They have such an infallible instinct, these young persons, for breeding and the right *ton*. I have succeeded in making little histories up about you. She has become interested; like

all people of cold natures and wooden virtues, she is immensely attracted by what she considers, in her charming elementary manner, wickedness. Doubtless you will be as surprised as I am to hear of your poor little affairs called by so fine a name. Big names and little facts suit *ces gens-là*; they have no amusements, you know, except their dollars and their religions. Fortunately for them, perhaps, they have a great many of both.

"Now, my little plan is that you should come and stay with us for a week or two, and allow us to arrange for you this very suitable match. If you will agree to this, I will discharge all your obligations, and there will be no further need to refer to the Bank, nor," added Romain with a faint smile, "to the—career! And, my dear boy, you will get the taste out of your mouth of this very bad furniture! Come! The little Pauline looks well, and really you need see very little of her! I can promise you from my own experience that with a little tact and the discrimination we were talking of just now, one's wife is the woman of all others with whom we need have least to do. I myself will see that suitable settlements are drawn up."

There were moments during Romain's speech when Jean hesitated. His uncle had a way of making ideals seem very silly affairs. Jean hated marriage, he disliked Pauline, the life before him had in it nothing that could rivet his heart, and yet so great was his shame and his sense of moral exhaustion that he listened with a feeling of relief. Perhaps this was the best way out of his false start; perhaps work and courage and privation were not worth the sacrifices one made for them; the flesh that he had thought so little of as a temptation, when he was leading the higher life, seemed different now—it

became, after all, the respectable thing, as, indeed, it very often is. He was young enough to despise good food, but Liane had taught him to think about his clothes, and he already shrank from small rooms and sordid surroundings; he had learned that poverty is not romantic when it is uncomfortable; and it is generally uncomfortable. Other men paid the same price that he would have to pay; it seemed a mean thing to do, but Pauline wanted his name; it would be an equivalent—she would expect no more of him; and he? Had he ceased already, then, to expect anything from himself? Romain watched him with speculative eyes. He hoped very much Jean would be sensible. He hardly acknowledged to himself that he would respect Jean less if he was.

It was at this moment that Margot began to sing. She thought Jean's fine uncle must be gone by now, and she was longing to go to Jean, because she had some very good news for him, news which made her spirit dance and her eyes shine, and the voice that came from her glad little heart took wings and flew to meet her comrade. He would be sure to hear her and call out for her to come in.

But Jean did not call her in just yet. Instead he turned a little brusquely towards Romain. "I am immensely grateful to you, *mon oncle*," he said, "but I could not think of accepting your plan for a moment. I shall get on somehow, you know." Romain D'Ucelles shrugged his shoulders and held out his hand, smiling his thin, bored smile.

"Think it over, my dear boy, think it over," he said. "There is no hurry, you are the only pretender yet in the field.

And as for the little girl here, you know, why really there's no particular reason why you should give that up!"

"There's one thing I'll never do!" said Jean to himself, as he watched his uncle's head disappearing slowly down the precipitous drop of the stairs. "Never! Never! Never!"

He did not refer to his marriage with Pauline.

CHAPTER XIV

IT was some time before Jean called Margot into his room; and when he did there was something in his expression which made her forget her happy news. He looked unlike himself and as if something had shocked him.

He walked up and down for an interminable time without speaking, while Margot fingered nervously at one of the superfluous woollen mats.

Then he came up to her and put his hands on her shoulders. “Margot,” he said, “my little comrade, you have been deceiving me. No, do not tremble or cry! I know well enough why you have done so, you only wanted to spare me; but there are times when to be spared takes all the strength out of a man. Do not try to spare me any more, Margot; tell me the truth now, how much money a week do I cost you?”

“Money, Jean,” cried Margot, her eyes grew very large and round as they met his; she looked as innocent as only a woman bent on deception can look. “You think, then, that I am incapable of feeding you on eight francs a week,” she cried. “It is to complain of my housekeeping that you have brought me in here. How unkind, Jean!” But Jean merely shook his head at her.

“Tell me who it is that blacks my boots,” he said sternly.

“Do you suppose that I have no friends,” asked Margot, “no admirers who are anxious to do me a little turn? Apparently you think I have no attractions, and the son of Madame Martin does not get up at six in the morning, and

run my errands, to be repaid thankfully by half a smile out of a shut window?”

Jean hesitated, but he felt relieved. He did not dream that Madame Martin’s son was a fine invention of Margot’s called upon to do service for one day only and not to be rewarded at all.

“Any man would be glad to do anything for you,” Jean said, smiling, “but if I were the son of Madame Martin, I think I should prefer to black your boots, and not those of the young man who is on the right side of the shut window!”

“I do not study his preferences,” replied Margot demurely.

“No?” said Jean. “But, Margot, I am going to ask you to study mine. I cannot stay here another day unless you will take twenty francs a week for my board; you see I put it very low to please you. It is no use your shaking your head; either you agree or our little scheme together ends. It is true,” said Jean half to himself, “that I still have to earn that twenty francs,” but even now that seemed to Jean the least important part of any programme.

“Jean,” asked Margot, after a little pause, “you will not think me curious or indiscreet, but did you not tell me that you sometimes accompanied Lucien le Page and Du Buissant? Surely such great artists would pay you!”

Jean smiled bitterly. “They would pay me if they would employ me, *chérie*,” he answered, “but you forget that they are friends of Madame de Brances, and lately I have not found them at home when I called. Last week I went so far as to write to Lucien; he replied very politely that he was not in

need of an *accompagnateur*. It is the same with them all, they will not employ me again."

"But Cartier," persisted Margot, "who gave you your music lessons, surely he will not treat you like that?"

"He is away in Russia," said Jean; "he does not return till the spring."

The two young creatures looked at each other something passed between them which contradicted the expectancy of youth. Their glance was measured, anxious, guarded. It resulted in Margot's saying, "How long is it now, Jean, since you left the Bank?"

"It is three months," said Jean.

"How hard it is raining," exclaimed Margot thoughtfully. "You ought to get a new pair of boots. Those are very smart you have on, but rain would go through them as if they were made of silk."

"I do not think they would take me back," said Jean wistfully; he did not want to think the Bank would take him back.

"Perhaps not," agreed Margot. "After all, the hours are not so long," she added.

"My aunt, Miss Prenderghast, wrote to my Uncle Romain to tell him I had left it," said Jean. "She says I have ruined my life!"

"Bah!" exclaimed Margot, "the English are a race of wet cats! I have heard they never even dance on Sundays. Don't concern yourself with anyone so ill-natured. After all, that Director of the Bank was a friend of your uncle."

“To-morrow, then,” said Jean, with a deep sigh, “I think I will go and ask if they will take me on again.” But Jean never quite knew how he had arrived at this decision. Margot sighed, too; but hers was a sigh of relief.

“What troubles me most, Margot,” Jean went on, “is that I took from you your part at the Odéon. She might have done anything else. I did not grudge her pleasure in destroying my chances if she had left you your part. That,” said Jean, staring hard at his boot, “was not generous of Liane.” He had never spoken her name to Margot before.

Margot drew a quick breath and laid her small brown hand on Jean’s arm.

“Don’t throw your life away, Jean,” she pleaded in a low tone. “You look so thin and you can’t eat, and at night I hear you walking about, walking about—till dawn sometimes. Is that the way to forget?” She looked up at him suddenly, her brown eyes filled with gentleness and love. “Is there no other way?” she said.

Jean glanced at her for a moment and then looked away. He knew well enough what other way there was; he was not by nature a vain man; he was more dangerous to women than that, he was intuitively perceptive. Margot’s secret had long ago slipped into Jean’s heart, and he had turned the key on it in silence. Was he always to keep it locked up? he asked himself. He wanted to kneel beside her and press his tired head against her tender breast. Surely to feel her arms about him, and to drink close and deep of the light in her eyes would help to heal the hideous ache Liane had left behind! And did he not owe Margot something? Was she always to

love without reward? He hesitated, but still he did not look at her.

Margot's whole soul was in her eyes fixed on him wondering and worshipping; she could have drawn him to her that night if she had known how; but she did not know how. She was not thinking of herself, which would have taught her—she was thinking of him; and all that that taught her was to wait upon his wishes; so she sat there, poor little Margot, praying God to help Jean; and it is possible that God heard.

"It is late, Margot," Jean said at last, in a low tone. "Doesn't your mother want you?"

"Mamma is asleep," said Margot.

"I won't play any more to-night then," said Jean.

"And there is something else too, Jean, that I wanted to tell you, but I didn't like to come in and interrupt you before. It's rather good news this time."

"Let's have it, then," said Jean, laughing, a short, hard laugh. "Let's have all the good news we can get, Margot. Perhaps it will make up—the good news—for all the things we can't get—or are fools enough," he added half to himself, "not to take."

"Well, it's an engagement," said Margot excitedly. "And the terms are better than I've ever been offered; it's every night for three months—at twice my usual salary."

Jean sprang forward and caught both her hands; it was months since he had looked at her with such delight.

“Oh, but I’m glad, Margot!” he said, “and to-morrow we will celebrate the occasion. I will take you out and you shall dine as you have never dined before, and then we’ll go to the Opera, and hear the big women sing, women who will one day listen to you—they will have nothing but a little squeak then and a grand manner, and you will have all the melody and all the strength of all the world in that little white throat of yours.”

Margot flushed up to her eyes with pleasure; her throat was not really white, it was rather brown, but the programme was splendid.

“How pleased you are, Jean,” she said wonderingly. “I did not know you would be so pleased.”

“Oh, I’m not only glad,” said Jean, stopping in front of her with shining eyes, “I’m relieved. Just think! you have got back what I took away from you and more! Ah! if you knew how bitterly I have been feeling all you have done for me. Couldn’t you see I was almost ashamed to look at you?”

He put his hands on her shoulders and shook her gently. His selfishness fell away from him; she was his comrade again, his good, kind little comrade with whom he lived on equal terms, and whom he would die for rather than wrong. Margot wrenched herself free from him; to Jean’s surprise a cloud had come into her eyes.

“So that was it,” she said slowly. “I see!” She turned back to the piano and began to pick up the music Jean’s impulsive movement had flung to the floor; he could not see her face.

“Now you no longer owe me anything,” said Margot.

Jean gave a long sigh of relief.

“You can’t think what a beast it made me feel,” he said apologetically.

“You are quite free,” said Margot. Her back was turned to him, but Jean heard the little note of pain in her voice.

“But aren’t you glad I’m glad, Margot?” he asked, in a puzzled way.

“Of course I’m glad you’re glad!” cried Margot vehemently. “Good-night!” And she ran quickly past him out of the room. Jean turned to catch her, but he was not quick enough.

He stood staring blankly at the piano. The piano, however, could have told him nothing except that Margot dusted it very unnecessarily every morning directly he went out, and sometimes kissed the keys. And even that, perhaps, it was just as well it should keep to itself.

The celebration fell through entirely; nothing more was said about it, which was strange, considering that both Jean and Margot were glad.

CHAPTER XV

IF Mahomet, on arriving at the foot of the mountain, had met with a frank repulse from the object of his condescension—say, an earthquake or a stream of molten lava—it would have been permissible on the part of the prophet to feel a little hurt. So that Jean may be excused for suffering the same kind of annoyance when the Banque de Paris et des Pays-Bas shut their doors in his face.

It had been an effort for Jean to go back to them at all, an effort that had at once attacked his independence and his pride, and having made this sacrifice, he was not at all prepared to find that it had been made in vain. His old friends, the fellow clerks, winked sympathetically, and one of them even invited him to return for lunch at noon. Jean refused his offer somewhat magnificently, little dreaming that in a very short time he would look at a proffered meal as one of the more important gifts of Heaven. He turned away from the gloomy portals of his former prison-house and said to himself that he was still free; as indeed he was, quite free, with Paris before him, twenty francs in his pocket, and two extremely good suits of unpaid-for clothes.

The weeks that followed seemed an incredible time to Jean to look back upon—and yet, while they were passing it was every other time that seemed incredible. They began quite easily with that useful lady known in Paris as "*ma Tante*." "*Ma Tante*" willingly accepted Jean's gold watch and chain, stooped to his tie-pin and few small articles of jewellery, and by and by absorbed, with an increasingly

small return, all that he did not wear of his wardrobe. Jean belonged to that class of society which knows what it is to do without some of its wants, but to whom it is wholly inconceivable that it should ever be asked to do without them all.

Jean informed Margot quite comfortably that a little went a long way, but he took for granted that he should have a little. A line, he felt, must be drawn somewhere, a D'Ucelles could hardly starve; and he was very cheerful and quite funny about it to Margot. Margot, however, took matters very seriously; she didn't seem to think that lines are drawn anywhere, or that there was anything essentially amusing in a D'Ucelles without an overcoat.

She merely bought Jean a winter overcoat for a Christmas present. Jean almost quarrelled with her on the subject; but Margot cried, and said he couldn't really be her friend unless he took it; so eventually they went to early Mass together, and Jean wore the overcoat.

Then Jean got a job as guide to a large and ignorant English family, who took an absorbing interest in the relics of Napoleon. While they remained in Paris nothing further went to *ma Tante* and Jean paid his board regularly.

Unfortunately even Napoleon can be exhausted in time, and having exhausted him, the English family returned reluctantly to Birmingham, and Jean found himself explaining to Margot that he was too busy to come in for meals; in the future he would take them out. Margot knew perfectly well what that meant, and she arranged a sly system of *goûters* and early cups of coffee, which he found it almost impossible to evade.

Liane had kept her word to Margot; she had used the whole power of a popular and unscrupulous woman to destroy every chance she had made for Jean. None of her friends would look at the little musician any more. As for Maurice Golaud, he stated frankly that if he saw the fellow again it would come to swords, and as everyone knew how shockingly badly Maurice fenced, this was felt to prove how atrociously Liane's little musician must have behaved. Still, of course, everyone wished that he would meet Golaud.

It occurred to Margot once to mention very timidly the fine uncle of the motor and the fur overcoat, as a possible source of supply, but when Jean said that he would rather settle the question with the Seine she dropped the subject.

"After all," Jean would sometimes say carelessly, "look what a time it gives me for your voice; it would be almost a pity, *chérie*, to take up anything else just now!"

It was true Margot did wonders with her new singing master; he put his whole soul into Margot's voice, he polished it like a careful jeweller polishes his favourite jewel.

He thought and planned for it as he wandered to and fro, looking for work, and found whatever warm corners there are to be found for shabby vagrants in Paris. The Parc Monceaux was peculiarly given up to Margot's middle notes; he wanted them to be the best of all.

Every evening he took her to the theatre and waited for her to come out; fortunately Margot never knew that one of the things Jean did while he was waiting was to find cabs for that class of society who do not find things easily for themselves. On one occasion Jean was so fortunate as to find

his Uncle Romain a vehicle, for which service that unconscious gentleman rewarded him with a franc, the only assistance at this time that Jean received from his relatives.

Romain was too busy protecting the pink silk petticoats of the lady who was to share his cab to notice his nephew's face. Jean gave a little laugh as he regarded his franc under the nearest lamppost.

"Funny thing," remarked Romain to his companion, "the man I tipped just now laughed like my brother Alphonse—one had not supposed that *ces gens-là* could resemble one's family!"

"You probably gave him far too much," said the lady, with a deep sigh. "You are generous to everyone but me," and the conversation followed its accustomed channels.

It was a wet night, and even Margot's overcoat did not succeed in keeping any warmth in Jean, and he was guilty of deliberately wondering if it would be any colder at the bottom of the Seine. It was strange how much he had felt his little meeting with his uncle.

He was not altogether taken by surprise next morning, when he found himself after dressing (a process which he had noticed seemed to lengthen itself out inordinately after a sleepless night) stretched upon the floor, with Margot bending over him.

"What's the matter?" he asked rather crossly. "What are you making such a fuss about, Margot?" He felt an indisposition to get up; he was very well where he was.

"I heard you fall; you must have fainted, Jean! I knew you would! Oh, I knew you would!"

“Well, never mind!” said Jean. “I suppose I must get up.” He did not know how much Margot helped him, but he was not sorry to find himself lying on his bed again and staring at the ceiling.

“It’s only this bad cold,” he said, half to himself and half to Margot. “People always have colds in the early spring. It’s a bore it’s raining.”

“Your hands are burning hot, Jean; you’ll stay in and keep quite quiet to-day, won’t you?” Margot pleaded.

Jean made a face, but he agreed that he would stay in.

Margot immediately called in a doctor. He was as reassuring as doctors usually are. Jean would need very careful nursing, he said; there was a spot on his left lung, and his heart was terribly over-strained and weak. Still, he had youth on his side. Margot mustn’t be alarmed; the first thing was to bring down the temperature and to keep up his strength.

Margot despatched Madame Selba to her father’s friends, broke her theatre engagements and threw herself body and soul into the struggle with the thermometer. She would get the temperature down! Margot knew no more than Jean how many days and weeks passed before that blessed moment when the thermometer definitely dropped. She knew that she told the doctor that Jean was to have everything that money could buy, and that to buy the things the doctor ordered she spent the last of her savings. Her days passed making poultices, cooking, pawning furniture round the corner, thinking of all that Jean could possibly want, and seeing that

he had it. When he was quiet she prayed. She had a theory that at night she slept.

There was only one thing that Jean wanted that Margot could not supply; and he wanted that incessantly, and cried for it as a dying man cries for water.

“Liane! Liane!” Jean moaned over and over again, and Margot tried to get Liane for Jean. She wrote to her—and when she got back the cruel answer: “Madame de Brances knows no such person as Monsieur Jean D’Ucelles and regrets that she cannot oblige Mademoiselle Selba,” Margot cried.

Sometimes he would think Margot was Liane, and then the look came into his eyes which Margot had never seen there for herself, and Margot would answer it with a tenderness that surely Liane had never felt for Jean or for anyone else. And for the moment Jean would be satisfied, only an hour later to rend her heart anew with the same low, impatient murmur, “Liane! Liane!”

“Yes,” said the doctor with his finger on Jean’s pulse and his eye on the clock, “he’ll pull through now, I think, but you’ll have to feed him up, you know; he’s had a close shave, and he is desperately weak.”

The doctor was not supposed to be a sympathetic man, he had very little time for it, and experience had buried his heart under the dust of innumerable human needs; yet he paused for a moment as he saw the look in Margot’s eyes; it was the Magnificat come to life again, and it touched the doctor.

“I should suggest your feeding up yourself, you know,” he said kindly. “That young fellow owes his life to you; his

kind of case depends almost entirely on good nursing.”

The look in Margot’s eyes deepened, her lips trembled so that she could not speak; the doctor shook hands with her and hurried away.

“Margot,” said a weak voice from the bed. “Margot, I’m very hungry.”

Margot gave a little sob of delight. He was to have chicken to-day. Her face clouded over a little when she remembered the price of chicken. Never mind, there was still the best bedstead; she had not meant to pawn that if she could help it; but she could not help it. So she thanked God, and ran to get Jean’s breakfast.

CHAPTER XVI

LIANE did not use empty threats. She was, as she was fond of proclaiming, a good-natured woman, and she never went out of her way to do anyone harm unless she meant to. Margot and Jean had defied her and disappeared, and she was willing for the moment to let the matter rest there. But they made the mistake of reappearing. She read notices of Margot's singing and she heard from her friends in the musical world that her little Baron was achieving something. He had played for one of Torialli's pupils, he was getting a name as an accompanist; and he was still with Margot. This she gathered directly from Margot's ill-spelt appeal to her. She was gratified by the appeal, and she would have been immensely touched by Jean's death. Jean, however, did not die—he went so far as to recover without renewing the appeal.

"One must do something," said Liane, during the temporary absence of one of Jean's successors. "I will call upon the uncle."

Madame de Brances found Romain at home and alone. Madame, the servants told her at the door, was away for a week, the Comte, however, had not accompanied her, he had a slight indisposition, but he would most certainly see Madame.

Romain's indisposition was of so slight a nature that it only consisted of an inability to do what he disliked. He told Madame de Brances that the thought of a country visit had

made him ill, and that the only remedy which suggested itself to him was to remain in town.

"For me," said Liane, lifting her eyes to the ceiling, "I adore the country!"

"So I should suppose," agreed Romain with his enigmatical smile. "Madame gives me that impression."

"If my life would only permit," continued Madame de Brances, "I would stay there for months at a time. How it would rest me! I can imagine days in the green fields—it brings tears to my eyes."

"It would to mine," said Romain. "But I prefer to keep them dry."

"If that were possible!" sighed Liane.

Romain bowed. He was intensely amused at this interview; he had already the honour of a slight acquaintance with the famous actress, but he did not for one moment suppose that she had called to renew it.

"Talking of the country," said Liane, drawing her long soft gloves through her fingers, "brings one back to your little nephew. You are so alike, Monsieur, one would suppose him to be a younger brother."

Romain bowed again.

"I should have said myself," he murmured, "my elder brother, but do not let me interrupt you!"

"*Pauvre petit* Jean!" said Liane in her best tragic manner. "There I blame myself! It is, in fact, to blame myself—to make, as it were, a little confession that I come here to-day."

“Ah!” said Romain. “May I ask, Madame, if you come to confess his sins or your own?”

“Altogether my own,” said Liane, with a little sigh. “I have been unconscionably cruel to him!”

“Ah, then, it was Jean who tired first!” thought Romain to himself.

“*Chère* Madame, when are not beautiful women cruel?” he said aloud. “It is their chief quality; even their kindness one suffers from—probably more,” he added to himself.

“Indeed I meant to be kind,” said Liane quickly. “I thought, ‘Here is this poor young man, inexperienced, bored with his bank, with a great talent (that I most emphatically declare he really has, Monsieur, a unique talent).’ I am an artist to my finger-tips, think of me what you like. I could not resist the temptation, I persuaded him to forsake the Bank. I threw him with both hands into the world of music, all this time without dreaming of the poor boy’s emotions—they were, I thought, only gratitude. Monsieur le Comte, they were not!”

“At his age what could you expect?” laughed Romain.

“I never yet knew a grateful young man; indeed, I would rather not.”

Liane brushed aside Romain’s comments; she leaned forward in her chair.

“She is getting a little too old to be so dramatic; it tires one,” Romain said to himself.

“It was not gratitude,” said Liane, drawing herself up with a superb gesture, “*c’était l’amour*!”

“Dear me!” said Romain, concealing a desire to yawn. “Wouldn’t you have been awfully annoyed with him if it hadn’t been?”

Liane’s eyes met his for a moment; she ceased to be superbly dramatic. Then she leaned back in her chair and laughed.

“Perhaps,” she said. “Give me a cigarette, please!”

Romain handed her one and rang the bell. Liane did not protest when he ordered a liqueur, she merely stated which she preferred. As soon as her wants were satisfied, she continued her story, but her tone was different.

“Oh well!” she said. “I am not, as you may imagine, as particular as all that—a little love is never out of place in a young man, and if your nephew had been satisfied with a little in return, who knows how long the arrangement might have lasted? But he was not—he is a young man of a terribly serious nature, brought up in the country, which I find we both detest. He required a great deal of love, he required a great deal of everything, that young man. I am a busy woman and I could not find time for him. I frankly told him so. What a business! He raved, he stormed, he made himself ill. He drove me to my wits’ end. I was patient, but in the end I became bored.”

“Too much is always a bore,” murmured Romain gently.

“I gave him his dismissal. What was my horror when in despair (perhaps, too, poor boy, with some thought of revenge) I beheld him throw himself away on a little girl of the theatre, a trifle of a *cabotine*, used, I believe, to clean the boards! This is what (I said to myself) I have driven him to!”

“I can fancy it must have annoyed you,” agreed Romain.

“It was of his relations that I thought most,” Liane continued. “You whom I have met—Madame la Comtesse whom I have not yet had the pleasure of meeting. But I comforted myself—it will be over before they have time to hear of it, I said. I must not blame myself too severely.”

“And then what happened?” asked Romain, with some interest. He had heard nothing from Jean lately.

“Jean has been very ill,” said Liane. “One can imagine the kind of thing; truly I feel myself consumed with remorse—poor boy! what sufferings I have caused him! This girl has nursed him. It appears that for his sake she has given up scrubbing the boards; they have no means of support, and out of gratitude—and I cannot forbear saying to myself, out of despair—he is contemplating a union with her.”

“A what!” cried Romain, now really startled.

“My dear friend, I regret to say that I believe Jean capable of anything,” said Liane, “even marriage!”

“*Mon Dieu!*” said Romain. “This is worse than his poor father! But surely he would not think of contemplating such a step without speaking to me?”

“He is very weak,” said Liane. “He has romantic ideas, and he is in the hands of a little girl who boasts of respectability. One knows what that means.”

“I am certainly very much obliged to you,” said Romain, after a pause. “The affair needs looking into; they must, at any cost, be separated.”

Liane rose to her feet.

“Tell him that he has my good wishes,” she said with a melancholy smile. “I have done what I could for him. Was it my fault that I could not give him what he asked?”

“From what I have gathered,” said Romain, holding out his hand to her, “I should imagine that it was entirely his own.”

They parted. Romain smoked for some time in silence. Then he laughed.

“Rather clever of Jean,” he said to himself, “to begin his career by tantalizing a born coquette. But, *Mon Dieu*! How they hate, these women! I would not give much for Mademoiselle Margot, if she found herself under Madame’s heel! After all it is possible that what she says is true. I really cannot go to see the boy again—a sick room after six flights of stairs would be worse than one’s wife in the country! But I can write him a letter. It’s a pity that I haven’t any money just now. I should like to send him some. Perhaps after all I had better wait till Marie comes back. It’s the kind of thing one ought to talk over with one’s wife, it makes one feel like the father of a family! The good Liane is decidedly going off, I fear. Jealousy is never becoming in a woman after thirty. It is something for a boy of Jean’s age to have made a woman of experience so much excited. Ah! Henri, is that you? Bring me a *marnier*. I shall not be in to dinner to-night, and put my latch-key in the pocket of my dress clothes.” And the domesticated Romain lit another cigarette, and went over in imagination his interesting evening programme, which did not altogether coincide with his new character of *père de famille*.

CHAPTER XVII

JEAN opened dreamy eyes to look at Margot, who sat by his bedside reducing with swift competent hands a pile of his clothes that she was mending. His body felt blissfully light and at ease, and for the first time since his illness his mind was alive.

He felt the singular clarity and depth of mind claimed by the mystic after a long period of fasting and prayer. All his senses were at their keenest and seemed to work without obstruction. None of the incoherence and clumsiness of reality were present to him; life seemed an easy and an exquisite thing radiant with love and beauty.

He gazed at Margot's face and noted one by one its gracious curves, the little lift of the lips, the line of her chin, the soft brown hair that shadowed her low forehead; it seemed as if her face was new to him, and he was looking at it for the first time. It was thinner than usual, and there were dark purple shadows under her eyes. She worked quickly and as if absorbed; but no movement of Jean's escaped her; she seemed to see without lifting her eyelids that he was awake, and when she raised them at length to greet him, Jean felt as if he had been taken into a strong place full of sunshine.

He gave a little sigh of pleasure.

"You've been very good to me, Margot," he said. "And how pretty everything in the room is. I don't believe there's such a neat or charming place in Paris!"

The soft colour came into Margot's cheeks; she had to perfection the Frenchwoman's talent for the management of things. Material was always docile to her, and she had kept Jean's room like a shrine. His praise was as unaccustomed as it was sweet, for Jean had been too absorbed in his own life before to realise how many of its conveniences he owed to someone else.

To-day he seemed to be seeing the past in fresh colours. What a stupid world he had lived in! Everyone had tried to get the better of everyone else, people had thought so much of money; he had himself—not of the money perhaps—but of what it could buy. Stupid things like admiration, fine clothes, and inconceivably uninteresting social successes! He had not thought of music, of beauty, or of the hard Spartan magnificent triumphs of the spirit. He had worked hard for the spirit, fought for the spirit, and then somehow or other, he did not yet know how, other things had kept coming in. He had been pushed away from his goal—music had forsaken him. He had played accompaniments, and worst of all, stupidest of all, had been his feeling for Liane—he shivered as he thought of it. How cruel she had been, and how indifferent to that vague foolish passion of his poured out at her feet so unnecessarily—for it was not the kind of thing Liane wanted. It was wasted; she had not cared for his soul. It seemed to him now the most idle and incredible folly, and he forgot the force of his passion as completely as one forgets last year's toothache. He felt as if he had reached a new system of values, one in which it would be no longer difficult to do without, because by doing so he would come into an inheritance of things more precious, clear solitude for work, freedom from the strain of the uncongenial, and entire

repudiation of the whole material world. In fact, it was the Higher Life again, only this time Jean called it art and not religion. He was a little more human over it too, because he allowed it to include the friendship of Margot.

He could not remember his illness very distinctly, but he knew that her voice had sounded like music, and her touch had been cool and soft, and that somehow, just when things had been at their worst, she had made them better.

He did not know why it was, but he felt vaguely better and safer if she were in the room; even the keen kindly eyes of the doctor did not give him the sense of support that he found in Margot's. He felt that there was in her something indestructibly strong, and that it was there for his use.

Jean put out his hand towards her and she let her sewing fall into her lap while she covered it.

"It is nearly time for you to have your broth, Jean," she said.

"No, it can't be," said Jean. "I want to talk to you, Margot. Where do you get the money to buy broth and chicken and jelly?"

"I make the jellies," said Margot, "and the broth and chicken are not expensive at this time of year."

"Where's your mother?" Jean persisted.

"She's staying with Papa's friends for a little change. She'll be back in a day or two!"

"Then you've done everything?" said Jean with a little sigh. "Do you know, Margot, when I came here I meant to help you, but it seems to me that I only gave you more

trouble—it has always been you who have helped me. How do you manage, too, about your singing, *chérie*? I never hear you!"

"Would you like me to sing for you now?" asked Margot, anxious to change the subject. "I could, you know; I know that last little song of Schubert's by heart."

"Yes, do," said Jean eagerly.

Margot drew a deep breath and winced.

"At least I thought I did," she murmured. She had not realized how difficult it is to sing when you are hungry. For the last three days she had had very little to eat.

"I'm so sorry, Jean," she said. "I'm afraid I can't without you. You see, then, how necessary you are! You do help me!"

"But you haven't told me how you are getting on at the theatre?" Jean persisted. "Tell me, Margot!" There was the first note of definite suspicion in his voice.

Margot almost welcomed the postman's rap. She sprang up and came back with a letter.

"It's from one of your fine friends," she said, laughing. "I can feel the thick paper—and a great crest—and I think, Monsieur Jean, it is from a lady! I shall be very discreet and go away without so much as a question. When I come back you will tell me if her hair is black or gold—that will be for a reward."

"Don't be gone long, Margot," said Jean. "I miss you so when you're away."

He took the letter out of her hand lazily; it was the D'Ucelles crest; he wondered vaguely what it was. It was not Romain's writing. After all it had seemed simpler to Romain to leave the matter to his wife—if he could have sent money he would have written himself. But it seemed a shabby thing to write without, and Marie would not let him send a sou. Jean wondered if perhaps his uncle had heard of his illness and sent him a cheque. What a pleasure and surprise that would be for Margot when she came back; it would pay for all the extra expense she had been put to, and if he were careful he might take her for a day in the country.

These November days were warm and mild, with a sweet fresh sunshine in them. He would like to see Margot in the country; she had been born there, and he knew that she loved it. He remembered how the first time he had heard her sing, her voice had seemed to him like the breath of the woods. He would not open the letter till she had gone. He felt very lazy still about doing things; it was so much more easy to think and plan.

When Margot had given him his broth and watched him take it to the last drop, she left him.

"But now I'm sure it's from a lady with fair hair," she said laughing. "Or else you would have opened it! You know well enough that I detest fair hair!"

Margot did not often make little jokes but her heart had never felt so light before. She wished that Jean could be for ever convalescent and grateful, seeking her with the clinging eyes of a child, and that she might always be hungry and happy, and tired, for his sake; but perhaps not quite so hungry! They would be sure to offer her something to eat,

though, at her father's friends, and that would last very well till to-morrow; and there was plenty of the best bedstead left for Jean.

When Margot had gone, Jean opened his letter.

"My Dear Jean" (his aunt had written), "This is indeed sad news which your uncle tells me! We do not quite know what to say about it; he has asked me to write in his place, as he is bothered with some affairs. Of course, it was my natural instinct to go to you at once, but I hear from your Uncle Romain that it is quite impossible for me to do so. You will understand this, I know, for though you have unfortunately been led into a connection which is quite beneath you, you would hardly wish your aunt to enter into the house of such a person.

"My poor boy, I fear you have fallen into the little trap your uncle warned you about some time ago, and that your illness has put you under the very obligation we were so anxious to save you from! It is not very agreeable for us, as you may fancy, to hear all over Paris that our nephew is being kept at the expense of a young person of the theatre, who has had—so I hear—to pawn the furniture to support him during his illness! But do not fancy that I write to reproach you. I feel that in spite of your rather ungrateful disregard of our little plans for you in the past, as if on this very account perhaps, you might more readily listen to a new suggestion.

"Do, my dear Jean, *while there is yet time*, leave the house of this disreputable little person and

return to your Aunt Anne for awhile. The country air will do you all the good in the world, and you might interest yourself usefully in looking after your little estate. Let me hear directly you are well enough to do this; and I will send your uncle's valet to meet you at the railway station with money for your ticket, as I fear, from the reports your uncle has received, that you must be very short of money.

"Your Uncle Romain joins me in sending his sympathetic condolences with you in your illness. With every good wish for your speedy recovery and your future well-being,

"Believe me, dear Jean,

"Your affectionate aunt,

"MARIE AGNES D'UCELLES."

It was perhaps unfortunate for Madame D'Ucelles' purpose that Romain had not been present to read this letter; if he had it would certainly have not been sent. Marie had forgotten his advice, that one should never be disagreeable until after one had lost one's cause.

Jean read the letter three times over before he could persuade himself that it was real. His mind and body alike rebelled against this new brutality of pain. He could not feel as if it were meant for him, or as if it were about Margot. His tender, faithful Margot, whose heart was as pure as a spring flower, defying in its fragile bloom even the dust of Paris. It might indeed be broken, but it could not be stained.

His aunt's words made him blush hotly and fiercely for her. He was not given to judging harshly of women; but he was ashamed of his aunt, it would have astonished Madame D'Ucelles as much as it would have enraged her, if she had known that Jean thought her a very bad woman. Then he felt a fresh pang. Was it true that Margot had had to pawn her things? He rose slowly to his feet and staggered to the door. His little room seemed very large and strange to him, and the passage outside seemed to stretch into eternity, but his suspense and excitement gave him strength. He opened the door of the living-room and staggered back against the wall. It was quite empty. There was no table, no handsome dresser covered with shining pots and pans, no armchair for Madame Selba, nothing there at all, except a box on which there lay two eggs and a half-mixed pudding for Jean's dinner. The shelves in the little larder were quite bare. He went on into the room beyond; his eyes could hardly see, for they were covered by a mist of tears; there was only a mattress and some bed-clothes under Margot's little stoup of holy water, and she had fitted up another box for a dressing-table. The mirror was gone, and she had nothing but a hand glass to help her make her careful toilet in the morning.

Margot had gathered into her room all the futile little treasures for which the pawnbroker had no desire, and these touched Jean most of all. There they were, all set out in order to comfort Margot's heart—embroidered table-cloths, antimacassars, carved picture-frames, and Jean's photograph in a white and gilt frame Margot had made herself, embroidered with blue forget-me-nots.

Poor Jean covered his face with his hands and crept back to his room. He flung himself on his bed and cried like a

child. What could he do in the face of this cruel and appalling tenderness that had stripped itself bare to the verge of starvation for him, that had kept nothing back, and had paid the utmost price with smiling, mendacious eyes?

For a time he did not see what he could do, he felt no anger at all, for Margot's love had gone too deep for mere resentment. It had touched the core of Jean's nature, and the core of his nature was sound and ready to respond.

Nor did he feel even anger with his aunt now; on the contrary, he felt a vague gratitude to her, for she had showed him what to do. If his aunt could think evil of Margot, there was perhaps left after all a way of serving her. Jean no longer thought of paying back an obligation; his pride had been not so much broken as absorbed in a deeper feeling; but if he could serve her!

He had only the shelter of his name to give her, but that she should have! He had never dreamed of Margot as his wife before. His strangely lucid and passionate nature caused him to divide all the relations of his life with a definiteness that never confused the issue.

Margot was to be his friend and pupil; he was not to make love to her even if he wanted to; it would not be fair. Now it appeared she was shaken out of this pigeon-hole into another, one wholly unoccupied so far. She was to be his wife. He flushed with the magnanimity of his scheme. After all he could be very happy with her; they would make an arrangement about Madame Selba (he passed as quickly as possible over this part of his plan); then he would take Margot back to Ucelles. There they would live very simply and quietly for art, and art only. As for happiness—what,

after all, was happiness? The pursuit of a rapid inconstant image which only waited to be reached to vanish as you grasped it, or turned into the horrible familiarity of the thing possessed? Surely it was best to try simply for contentment, and to look for that in work, obligation, and pleasant human ties, without excitement, perhaps. But Jean felt to-day as if he would never care for excitement again, and then there would always be that happy, grateful light in Margot's eyes! All men like to be worshipped, especially when they are not feeling very strong and there is nothing else to do. Normally, perhaps, they may seek for a more active rôle; but Jean was not feeling very normal at the moment; his temperature had risen several degrees, and he felt all the sober exultation of sacrifice before the sacrifice is made.

He was very anxious for Margot to come back.

When she came he could hardly wait for her to light the candles behind him before he seized her hands and told her to sit down, he had something particular to say to her, and he must say it at once, and she mustn't get his supper till then.

Margot gave him a quick look, then she drew her chair near the bed and laid her hand on his pulse.

"No, Margot, don't. I'm not the least excited," Jean said impatiently.

Margot withdrew her hand; she had felt his pulse flying under her fingers.

"I have been thinking things over, Margot, since I have been lying here," Jean began, fixing her with his brilliant feverish eyes.

“I have come to a great decision. I am going to make a change in my life. I cannot be satisfied to earn money as I am earning it now, out of the mere shell of what, to me, is indestructible life. I must get nearer to the heart of things; why—you’re laughing at me, Margot—but I know you understand—these people who live in Paris cheat and talk and play with sacred fire; I cannot belong to them, I must belong to myself—” Jean paused for a moment; he tossed restlessly on his pillow.

“But a man needs more than that,” he went on at last. “He must have something to look forward to—something human and touching and loving—a man must have a home!”

Margot drew her breath a little quicker, but she saw she wasn’t to interrupt this list of a man’s needs. Jean was evidently feverish to-night; she must look into this directly he stopped talking.

“Margot, come nearer to me. Give me both your hands,” he said, his eyes filled with tears; they were tears half of weakness and half of pleasure; he was pleased at what he was going to do for Margot. She gave him both her hands.

“Have you thought, can you guess, who is to make my home for me? No! Don’t take away your hands, Margot—” He drew them to his lips and she felt his kisses burn them. “They have worked for me and nursed me, these dear hands,” he went on, breathless with sudden passion. “Will you let them stay with me always? Oh, your dear little, wonderful woman’s hands, Margot; they are so small they make me cry; they are so strong that I could worship them. Now, do you see what I meant? We should be very poor, I know, but I could manage, Margot—and we should live in

the country, and we would sing and play all day long in the blessed golden silence of Ucelles—say you will, say quickly you will be my wife, Margot. Yes! Yes! Yes!”

“Your wife, Jean?” said Margot; all the colour left her face, her heart leapt over against her side like a terrified bird; then it felt very heavy.

“Dear Margot! don’t look so frightened, you are not afraid of me, are you?”

“No! I’m not afraid of you!” gasped Margot. It seemed to her as if a thousand thoughts were beating at the bar of her mind and could not get through. Why did Jean ask this of her? Would it be good for him? Did he really need a quiet, simple life? Could she make him happy that way? But all these questions suddenly seemed to resolve into one. What had made him ask her that question? Her heart rebelled against this stern catechism. Ah, why could she not take her joy when it came to her? It had come at last—for a moment she let the taste of it fill her whole consciousness, but she did not let Jean see that she had done so; she kept her eyes down and no one knew what Margot looked like when she held her heart’s desire. Then she lifted them and looked into Jean’s eyes as Jean had never seen her look before; it was the terrible implacable look of a human being seeking for truth. She looked into Jean’s eyes, and he felt her passing beyond all his careful plans, beyond his excited momentary feelings, his tender regard for her, and his ineffectual gratitude, into his very soul.

“Don’t look at me like that, Margot,” he said quickly. Then he tried to baffle her inflexible honesty. “Don’t you love me, Margot?”

He almost smiled as he asked it; he was so sure of her great love.

“Not in that way, Jean,” said Margot firmly and with absolute finality. And as she spoke she drew back a little, and took away her trembling, fluttering hands. Jean stared at her; it seemed to him as if solid earth had failed, as if something that was his by an inalienable right had been taken away.

He felt not angry so much as incredulous and blank. How could she possibly not love him? And how very lonely it made him feel!

Margot stooped down to pick up his letter that had fallen to the floor.

“Ah!” said Margot quickly. Her question answered itself; not even the pain in Jean’s eyes which was stabbing her to the heart could turn her from her purpose now.

Someone had written things to Jean, things which had urged him to do what she must never let him do, that was all. She prayed that God would make Jean turn away his eyes from her so that she should not be tempted beyond her strength to lean forward and take him in her arms. Jean threw himself back exhausted upon his pillows and closed his eyes.

“Very well then, Margot,” he said coldly. “That settles it, of course, I must go away.”

Margot crouched down in her chair like a creature caught in a trap.

“But, Jean, why?” she said. In spite of herself something primitive and bare escaped in her voice; it contradicted her

words and reached Jean's tired senses with unmistakable emphasis.

He was too tired now, though; he no longer wanted to hear anything that she had to say; all the colour had faded out of his dream. He would not open his eyes and look at Margot again.

"Jean, you'll come back to me? Yes! Yes! do go away for a change directly you are strong enough," Margot went on, taking her hat-pins in and out of her hat. "Nothing matters that you've said, nothing that you feel could make any difference to us really! We must go on! we must help each other all we can. Jean, I may ask this of you, mayn't I?"

"You may ask anything that you like of me, Margot," said Jean; "and there's nothing that I would refuse you."

And then Margot knew quite well how little he had loved her.

CHAPTER XVIII

JEAN had told Margot that the one thing he would never forgive was interference in his concerns. No friend, he had explained, had the right to force upon him such an indignity. One might willingly consent to being under an obligation to a friend, but to receive a compulsory and unconscious benefit behind one's back was a wound to the personal honour which nothing could ever heal.

Such service was worse than enmity; it was more intimate and less forgivable.

Margot listened humbly to this statement of Jean's views; she thought how noble he was; and then it occurred to her that he need never find out.

After all, the great thing was that Jean should be helped, and Margot had never felt that it was at all necessary she should be noble. Jean was Jean, but when you came to think of it, it was almost a moral convenience that Margot was only Margot.

On the day after Jean's disastrous proposal of marriage Margot mysteriously left him. She said she had occasion to take the air—and she took it, after having made a toilette peculiarly ambitious for so simple a purpose. Jean was not, of course, offended with Margot; at the same time he was sufficiently hurt to evince no curiosity. She had not broken his heart, but there would have been something inappropriate in his expressing any wish to know why she wore her best hat and did her hair in the most complicated manner.

He satisfied himself, therefore, with looking extremely depressed, and watching which direction she took from the window. At the corner she stopped to buy two crimson roses and pinned them six inches under her chin; it was almost the last franc of the best bedstead money.

Monsieur Cartier had returned to Paris, and Margot sent her name up to his handsome rooms through the medium of a low-voiced, velvet-footed manservant—while she waited trembling at the door. She wrote on the card, “I want urgently to see you, Monsieur Jean’s friend, Margot Selba.”

The great Monsieur Cartier was a good-natured man; he was also curious.

All of Liane’s friends knew the name of Mademoiselle Selba almost as well as Liane’s enemies knew it, but Cartier was probably the only one of them who had no intention of dropping the young musician because of it.

Liane’s wrongs did not matter nearly so much to him as Jean’s touch on the piano—he considered, and he was an excellent authority, that Jean D’Ucelles had a very pretty touch and an idea or two behind it, while it had not occurred to him that Liane’s wrongs shared in either of these delicate qualities.

“Well, Mademoiselle,” he exclaimed, as Margot was announced, “of course I remember you—you had no need to announce yourself as a friend of Jean’s. It is a pleasure to see you. I read a charming account of one of your successes in the *Journal* the other day. You stand on your own feet now, and Jean, I hope, continues to remain at them?”

“Thank you, Monsieur,” replied Margot, with a neat little bow. “It is of Monsieur Jean that I came to speak to you.”

Cartier pulled forward one of his big leather armchairs in which Margot’s tiny figure was almost lost. She continued, however, to behave with as much dignity and assurance as if she were six feet tall and had been born in the Tuileries. She had never been in such a big room in her life, and her feet didn’t quite touch the floor—but no one would ever have supposed so to look at her.

“What’s the young scapegrace been doing?” asked Cartier genially. “If he has not been practising four hours a day he had better avoid meeting me, that’s all! A genius that doesn’t work is like a blood-horse with a broken wind—all very fine for the preliminary canter, but good for nothing after the first fence. You don’t come here with tales like that, I hope, Mademoiselle?”

“Oh, Monsieur,” exclaimed Margot, “first, before I tell you anything, promise me never to let him know that I have been here!”

“Mademoiselle,” laughed Cartier, “I am discretion itself. No one shall ever know of it! Has he become a *Barbe Bleue, le petit* Jean, in my absence?”

Then Margot told him. It was a long story, in spite of which there was a good deal left out of it.

Cartier followed it attentively, twisting his gold-rimmed glasses to and fro, and shaking his foot in a certain vexation of spirit. He did not like to hear of suffering, and it was of suffering Margot told him. Jean’s suffering, of course, his poverty, his heroism, his endurance; it lost nothing from

Margot's lips; only it appeared that she herself had taken no part in it. "And the worst of it is, Monsieur Cartier," she finished, "that he is so proud; the best men always are, I think! It would be so difficult, you can't think how difficult, to help him! The artists he used to play for no longer offer him work; perhaps, Monsieur, you may have heard that he displeased Madame de Brances. If she had only known, there was nothing in it at all; but we cannot expect a lady like that to believe——"

"In innocence," finished Cartier softly. "Indeed, Mademoiselle, you are right; that particular belief does not come easily to those who have lived for long in Paris...."

Margot coloured. "There was no way whatever in which Monsieur Jean was to blame," she said, "no one, not his own mother, could have blamed him. Nevertheless, it is through his kindness to me that he has suffered. So you see, Monsieur, it is only natural that I should wish to make him some little amends."

Cartier nodded. "Very natural indeed, Mademoiselle, and quite probable, if you will excuse my saying so, that you have already made them."

"Madame de Brances has persuaded none of her friends to employ him," continued Margot, taking no notice of Cartier's remark.

"She has not persuaded me," said Cartier simply.

"Oh, Monsieur!" cried Margot.

"There, there," said Cartier quickly, "no thanks! no thanks, Mademoiselle. You and I, I fancy, are at one in that—we prefer not to be thanked for our little services. I like

Monsieur Jean, I think him a musician; as for the de Brances affairs—they are, *en général*, an intolerable nuisance, and they seem to increase as she gets older. I don't, however, know of much I can put in Jean's way at present. The Toriallis want another *accompagnateur*; he might go there for the moment while I look about. It's not the kind of thing I care for him to do—but it will keep his head above water. To-morrow I will call and make him the offer, and since he would be sure to refuse money—and you must have been put to some expense..."

Margot rose to her feet.

"I think, Monsieur," she said, "that I also could not take money. If it could be from anyone it would be from you, but to-day I called again at the theatre at which I sang before his illness, and they have kindly said they will take me on again; so you see I shall not be long in want of anything. I will not thank you then, Monsieur, but to-morrow I shall expect you." And Margot held out both her hands to Jacques Cartier.

"Personally," he said, as he took them, "in spite of all you've been telling me, Mademoiselle, I think that Monsieur Jean is a very lucky fellow!"

"Oh, Monsieur!" said Margot, with some emphasis; and she shook her head.

"Then I think he's uncommonly *bête*," said Cartier, holding the door open for her.

"No indeed, Monsieur," exclaimed Margot, and more emphatically still.

"Well, then," said Cartier over the banisters, as she stepped past him down the stairs, "I think the world's a

deuced clumsy place, Mademoiselle,” and this time Margot did not contradict him.

CHAPTER XIX

THE Toriallis had a handsome new house in the wide Boulevard Malesherbes; it was, as Madame often explained, “only a business residence.”

This, however, had not prevented her from doing full justice to her consummate taste and to the large sums of money which her husband’s professional successes had put at her disposal.

Half the house was arranged entirely to suit the pupils.

Beyond the entrance hall was a large waiting-room leading into a small theatre. The pupil and his *accompagnateur* appeared upon a large platform, while Torialli sat in one of the stalls, listening and shouting his directions. Occasionally, if the pupil was one of great importance, a few guests would be allowed to be present, and very often Madame herself would come in, sometimes to encourage a nervous pupil, and occasionally to appease an angry one.

The day of Jean’s first attempt the big *salle d’attente* was even fuller than usual; it reminded Jean of nothing so much as the consulting room of some fashionable doctor. There was the same air of strained suspense, and of superficial efforts to appear at ease.

It was one of Madame Torialli’s favourite sayings that Torialli’s pupils were like a “family party.” If she meant to express a cynical disregard for the amenities of domesticity it struck Jean that her comparison would have been perfect. All

the members of Torialli's little family were, beneath a certain outward courtesy and ease, intensely antagonistic to each other. In the musical world there are very few plums, and there are a great many appetites. There were two sides to Torialli's world as well. The professionals who paid with their earnings and worked with a fierce seriousness for bare existence, and the rich amateurs who gave lightly of their superabundance both of money and leisure. It is possible that Torialli, if left to himself, would have put the artists first; but he was not left to himself. He was a rich man and a great success, and he had won these benefits through his wife, who had taught him to give the first place to the amateurs, and to keep his professional pupils merely as an ornamental addition to his profitable life-work.

Even in the *salle d'attente* there was a distinct cleavage between the two branches—a little group of beautifully dressed women and well-groomed men sat apart by itself, in a kind of upper Paradise, near the door which led to the theatre, and where Jean leaned by an open window sat the professionals. They were well dressed, too, but their whole air was different; there was a restlessness in their eyes and the definite marks of age and work written in the lines of their faces. Nobody from either group took the least notice of Jean.

He was amused to see that among the group of amateurs sat, enthroned in the foremost place, the handsome figure of Pauline Vanderpool, the lady whom Romain D'Ucelles had offered to Jean as a commendable source of income.

She certainly upheld her reputation, for her furs alone cost more than those of all the other women in the room, and

she wore a pair of very large and fabulously expensive diamond earrings.

"Of course, Clothilde Duffray hadn't the least voice when she came here," a girl with a magnificent mass of red hair exclaimed. "*Ma foi!* One would have had to lay one's ears to the ground to catch a note! And now, I assure you, she drowns an orchestra. What she paid I can't tell you, but she told me herself that she suffered torments. Torialli literally stood over her like a wild beast. I'm not sure he didn't bite her. He raved at her, I know, like a madman. I've seen her come out purple with tears—but it was worth it; she's making two hundred francs a night now, without turning a hair."

"What I can't understand is," Pauline's flat, uncertain French struck across from the other side of the room, "how Torialli ever came to let Clara sing at the Salle Fémina. She hasn't any voice, she hasn't any style, and she must have done him about just as much credit as a tin trumpet; it doesn't seem to me to be any catch to be Torialli's pupil, if he's going to let women like that loose on one's ears."

The men laughed.

"Oh, it wasn't Torialli's fault," said a famous tenor (so famous that from Torialli's point of view he was almost as good as an amateur). "You'd have, you know, to chain Clara up to prevent her. Why, I heard her sing at Chevillard myself last week, and when I met Torialli afterwards his language quite astonished me; nothing but the fact that she's got the largest fortune in Paris prevented him from suing her on the spot. One doesn't, you see, try to take money from people who have it, only from poor devils like ourselves, who

haven't a sou to live upon!" This was really a great joke, for Lucien had any other quality of the devil rather than the one he was usually most eager to assume.

The door opened, and a dark, handsomely dressed woman entered. A glance at her assured Jean that she belonged to that race whose marked features, both physical and mental, have caused it to be the most hated, feared, and despised in the world.

Hester Lévi was no bad example of her creed. She looked gracefully immobile and rather feline, the only feature that lived in her little expressionless face was her marvellous great eyes—out of them shone an untameable fire. As she advanced to the centre of the room the little group stood back to let her pass. She represented the two greatest powers in the world—money and brains, and she made the many fat women in the room look strangely insignificant beside her tiny forceful little figure. She lifted her heavy eyelids and bowed unwillingly from right to left.

"So you're back!" said Pauline without rising. "But I might have known that as soon as there was wind of the Toriallis coming you'd get to know of it. I guess there isn't much going on that you don't know!"

Hester Lévi looked wearily about her before she loosened her heavy furs and sank into a seat the great tenor stepped forward hastily to offer her.

"Yes," she said, without looking at Pauline. "I knew."

"Well, you'd better tell me how long he means to take you for this season?" said Pauline dryly; "then we can't have another mix up."

A curious light flickered across Mademoiselle Lévi's eyes.

"I am to have extra time, I fancy," she said, "to practise the solos for *Parsifal*."

There was a hush over the whole room—so Hester, then, was to take the coveted part. A hurricane of short angry whispers arose in the further corner of the room; the little group about Miriam and Pauline exchanged glances.

Lucien laughed.

"So that affair's settled then," he said. "Mademoiselle is one of those who arrive early and stay late. I felicitate her."

Pauline looked straight in front of her, her eyes had an icy glitter in them; she was profoundly angry and bitterly disappointed. Jean, looking at her, felt a sick distaste for the whole performance—this, then, was music—the goddess of his lonely soul! Was experience, then, merely a prompt profanation of dreams? If so, what a pity ever to awake! A silent, slender girl beside him made a stifled sound. She had worked for four years upon the solo parts of *Parsifal*, and her voice was worth three of the rich Jewess's clever but mediocre gift. Hester Lévi looked at her watch. There was a stir at the other end of the room. The door opened quickly. A dapper-looking man of early middle age, rather fat and very pink with an air of just having arrived from a lengthy toilet, stepped briskly forward. He smiled continuously and rubbed his plump little hands together. He spoke obsequiously to Hester Lévi.

"You will not be kept waiting more than one moment, I promise you," he said. "How charmingly you are looking this

morning! I can see your little holiday has agreed with you! Torialli is longing to hear how the voice goes."

He turned as if he meant to speak to Pauline.

"Ah! Mademoiselle—" he began.

Pauline stood up; her cold grey eyes fastened themselves like a gimlet into the face of the man before her. The smile slipped from his face; he turned white and flinched like a dog.

"Well," said Pauline with a grim smile. "It seems I'm come back too, Monsieur Flaubert. Torialli has arranged for me to have another *accompagnateur*. A gentleman who knows how to do accounts, how to play the piano, and how to behave!"

Flaubert stepped back a little and gave a slight grimace and a slighter bow. "The gentleman is to be congratulated, I take it, Mademoiselle, on his opportunity," he replied softly. "Monsieur D'Ucelles is, I believe, the name of this personage. I do not know yet if he has arrived."

Jean stepped forward. The occasion seemed to him singularly uncomfortable, but he tried to put some conciliation into his bow.

"Charmed," murmured the affable Monsieur Flaubert, holding out a plump pink hand.

Pauline stood stiff, angular, and impenetrable. Then she gave Jean the slightest possible inclination of her head, and turned her back on him; evidently she intended to have no recollection of a former meeting.

Louis Flaubert turned hurriedly away to where the slender little girl in black leaned forward—her bent head raised at last, and her heart in her eyes. He spoke to her rapidly in an undertone. Jean could not catch what he said, but it was enough to look at the girl to guess what had happened. Louis Flaubert was hideously angry, and he had utilized his anger to avoid the strong and attack the weak in the most prudent manner.

The girl tried to speak, her face seemed to grow old and to contract, she held out her trembling hands with a sharp little gesture of appeal. Flaubert bowed and smiled, and retreated almost as quickly as he had come. The girl, who had sat quite still for a moment, gave a loud wild laugh, then another, and then the whole room filled with peal after peal of cruel hysterical laughter. She bent and swayed under it, shrieking with uncontrollable sobs. It seemed to Jean as if he were watching a tree caught in a gale of wind, and flung and twisted here and there by an invisible Torturer. Nobody expressed any surprise at the outburst, one or two people smiled and shrugged their shoulders—a few paused in their conversation and looked slightly uncomfortable.

“For the love of God, can we do nothing to help her?” cried Jean in a fury of disgust and rage. “Where can one get a glass of water?”

The great tenor Lucien D’Arblay smiled at his impetuosity.

“You will have your work set, my dear young man, if you go through the world trying to relieve people—believe me, it is not worth while! She’s just had her dismissal, poor little one! It would take more than a glass of water to cure that.

Torialli won't see her again. I can't think why Flaubert didn't write it. He might have known there'd be a row. Ah! here's Madame!"

The door opened again and Jean, looking up, met the candid innocent blue eyes of a little child gazing into his.

Madame Torialli was any age you like when her eyes were shut, and the thick bisque shadows under them betrayed her struggles with time; but when they were open and yours met them, you found yourself gazing into the fountain of eternal youth.

She was a very small woman who carried her head like a queen. If time had taken away the bloom from her delicate mobile face, it had replaced it by a riper charm which had in it nothing but the sweetness of experience. You could not look at Madame Torialli and remember that the world was hard.

She went straight up to the shrieking girl and put her tiny hand on her shoulder. It seemed to Jean as if a miracle had taken place; the girl ceased crying and looked up at her. Madame spoke a few simple words with an air of mingled sympathy and authority, then she turned gracefully away with a laughing comradeship to the group of artists near the door. She left them only to assuage the impatience of others.

She took Pauline's hand in both of hers, and Jean, to his astonishment, saw Miss Vanderpool's annoyed sharpness change to a calm serenity.

"To-morrow," said Madame Torialli, with her grave gentleness, "you will sing at my At Home. Non? It will not be a great affair except for that, *ma belle*! but it will be our

real welcome to Paris—it is what we have been looking forward to, Torialli and I; we shall not ask anyone else to sing. One does not hand apples after peaches. We may count on you then?" And Madame, hardly waiting for Pauline's quick assent, floated off with Hester Lévi beside her into Torialli's theatre. Nobody seemed to have any complaints left. The tiny woman with the child-like eyes had carried them away with her as if they were so many decorative flowers.

"She says she's quite sure there's been a mistake." The slender girl confided to Jean whose sympathy she had divined rather than heard. "And she is going to send me a note to-night herself."

"She is like the East," said Lucien half to himself, "a land where there is always sunshine and warmth—and secrecy."

"But don't you think mystery is the most beautiful thing there is?" ventured Jean. Lucien looked at him for a moment.

"The most beautiful? Yes," he said at last, "and the most tragic. If you want to be—I don't say happy, *mon cher*, I am not guilty of the absurdity of supposing that at your age you want to be that—but if you want to be even tolerably safe—avoid mystery and stick to facts. Facts, it is true, may knock you down, but they let you pick yourself up again. When mystery knocks you down, she has, on the other hand, a little habit of keeping you there. *Au revoir, mon ami. La grande Américaine* wants you."

"We go in next," said Pauline to Jean.

Half an hour later Hester Lévi came out of the theatre as impassively as she had entered it, and Jean found himself

following the sweep of Pauline's train, with a quaking heart. The theatre was empty except for the Toriallis. Madame was leaning against one of the stalls, and looking across the empty spaces with a charming, friendly smile; it was not so much a welcome as a recognition. She looked as if she had been always expecting them with pleasure and without suspense.

"There, my dear," she said to Torialli who stood near her, "is our grand Pauline."

Torialli came forward briskly. He by no means relished Pauline's behaviour to Flaubert, and his bow to Jean was of the stiffest and shortest. Madame Torialli, however, looked at Jean with a flash of sympathy; her eyes seemed to say: "Be patient; I know you have talent; you shall soon have an opportunity of showing it."

She was the most wholly graceful woman Jean had ever seen; it was as if she had bloomed all her life in some summer garden and had learned the secret poise of a flower and the easy hoverings of a butterfly. If she came up to a difficulty it melted away; if she looked at an embarrassment it vanished.

Torialli, on the other hand, was made of a stouter and harder substance; he was a big man with a bald head and heavy eyebrows, under which the eyes sprang, round balls of vigorous fire. He was full of feeling, irritable and impatient, easily depressed and warm-hearted. Much of his original nature and some of the real strength of his genius had been weakened by the easiness of his success. It had fallen upon him—his success—in mid-career, blunting his finest faculties and developing at a fierce rate his vanity and greed.

The artist and the business instinct still struggled violently at times, but for the most part the business instinct had won.

Perhaps Madame had helped it to win. She adored artists much as Delilah adored the strength of Samson, but like Delilah she took the earliest opportunity of delivering Torialli to the Philistines.

"Now, Mademoiselle," said Torialli, not without an undertone of malice. "We will see how the holidays have improved your voice. It ought to be as eager to get out as a well-bred hunter kept a week in the stable. We will begin, please, with the air of Herodiade, 'Prophète bien aimé.' Monsieur, you will conduct Mademoiselle to the piano. Gabrielle, do you remain?"

Madame Torialli smiled at Jean.

"If Pauline and Monsieur D'Ucelles permit," she said modestly, sailing into one of the stalls. "I am not a critic, Monsieur, merely a lover!"

"There is no person so exacting as a lover!" ventured Jean in an undertone.

"What a discovery!" cried Gabrielle, and she laughed with a spontaneous infectious gaiety, in which even Torialli joined.

"Now, Gabrielle, no jokes!" he said warningly. "We are here to work. *Commencez*, Mademoiselle!"

Pauline rose to the occasion magnificently; she was never afraid of herself; but she had the incentive of a desire to shine more in some company than in others. She always wished to impress the Toriallis, and to-day she wished to

make them feel that they had made a mistake in passing her over for Hester Lévi. Jean played faultlessly. He did not desire to shine and he had quite forgotten Torialli and Pauline, but he had not forgotten that he was playing to a lover of music, and he played to satisfy her and please the child that had smiled at him out of Gabrielle's eyes.

Pauline's voice was hard, tuneless, and without emotion; it was a good organ, and it had been well trained. Like all her other acquisitions she had done the best she could with it, and for want of something better, which can never be done to anything, it yet failed to please.

To-day she took her notes with deliberate skill and threw into their rendering a dramatic force which she had never shown before; and so interweaving with her voice that it almost seemed one being, Jean gave the velvet and tenderness, the fire and magic of the music in his heart and under his flying finger-tips.

Torialli leaned back in his seat with drawn brows and seemed to be listening with his small light eyes as well as with his ears. He hardly spoke at all during the performance; once or twice he called to Pauline to repeat a phrase, but he made no comment till the end. Then he sprang from his seat, rushed across the stage, and flinging his arms round Jean, embraced him on both cheeks.

"But my dear young man! my good young man! You have music in your fingers, but it is there, I tell you, the real thing we are working for, and listening for, and trying to drag out all day long! And you kept it up, you kept it up! You got into her big brass voice and made it yield up gold! You must come and play for us! Gabrielle, arrange something this

instant! I cannot afford to lose sight of such an excellent talent!”

Fortunately, perhaps, Pauline could not follow Torialli’s rapid French; she only understood enough of it to know that Jean had succeeded; and she knew that she herself had never sung so well before.

“I’m right glad you’re pleased,” she said to Torialli. “Monsieur D’Ucelles helped my voice a lot, I know. It’s something to have a man who knows how to play. You don’t suppose I could have sung like that if your secretary had been at the piano.”

Madame Torialli laughed. Her voice was like the deeper note of a silver bell.

“Our poor little Louis!” she said, “is not a musical genius, perhaps, but you know we couldn’t do with him so well if he was; and you will not think me conceited if I say that when I look for genius—I turn to my husband!”

Madame gave Jean a charming compensating smile; she seemed to be saying that he must excuse her for appearing not to take his part; she must do what was safe and wise, but at the same time she had, perhaps, other ideas.

Torialli moved away. When he spoke again to Jean it was in a colder tone; his enthusiasm seemed to have received a sudden check. At the back of his sharp little eyes there was a jealous, irritated look.

“I ask nothing more but that you should carry out my wishes for Mademoiselle,” he said. “It does not matter who her accompanist is if he sufficiently grasps that fact. Mademoiselle, bring out the flexibility of your voice. You do

not want to throw it at people like a stone, but to caress them with it as if it were velvet. Take the airs in the last act for your next lesson. See what you can make of them. *Bon jour*, Mademoiselle."

Jean might have felt a little crestfallen at the sudden change in Torialli's manner, if his eyes had not happened to meet Madame's. She gave him her hand as if he were an old friend.

"You have charmed my husband, Monsieur," she said. "And I think you have surprised him. But you did not surprise me! No! that I must claim for myself. I knew when I looked at you that you were about to give us something original and rare! I need not say, then, that you have fully satisfied my expectations!"

Jean bowed politely and with shining eyes—he did not remember until afterwards that Madame Torialli had entirely overlooked her husband's request that she should arrange with Jean to play for them.

CHAPTER XX

THE big hotel in the Boulevard Malesherbes was the outcome of Madame Torialli's spirit of compromise. To most people compromise means giving up something in order to obtain its equivalent; to Madame Torialli it meant something quite different. Compromise for her was the appearance of sacrifice with the certainty of compensation. It was necessary for Madame Torialli that she should, for the sake of her husband's business interests, appeal to the tastes of his pupils and admirers; and as their tastes in general ran in the direction of the appearance of expense lavishly maintained without subtlety or distinction, Madame Torialli ministered to their faith by a modern massive house with a great deal of glass, a *portier* at the first door, two footmen at the second, a butler of the smartest London type, and large reception rooms in which the florid held an unambiguous sway. Everywhere she had placed busts and portraits, commendations and presentations, of Signor Torialli. "If one must accept vulgarity, it shall at least pay for itself," said Madame Torialli to her own friends. "If they wish to have something always in front of their eyes in the Boulevard Malesherbes, it shall have the advantage of advertising my husband. I have just hung this last bronze laurel wreath from Germany on a gold mirror. You can imagine how it added to my pleasure to hear a pupil of my husband say it moved her to tears. Tears like that are an extravagance for her and an economy for us. She pays very well for her lessons. Her voice? My friend, you should not ask me for professional secrets—shall we say that it is of gold?"

But these reception-rooms were only the shell of Madame Torialli's house. Far away out of the sound of the theatre on the other side of her spacious mansion Madame Torialli made herself a home. Here she had three drawing-rooms in particular which were known all over Paris, and into which none of her husband's most famous pupils had ever penetrated. Madame Torialli called them her "dull little rooms." Dull they may have been for eyes which rejoiced in the gorgeous tapestries and expensive marbles that looked even more than their price, and reposed in heavy splendour blocking the *salle de réception* downstairs; but to those who climbed the wide marble staircase with its banisters of old fifteenth-century iron work, passing through noiseless corridors over soft deep Indian carpets, which sank under the feet like cushions, Madame Torialli's "dull little rooms" appeared the most exquisite of surprises. If below she had introduced the observer to the difficulties of wealth, here he saw before him the finished, distinctive ease which taste alone can draw from the raw material of money. If she had attacked the senses with an abundance of good things—for even downstairs many of the things were good—here she gave to the expert the sharp asceticism of luxury.

The first of her rooms was called the bronze room. All the walls were painted a pale Nile green, a colour which had the clarity of air and something of the restfulness of sea water. The hangings were of the same shade, and at the end of the room against a heavy portière on a bronze pedestal was one of the finest existing copies of Giovanni da Bologna's Mercury. The chairs were beautifully carved in fantastic shapes. On a little table by the window stood a bronze bowl full of golden daffodils; the mantelpiece held

three or four almost priceless bronzes about four to six inches in height. On the wall that caught most light was a copy by a great artist of the Gioconda. Her soft, slow, secretive smile slipped out into the room like some mysterious and sinister sunshine. The classic serenity of the room made Jean feel as if he had entered a shrine, and something in the delicate coldness of its beauty warned him at the same time that there would be no return for his worship.

The second room was called the silver room. There was the same spare priceless simplicity in its arrangement, but the bronzes were replaced by antique silver cups and vases, and the palest shade of silver grey had been introduced into the hangings. Here there were two pictures—one of Whistler's of a fog on the Thames, and one by a modern French artist of a nude girl sitting on a table.

The last of the three rooms was called the gold room. A piece of old gold embroidery hung from the ceiling to the floor and glimmered like pale sunshine on the darkest day. The sofa, the chairs, and the little gold bibelots scattered here and there in spare and isolated arrangements, struck the same note. There was a picture of Madame herself in this room as a young girl in an orchard in the sunshine; the colour centred in her golden hair, and the sunshine lit up her simple white muslin dress into a dazzling radiance. She had yellow roses in her hands. On the other wall opposite hung a Fra Angelico Madonna. There was gold in that picture too, the faint etherealized gold of Fra Angelico's dreams; but somehow or other it would not harmonize with anything else. It seemed the only false note. It was as priceless as everything else that Madame Torialli had; it had cost her a year of her husband's

work; and yet the old saint's dream refused to be invaluable or to associate with its surroundings. There it hung on the wall, a silent protest—a wandering, golden ghost that mocked urbane humanity and forced modernity to acknowledge a power in which it had refused to believe. Only Madame Torialli was insensible to the picture's incongruity.

"I wanted just that shade," she would say; "you see—the angel's wing? I couldn't have done without it." And if those who listened to her saw more than the shade of colour in the angel's wing they did not tell her so.

When Jean obeyed the written summons of Madame Torialli to call upon her to arrange his future work, he was led by the highest of all Torialli's handsome functionaries up the marble staircase, and at length into the precincts of Madame Torialli's "dull little rooms." She was sitting in the silver room, apparently awaiting his coming. She was dressed in grey and wore a bunch of violets at her throat and at her waist. It seemed to Jean as if he had been led by some strange spell into moonlight, and now beheld the Lady of the Moon. Madame Torialli smiled at the dazzled bewilderment in Jean's eyes.

"But you like my little things?" she said sweetly. "Well, then, look about you, there is plenty of time. I have very few, as you see, but such as they are, I, too, find them restful. Do you know that I have a little fancy that we go through three stages of existence. In the first we are very spiritual beings; the innocence of youth makes us hold all reality lightly. We long to be imprisoned in dreams and to escape the brutality of facts; we are led by a breeze to a flower, we go no further

than a smile. Our hands tremble before what we dare not touch. This is the first stage. I find it pathetic when I see it in the faces of the very young. You and I have both passed that stage, Monsieur."

Jean sat down near her. It was true that everything in her rooms was well worth looking at, but there was nothing in them that held his eyes like herself; this exquisite complicated being in silver and violets, with the same faint scent about her that Jean remembered in her letter, and eyes that were as simple as a child's prayer. She lifted them smilingly to his.

"Shall I go on with my little parable?" she asked.

"But please," said Jean. He was even conscious that his voice shook a little, it was such a delight to hear her speak. Her voice was like a silver bell.

"The second is more robust," continued Madame smiling. "It is a passion for reality, for big emotions, for the crash and storm of the maturer senses. It is in this stage that everything happens to a man that can happen! I do not say it is the happiest of the three stages; it is perhaps the most interesting. At the end of it a man knows himself, and he knows also the reason of many things; but he does not tremble any more. The third stage—and it is at this that I have now arrived, Monsieur—is that he occupies himself with material things; he becomes a collector, a man with a hobby, a creature of comfortable habits and practical good sense. He builds himself on the desert island of his soul a charming little log cabin out of the wreck! I have invited you to see my little log cabin, Monsieur. I hope that you think I have done well with it?"

Madame Torialli's gentle eyes smiled with a touching mixture of wistfulness and irony. Jean, looking at her with the quick, absorbed sympathy of his sensitive nature, felt that no one had ever done justice to Madame Torialli before; and this is a very dangerous feeling for a man to have about a woman.

"But come," said Madame, leaning forward a little. "You are in the most interesting of the three stages, you know; let us talk a little about yourself. I found out quite by an accident the other day that I knew your uncle. Monsieur! may I add that I also knew your father?"

"Indeed—yes, Madame," said Jean simply.

They were silent for a moment.

"And now tell me about your life," said Madame gently. And Jean told her.

He had never before talked freely to a woman quite of his world and perfectly to his taste. He told her everything, his eyes lit up with the eagerness of his self-revelation; he poured the history of his heart out at her feet like water. Sometimes the tears came into her eyes as she listened to him, and once, when he spoke to her of Margot's sacrifice and of his ashamed return, she put out her slender white hand and touched him, almost as a mother might.

"Poor boy! poor boy!" she said softly. "But how hard life is!"

When he had finished she leaned back in her chair and closed her eyes, as if she were thinking intently. The sympathy in her silence seemed to Jean the most beautiful

thing he had ever found; except perhaps the sympathy in her voice when she spoke.

"I am glad you have told me all this," she said. "It has touched me very much that you understood you could speak to me, and I am perhaps a woman not wholly without experience. You have had much to bear, and little happiness from women. Do not, however, believe that all love is fruitless—a lost and wandering fire! It does not always transfix and petrify us with the terrible beauty of the Medusa. I speak very simply to you, not as a woman of the world, but only perhaps as a woman, who, having lived amongst dross all my life, chose gold. Let me show you something."

Madame Torialli rose as she spoke. She crossed the room to a tiny shrine upon her desk; the two little doors fell back at the touch of a spring. Jean saw nothing very wonderful inside, only the photograph of a man in evening dress—Torialli as he may have looked a hundred times over, on the platform about to sing. The wonderful thing was in Madame Torialli's eyes. It was a moment of great emotional sincerity, for Madame Torialli loved her husband. For his sake she had left her world, the quiet distinguished world of the best blood in France, and married an artist. It is true that though she had left it, it had only been to bring it after her to his feet; and yet it had needed an imagination, a fine and an honest purpose, for her to take so strange a departure; and she came from the most conservative aristocracy in the world. She had never regretted her impulse. She loved art, as no artist ever loves it; and she knew the world of human beings as no artist can ever know it; and after being the greatest passion of Torialli's life, she became his most useful possession; and she accepted her

position gracefully, and turned it as she did all the other facts of life—to her own advantage.

"Thank you, Madame," said Jean simply.

"*Voyons*," she said, laughing a little, and even blushing through the careful enamelling of her face. "Even old women have in their hearts a corner where they like to play the young girl! Let us return again to our discussion. Your great actress gave you an admirable lesson; the lessons of bad women are often more efficacious than the lessons of good ones. They have a great advantage over the rest of us, for they force you to accept the moral while they have none of the onus of suggesting it to you. For the rest, your poor little friend charms me greatly; for her you must be very careful, my dear boy. She saved you from marrying her, and you in return must save her from failing to marry—the nice young grocer round the corner."

Jean flushed a little.

"What nice young grocer round the corner?" he asked uneasily.

Madame laughed.

"Come! Come!" she said. "There will always be a young grocer round the corner, and you must be graceful about it. You must not want her to keep always single for your sake. I grant it would be more poetic, but it would not be very kind."

"But of course I don't," said Jean hurriedly. "I haven't the slightest wish—" he stopped a moment—"but I don't see why we shouldn't still be friends," he added.

Madame laughed again.

“There are only two alternatives, I assure you,” she said. “And it’s like the arrogance of youth to imagine you can invent a third. You may marry the little girl, or you may make the simpler arrangement of a man of your class, but in your situation and with her feeling for you—there will be, sooner or later, an arrangement, and an arrangement which will not be easy to explain subsequently to the grocer; and we must always bear that young man in mind.”

Jean was silent for a moment; he was beginning to think differently of Margot; it was as if he already saw her the wife of the grocer. He felt as if he had been a little ridiculous.

“Well, then,” he said. “What should one do?”

“I think one should not remain in her rooms in the first place,” said Madame very softly; “and, in the second, I should persuade Flaubert to give her lessons instead of you.”

“Give up Margot’s voice!” cried Jean reluctantly. Then the figure of the grocer came up and hit him between the eyes.

“It is true she has a good position now,” he said slowly. “I think she will do well. She’s earning quite a lot. But then—there will be the price of her lessons.”

Madame smiled sympathetically.

“But Flaubert charges the profession almost nothing,” she said. “The dear little thing! How funny it must all have been—but for you, my poor boy, how sad!”

Jean had not thought of the situation as a humorous one before, but he already felt older and broader-minded; he laughed a little—the kind of laughter which makes a man

slightly ashamed of himself afterwards, and much pleased at the time with the company he is in. It was a laugh of a man of the world. Madame Torialli recognised this, and changed the subject.

The greatest art in life is to know when to leave off; and it is an art which few women ever learn. But Madame Torialli knew it to perfection. A few minutes later a knock sounded on the door.

Madame rose to her feet and held out her hand to Jean.

"But this is Louis," she said, as the fat little Flaubert entered, rubbing his beautifully manicured hands softly together, and smiling more than ever—his most agreeable elastic smile.

"What will you say to me, Louis?" she said, with a light caressing familiarity which contrasted greatly with the little air of respect and consideration she had shown to Jean. "When you hear that I have been talking all this time and not once mentioned business? Perhaps you will not be surprised, however. You know," she added, turning to Jean, "my husband and Monsieur Flaubert are always laughing at me; I forget the point of everything; but I say to them—Well, after all, is a point always a pleasant thing that one should remember it? Never come to me for business, Monsieur D'Ucelles, but for anything else," Madame held out her little soft white hand and pressed his gently, "I think you know you may command me. And now *au revoir*."

"*Au revoir*, Madame," said Jean, "and a million, million thanks for all your kindness."

Without a sound the violets and the soft grey shining dress and the delicate golden hair vanished from the silver room into the bronze. The two men left alone together exchanged a long, challenging look. Jean did not feel particularly attracted towards his companion. Louis Flaubert looked a little like a round birthday-cake with too much pink icing on the top.

"Madame is always gay! always gay!" Flaubert said after a moment's pause. "*Maintenant, Monsieur, parlons de vos affaires; elles vous sourient en ce moment.*"

Jean sat down and listened attentively to what Flaubert put before him. It appeared that Torialli's connection was enormous and his every hour pressed to overflowing. He could only take the best and most important of the pupils who applied to him.

"The best from the point of view of art," Flaubert explained. "That you will find is the great point here, Monsieur; we make nothing of success or of material value here! We are, as it were, in a world beyond all that—but for art to preserve its purity we slave! I have had myself to take many of the pupils of Torialli—I am over-weighted with work; of course, I have the advantage that I know the system. Yes, I may say that for myself the system has become a part of me—and I have almost become a part of the system. I refer, of course, to the production of the voice; it is what we refer to chiefly here. You will find yourself in a positive factory for the human voice in all its stages and conditions. For a young man with musical talents and a career to make, I think, I don't say lightly, that the advantages are simply inestimable. There is much of the work, however, which is

not purely technical. You will find out all that later—appointments to make—business letters to write—concerts to arrange for—all these things will be invaluable for your future experience. They will introduce you to the necessary workings of public life. You will, of course, accompany regularly my pupils, and from time to time when I am unavoidably detained about the management of affairs—and I must tell you this often happens, for Torialli is, like Madame, an artist pure and simple—you will, of course, hold yourself in readiness to accompany for him. What you will learn then, I need not say, is an opportunity many men in Paris would give their heads for!"

Jean gratefully acknowledged the splendour of his future, and felt that after this it would seem ungrateful and even grasping on his part to press for a salary. Still he had to live, and one cannot live on the magnificence of future prospects alone. He suggested hesitatingly to Louis that there was this difficulty.

"We will come to all that," said Flaubert a little impatiently. "Many men would pay to have the opportunity that is before you, but I understand from Cartier that your circumstances—?"

Jean blushed hotly. Somehow he hated to talk to this man about his circumstances.

"I am very poor indeed," he said coldly. Louis looked slightly incredulous, but rubbed his hands together more than ever.

"Well! well! we shall remedy all that!" he said. "Your hours will be from nine to six o'clock, Monsieur, at my

house, you know; a truly unpretentious place close by, Number 34; and the evenings you have entirely to yourself—you can therefore earn as much as you like during your free time. We do not seek to bind you in any way. Of course, you quite understand that nothing must ever be said about the system? Of that we must be as careful as if it was a secret of the confessional. From now you are one of us. You agree to this, I hope?"

"Oh yes, certainly," said Jean.

"Then," said Louis Flaubert, rising, "I think that is all. Ah yes! I forgot the point, like Madame. Of course, there is your salary. Shall we begin with four hundred francs a month? I take it that is agreeable to you, is it not?"

Jean stammered that it was—he wanted to ask for an advance, but he had not the courage; and the fat little man did not give him time to acquire it. He shook hands with him violently, telling him to appear at nine o'clock next morning, and was out of the room and down the stairs before Jean had time to formulate a thought, far less express it. He followed the fat little whirlwind into the street at length with a dizzy head. The future was before him and the whole of Paris sang. It seemed to Jean that the sunset sky was grey and silver with a band of gold, and as if to-morrow Jean would find himself playing before kings—music that was made up of silver laughter, of gentle wisdom, and of the wistful mystery that guards the heart of a child!

It was some hours later, when the sunset had faded, and Jean had eaten a small and sober supper in a peculiarly dingy room which he took for himself in the Rue Lalo, that it occurred to him to reflect he was after all not going to be

Torialli's *accompagnateur*, but the private secretary of Torialli's *accompagnateur* at a ridiculously small salary.

He took out Madame Torialli's letter and read it again. There was certainly a slight mistake somewhere; the faint scent of violets crept out into the dingy little room. Jean closed his eyes and smiled. Madame Torialli had no head for business. But after all what did it matter? The scent of the violets seemed to have replaced the moment's chill lucidity of doubt. The past was a phantom, the present was a bridge, and the future had all the invincible fragrance of a dream.

It was evening in Paris and the spring was in the air. Jean ran downstairs headlong to become a part of the laughter and movement of the streets.

He was glad when he remembered that he had not given Margot his new address. She had been out when he called to fetch his luggage and tell her of his change of plans. She would have asked for explanations, and there is a time when no man likes to explain.

CHAPTER XXI

MARGOT was extremely unreasonable about her change of masters; she said she did not like Monsieur Flaubert.

It was true he agreed to teach her for a sum almost nominal. He professed to take the deepest interest in her voice, and told her, as Jean had never done, that she sang with the purity of a lark and the passion of a nightingale. “I do not like him, he chills my spine,” she asserted to Jean after her first lesson; “and you—you do not like him either, Jean!”

This was more unreasonable of Margot still, for Jean had never admitted even to himself that he resented Torialli’s secretary, and he did not admit it now.

He explained elaborately to Margot his reasons for esteeming Monsieur Flaubert; they really added up very respectably, from the fact that he had been with Torialli for ten years to his frank appreciation of Margot’s golden voice.

“Bah!” exclaimed that young person, “dress an eel in gold and he will, still squirm! Why does he come into a room rubbing his hands? He has a bad conscience and he looks like a cat that has stolen the cream. You say I know nothing against him—everything is against him—I do not like the way he does his hair!”

Jean shrugged his shoulders; it was no use trying to argue with Margot; she lived too near the sources of sensation to be easily hoodwinked by ideas.

Jean would have liked to hoodwink her because it would have given him company in the process in which he became daily more and more involved of hoodwinking himself.

At last he had begun his career, but there were moments when he found himself wondering what his career was. He was everybody's servant and nobody's master. Music seemed to recede further and further into the distant horizon. For days together all he had of it was the sound of a distant piano; sometimes he was out all day, delivering notes and seeing business people for Louis Flaubert, or Madame Torialli would ask him to organize a little party, a day in the country, or an evening At Home. These last occupations, however, if they were not music, had at least about them an indefinable charm. They seemed to make Jean indifferent to the salary that was never paid, to the extra evening hours no one seemed to be surprised at his resigning for the general good of the Toriallis. After all he had, as Louis often pointed out to him, his great opportunities. He took almost all his meals in the Boulevard Malesherbes, and he met the best people in Paris. Madame Torialli treated him as a friend, almost as a son. Signor Torialli treated him as a fellow musician. Jean often played at the Toriallis' At Homes; he began to have a vogue in Paris; he was called "that good little fellow at the Toriallis'"; and people smiled indulgently when they mentioned him; but whether the indulgence was for Jean or for the Toriallis never appeared. Romain met him at one of the Toriallis' At Homes. His smile seemed to have even more humour in it than usual; he did not refer to any of his previous ideas for Jean.

"So, my dear boy," he said, "we meet again. You are *bien installé* here, I take it. I am so glad you have been wise and

given up your music."

"But I have not," Jean cried in amazement. "That is what I am here for!"

"Tut! tut!" said his uncle. "You must be jesting, Jean; every one knows the good Toriallis have no time for the fine arts; they have only time for receipts! Share them! Share them, my dear boy! for if you do not you will very surely be made to pay them! There are only two ways of getting on in this world—taking and sharing! For my own part I think sharing is the best, the responsibility is divided, and there is nothing I trust so greatly as a self-interest which is identical with our own. Ah, Madame Torialli, I am congratulating my young nephew on his position with your husband. If I were twenty years younger I should wish I were in his place." Madame Torialli smiled very gravely and gently; her eyes sought Jean's with an affectionate expression.

"I am wondering what your uncle means," she said. "And I am afraid that it is not perhaps quite kind. I am such a simple person." And then she looked back at Romain, who chuckled.

"Twenty years ago, Madame," he said, "I should have been a simple person, too. We might then have met upon an equality."

"Jean and I understand each other," said Madame, softly, preparing to pass on to her other guests.

"That is doubtless why I congratulate him," said Romain, drawing aside to let her pass.

Jean was needed elsewhere; he made no attempt to continue his conversation with Romain. He did not know

why, but it had made him feel a little uncomfortable.

It was only a small addition to the discomforts his pinched pride gave him every day. All these little pin-pricks together only amounted to the pain of a corn in a tight shoe. When the shoe made him most aware of its presence was in the disagreeable business interviews with the pupils. From the first Louis had sent him to collect money for the accounts. Jean copied them daily into the book from Flaubert's notes; but the Toriallis' pupils almost always disputed their accounts, and Jean's dislike for these interviews increased daily.

"I can't think what is the matter with these people," he said at last to Louis. "I can understand some of them being mean—but so many of them are, men and women alike. And they seem so certain that they have had fewer lessons or shorter hours. I suppose there *can't* be any mistakes in the accounts?"

"How can there be?" said Louis, looking at Jean rather hard. "I put them all down in a book myself, you know, exactly as they take place. Paris is full of cheats, and the worst of them are the rich."

"Yes, but they aren't all rich," Jean answered. "Some of them are poor, and that makes it so much worse."

"I haven't the time to explain just now," said Louis after a pause. "Be so kind as to write down the appointments for next week; and here, by the by, is Miss Vanderpool's account. You may take that to her to-morrow."

"Can't I send it?" Jean asked.

“No! She always likes to argue things out,” said Flaubert. “She thinks she shows a business instinct. Mind you make her pay.”

“Really, Flaubert, I wish to Heaven you’d do it yourself!” said Jean impulsively. “The other day I heard you tell one of the pupils that a mistake in the account was my fault, and you know I never make them out at all!”

Flaubert put his arm genially on the young man’s shoulder.

“My dear boy,” he said. “I apologize a thousand times. I had to get rid of him, and to tell the truth I hadn’t time for a fight. Madame had just sent for me. You came into my head, and I made a scapegoat of you. I apologize profoundly.”

Jean drew away from the insinuating arm.

“I should be very glad if you would give me your word that it doesn’t happen again!” he said curtly.

Louis laughed nervously.

“I will give you my word, of course, if you want it, my dear boy,” he said. “But really, you know, you’ll never learn business at this rate.”

“I’m afraid I must insist,” said Jean.

Flaubert shook his head roguishly. “I give you my word, then,” he said; “but I don’t know what Madame would say if she heard me; she believes in a silent partner, does Madame.”

“But Madame has nothing to do with business?” exclaimed Jean.

Flaubert bit his lip, and forced an unnatural laugh.

“No, no!” he said. “Of course not, that is why we must be so careful of her interests. By the by, if you so much dislike tackling the great Pauline, you can after all leave her to me. If she does dispute the account I’ll try to make time for her; she is always disputing something. No! send it by post; after all that is the best way.”

Jean was immensely relieved. After all Flaubert was very easy to work with; he was always good-natured, and he never took offence at any of Jean’s protests. Jean decided that he would try not to protest so much, and he sent the account to Pauline. It seemed even to him, accustomed to the enormous expenses of Torialli’s lessons, an immense account. He congratulated himself on not having to face Pauline with it. Unfortunately his congratulations came a little too soon. The very next day Pauline called, not at the hotel of the Toriallis, but at Louis Flaubert’s house.

She was shown at once into the room where Jean was going through the morning’s correspondence. He was used by now to the sight of angry women, but he had never before seen one so fixedly, fiercely angry as Pauline Vanderpool.

“Where’s your master?” she asked Jean with no formal preface.

“I don’t think I know quite whom you mean, Mademoiselle,” said Jean very quietly.

“I guess you know well enough, Jean D’Ucelles, and you’ll soon know some more. I tell you those—Send for that man, Flaubert. No! Don’t you stir—I’ll not have you two conspiring behind my back. I’ll see you both together and now. Do you catch on? The daughter of Silas P. Vanderpool

isn't going to be swindled by a pack of low-bred Parisian money-grabbers, not by a long way!"

"Mademoiselle, I do not think you will gain anything by being abusive," said Jean. "You have very great advantages as a woman. It would perhaps be better manners as well as better policy on your part not to abuse them!"

"Why, you puppy!" gasped Pauline. "Do you dare to stand there and try to teach me manners, when I know you haven't got a brass cent unless you have stolen it?"

"Be content, Mademoiselle, for apparently I have not succeeded," said Jean grimly. "Ah! Here is Monsieur Flaubert! Have the kindness to make your complaint to him."

"Say, do you keep this impertinent young whipper-snapper here to insult your clients?" hissed Pauline, leaning forward and forcing the words out between her teeth, her blue eyes hard as steel and her great chin thrust forward like a rock. "I've brought you this bill, Monsieur Flaubert—this isn't the first time I've suspected some monkey trick in my account here—but this time I know it! It won't be of any use your lying about it. I can prove the mistake and I can prove where it is. Take this paper I've got here, and look through it, and then tell me you've not cheated me, if you dare! I tell you what it is, Monsieur, I'll have these two accounts published in the leading journals throughout your little one-horse village by to-night if you don't climb down pretty quick—Toriallis or no Toriallis!"

Jean looked at Flaubert with a sympathetic glance; it was very disagreeable to have a mad woman to deal with, and he was sorry for Flaubert. He thought Pauline was mad. To his

intense astonishment he saw that Flaubert was white to the lips and trembling like a leaf—great beads of perspiration stood out on his forehead, and he smiled in a sickly way, first at the paper in his shaking hands, and then at Pauline. He moistened his lips before he spoke, and gave Jean a quick, furtive look under his eye-lashes.

"I regret infinitely, Mademoiselle," he said, "that a mistake should have been made; it is nothing more, I assure you; still it is very natural that you should be annoyed by it. I have not had my secretary here very long, and he is not much up to affairs! You know, Ucelles, you owned to me yourself only this morning that you had a very poor head for business," said Flaubert, turning to Jean. He had recovered himself by now, the colour had come back to his face. He looked in Jean's direction, but he did not meet his eyes. "I fear I must ask you, Mademoiselle, to overlook my secretary's little mistake and to accept our most humble apologies. I trust you will let this affair go no further. I can answer for Monsieur D'Ucelles' good intentions as I can for my own, and if it reached the ears of the Toriallis they might be annoyed."

"It shall reach them," said Pauline sharply.

"I meant annoyed with you, Mademoiselle," interposed Flaubert, whose confidence was now fully returned. "Signor Torialli is so impetuous, and your attack on me has not been very temperate. It would be such a pity to stop your lessons just now, when your voice is profiting so greatly."

Pauline paused for a moment. Her lip curved scornfully as she looked at Jean. He had started forward at the first words of Flaubert's speech, stung beyond his own control

and ready with a vehement denial. But even as he did so Flaubert's words about Madame came back to him; he must do nothing that might be against her interests, and he was in the presence of something that he did not understand. He drew back and stood quietly waiting with his eyes on Pauline.

"As for you, Jean D'Ucelles," she said, "I guess you're just about the poorest-headed, lost lamb of a Weary Willie I ever struck! I don't see, Monsieur Flaubert, how you can suppose a man who has never had anything of his own to look after is likely to make much of a hand looking after anybody else's accounts! If he ever turned up our side of the water they'd send him brick-picking! Now see here! I'll give you back this bill this one time; make it out again, and let me advise you to send it to me correct! You've tried to fool me twice, and it hasn't paid you any, I guess—but if you try the third time, Louis Flaubert, I'll turn you down!"

Pauline swept from the room. Flaubert went to the door with her while Jean stood quite still, trying to understand what had happened, and what he must say to Flaubert when he came back. He knew now what all his little misgivings and discomforts had led to—they had led to this; and yet he dared not say even to himself what *this* was. He had one thing that he could still hold to, and for the sake of holding to that one thing he must make up his mind quickly to let everything else go. He was where he was in order to serve Madame Torialli, and if the man she trusted in was a thief and a liar, the more need she would have of Jean to stand by her, and watch over her; and to do this he must overcome his natural instinct, which was to seize Flaubert and kick him with contumely and finality out of the house.

Louis came back humming a little dance tune, and rubbing his hands together; he did not appear to see Jean standing in the middle of the room with sombre eyes. He smiled cheerfully.

"Well, the storm is over, the sun is out again," he said. "That big Pauline would make a terrible wife; she should marry a lion-tamer or an *apâche*; but we have escaped that difficulty, my dear fellow, and now she is out of the house would you mind making a list of the appointments you know, and I shall just try over some of these new accompaniments?"

Flaubert, still without meeting Jean's eyes, seated himself upon the piano stool, and trilled out the latest drawing-room inanities of Parisian music.

Jean hesitated, but in the end said nothing. What can an honest man say to a liar? Nothing that the liar does not already know, and only that which must put an end to all connection between them. Still, he could not breathe in the same room as Flaubert; he took up a list of appointments and passed into a little ante-room where the most insignificant of the pupils were accustomed to wait their turn; it was empty now. The light music followed him with a mocking insistence; it seemed to Jean to be laughing at his fine principles and triumphantly flouting his stubborn honour.

"I don't know anything," said Jean to himself doggedly. "After all, what can I do? I don't know anything!"

The cold, thin music rang its perverse and sickly sentimentality into his brain. It was like bad wine. Jean pushed away the papers in front of him and put his head on

his hands. When he lifted it again he looked ten years older. Something had passed away from him never to return.

It was his trust in the integrity of man.

CHAPTER XXII

"JEAN," said Madame Torialli, one evening late in June. "Are you in a hurry to-night?"

"Not if I can stay with you, Madame?"

Madame Torialli smiled at him; her eyes seemed almost too innocent for maternity, and yet it was maternity that she loved best to express for Jean.

"I sometimes fear that we work you too hard," she said wistfully. "I am a vampire for my husband, I sacrifice so many to save him and serve him all I can; and in the end I often ask myself what is it that I do for him? Nothing! A woman is very helpless, Monsieur Jean."

Jean might have pointed out that she wasn't really very helpless when she had at least half a dozen men at her bidding from morning to night. But he felt a profound pity for Madame Torialli. He often thought Torialli did not understand her, and he knew that he was not worthy of her; only what man could be that? So he said:

"If I could help you the least little bit in the world it would make me very happy, Madame!"

"You do help me," said Madame, slowly. She turned with him into the bronze room and sank on a low couch near the window. It was wide open, and summer came in through it—the soft, fresh breeze of the early summer when the earth has not yet grown sober with her riches, but sings to herself in her joy, and her songs bring all the fragrance of the fields.

Even in Paris the scent of new-born flowers was in the air. The sounds from the street seemed far away; it was a still night, and the soft, green curtains hardly moved behind Madame's golden head.

"Let us talk together for a little," she said.

Jean sat down near her; he did not speak at once. It seemed to Jean that he did not need to speak much to her—she read his heart as if it were an open book, and he liked best to keep quite still near her, and hold it open for her to read.

"Just lately, the last few days, you have not been very happy," said Madame gently at last. "I have felt it, you know, and I have said to myself, 'It has not come to him as quickly as he had hoped—his great future!' I have said to my husband, 'That boy with us, we are perhaps using him too much?' Torialli has laughed at me; his own success took long in coming, and he worked for it through long, dry, fruitless years. To him it seems that you are doing very well and getting on very fast. But for me—my blood runs quickly for you—I have an impatience, I want you so much to succeed."

"When you talk like this," said Jean, and his voice was not very steady, "you give me something sweeter than success, Madame."

She was silent for a moment.

"But I would give you success too," she said. It was Jean's turn to be silent, but he was silent because he dared not speak.

"Our good Louis," Madame continued, when she thought the pause had lasted long enough, "has an affection for you

almost like that of a brother. We speak sometimes of your future, he and I. You have done wonders for him since you have been here, you have taken half his work off his shoulders; but have you—I sometimes ask myself—taken too much?"

"I like hard work," said Jean quickly. "I should not complain if it were even harder than it is."

"And you would do much willingly for a friend?" Madame asked, playing with a large paper-cutter on a table beside her. "I am quite sure of that."

"I would do anything in the world for you, Madame," said Jean.

"I was talking of Louis," said Madame.

Jean was silent. Madame's little hands still played with the paper-cutter; they looked such helpless little hands, Jean longed to take them in one of his and take care of them always. He did not believe that any one could ever take care of Madame Torialli enough. If he had known it, his feeling for her was very much the same as Margot's feelings for himself; for men can have the maternal instinct as well as women; and quite as uselessly.

"Poor Louis!" said Madame softly. "He is often misunderstood, I think. His parents had good blood in them, but his mother died young, and his father fell quickly into a bad type of existence. Louis has been brought up by chance; he has the instincts of his class, but I sometimes fear his manners—"

Jean leaned forward with a nervous movement of his hands.

“He does not appear to have these instincts always, Madame!” he said bluntly. Madame leaned back in her chair and sighed. She gave up the bronze paper-cutter, as if after all she couldn’t do anything with it.

“Ah!” she said. “Youth is so intolerant of appearances. You have not learned yet, my dear Jean, that appearances are almost always against the innocent—the others know how to use them! Louis’ manners are bad, that I grant you, but he has a good heart. It is for that we love him! My husband and I have learned its value in Paris. We can trust Louis.”

Jean said nothing. If he had said all that he thought, however, it is improbable that he could have enlightened Madame more plainly than his silence did.

She gave a little laugh, and he looked up and caught her eyes.

“Do you know, Jean? Have you found out yet that there is one very funny thing about our poor Louis? Perhaps it is even more pathetic than funny. He has one great—one very great vanity—he believes that he is superlatively clever, and he would far rather be thought guilty of a crime than of a mistake. I think that it is the fault of his having been, as we were saying, badly brought up. Gentlemen are never afraid of being thought stupid, it is in fact their prerogative—but when a man doubts his social value, he at once becomes sensitive as to his intellectual powers; he falls back, as it were, upon a new line of defence, and he will not admit being mistaken! It is the vanity of ignorance, the worst type of vanity there is, I fancy, because it cannot be cured. It may make a man a Napoleon or an *apâche*, but there is one thing, it will never let him be for long—himself! I have seen Louis, who is

naturally the most honest of men, lie and invent scandal of himself, rather than admit a *bêtise* which would have made Torialli smile. You have, perhaps, come upon this little weakness and it has shocked you?”

Jean started. Was it then after all only stupidity of which Flaubert was guilty? Madame had known him for a long time. Then he remembered the deadly terror in Flaubert’s face and his broken word.

“The motive may be as you say, Madame; but there are some things that a man does not allow himself to do if he wishes to be considered—” Jean paused.

“Yes, Jean,” said Madame very gently.

“A man of honour, Madame,” said Jean.

Madame moved a little restlessly against the green curtain.

“Women are so ignorant about such things,” she murmured. “But, Jean, when we do not understand we nevertheless sometimes arrive. I have arrived at this: I believe that Louis has shown himself at his worst to you. He has made some foolish mistake, and because he respects and admires you, more than you think perhaps (what he has said in confidence to me about you I cannot, of course, repeat, but it has touched me), he has tried to cover up his folly by a falseness which has disgusted you; and you are judging him harshly because it is one of your code sins. Have you ever thought that it is not quite fair to use a gentleman’s code for a man who is, perhaps more by the fault of others than his own, not quite a gentleman?”

Jean flushed; he felt ashamed of himself, after all. Hadn't he been rather hasty? He was touched too, also, to hear of Flaubert's feeling for himself. He had not guessed it; indeed, he had been conscious of a certain mutual antagonism between himself and the other man—and all this time Louis had been praising him to Madame!

"Well, Madame," he said, smiling a little uncertainly. "I will try to be less intolerant. I cannot promise to like Flaubert, because I'm afraid I don't; but I will try not to show it, and perhaps I shall understand him better after what you have said."

"Thank you, Jean," said Madame. "And now I am going to ask more of you. I want you to write to all these addresses for me, on that nice new rough paper I bought the other day, and invite everyone to Louis' ball. You see these are all my friends, and he wants the affair to be a great success; some of these names may help to make it so. I specially want the two princes to come—Prince Ivan and Prince Rudolph—tell them La Salvi is going to sing; I must make her, for otherwise perhaps she would refuse—the good Salvi is a person with whom one must go very gently. She comes to town to-morrow, I think, and Louis has set his heart on it; it will be a chance for us to show him that we are his very good friends."

Jean took the little address book out of her hand. He thought, perhaps, that he might stoop and kiss it, and that Madame would not be very angry; she was not very angry. But at this moment a knock came at the door and the butler announced with immense ceremony, "Madame Salvi!"

Madame Torialli gave a little cry of surprise and delight, and sprang forward to meet her, while Jean, after a hasty

glance at the new arrival, turned into the adjoining room. The new rough paper Madame had mentioned was on her desk, and Jean sat there, as he often did to write her notes for her.

The door was open between the two rooms, for the night was hot. As for Madame Torialli, the new arrival had swept poor Jean as completely from her mind as if he were an autumn leaf before a gale. It was not every day that Salvi came unannounced to call upon her.

La Salvi had advanced into the room, with all the air of expecting to be met which marks a royal personage. For in Paris Salvi was royalty. She had the greatest voice in the world and she had ruled it for twenty years. She was a big, fat woman with a large red wig; tucked under her arm she carried a small King Charles spaniel, which yapped dolefully. He was also too fat, and was addicted, like his mistress, to sweet cakes and cream. Unfortunately his resemblance ended there, for though he used his voice quite as much as she did, he was not so gifted in its timbre.

“My dear! what a surprise and what a pleasure! And how well you are looking!” cried Madame Torialli. “But fancy not telling me though! Think if I had had the misfortune to be out!”

Madame Salvi sat down with a doubtful glance at the slim delicate chair-legs before she answered. The dog yelped and she panted.

“I didn’t know I was coming myself,” she explained at length. “How was I to imagine, when I had left particular orders with the servants always to expect me back at any

moment, that the cook should have gone to his mother's funeral!"

"My dear, have you had anything to eat? But how shocking!" exclaimed Madame Torialli, with sympathy.

"Yes, thanks, I went to a restaurant. I had a man in the motor. It doesn't matter, dear. I've sent him away now, but I might have been alone; if I had been, consider how I should have bored myself." Salvi shuddered.

Jean, looking up from his writing-table, thought it was like the shudder of an enormous jelly fish.

"The thoughtlessness of that class of person!" said Salvi, with righteous indignation. "And of all things what I dislike most is to hear any talk of funerals!"

"Yes, my dear, I quite understand," murmured Madame Torialli, soothingly. "Let us talk of something pleasanter. Who was the man in the motor?"

"Only my doctor," said Madame Salvi, still gloomily. "He's a new one, the last one interfered with my diet; it was terrible, I suffered agonies; he said pastry was bad for the voice, as if I hadn't eaten it for twenty years! This one is an improvement; he says the great thing is to go on doing what you like, and only to stop when it becomes inconvenient. He says, too, that I ought always to wear green, or certain shades of yellow with black; they effect the nerves favourably."

"But, my dear, aren't they your favourite colours?" asked Madame Torialli.

"Yes," said Salvi. "That's what makes it so convenient. Still I thought I had better be on the safe side, so I ordered

ten new dresses to-day.” Madame Salvi was not telling the truth, but then her friend did not suspect her of it; she only told the truth when she had nothing more picturesque to tell.

“But, my love, what riches!” cried Madame Torialli.

“On the contrary, what poverty!” said Madame Salvi. “I shall have to economize; I shall leave my bills unpaid!”

“How free you are!” said Madame Torialli sighing. “For me, my husband utterly refuses to buy me a new motor until next quarter day. I think it is so foolish! ‘After all,’ I say to him, ‘one need not pay for it immediately, and by next quarter day I shall, perhaps, be wanting something else.’ Have you heard that our good Louis has just built himself a magnificent set of new rooms, and is to give a ball in them on Saturday week? I can’t think how he can afford it; but Torialli and I can never afford anything; we live like the little birds!”

Madame Salvi laughed rather maliciously.

“Like the little birds who have feathered their nests, you should say!” she replied.

Madame Torialli gave a graceful gesture of denial.

“But indeed it is true about Louis,” she went on. “He is rising in the world, he has become very ambitious; you will never guess to what he aspires now?”

“My dear, I have always guessed it,” said Salvi calmly. “It is you who never see these things; it was inevitable that he should adore you——”

Madame Torialli laughed lightly.

“It is another inevitable avoided then,” she answered. “He has not confided his passion to me—for myself, dear friend; on the contrary he aspires very much higher—it appears that he wants you to sing for him on the great night itself. When you are going to sing for us on the following Wednesday, too, it is a little too ambitious, is it not?”

Madame Salvi frowned.

“I am not surprised to hear that he gets on,” she said. “If he is so little afraid of being snubbed.”

“It is amusing, is it not?” said Madame Torialli. “He is not like poor Torialli, who always says that he will never let business interfere with pleasure.”

“Well, my dear, he has no need to, since he has married you,” said Salvi.

“You are too kind to me,” Madame Torialli murmured; “but think of our poor Louis, so certain that you would agree to sing for him that he has sent out invitations already to Prince Ivan and Prince Rudolph, asking them to hear you.”

Jean started. He had written all the invitations and Flaubert had given no such order; it was Madame herself who had invited the princes to hear Salvi.

“*Mon Dieu!*” cried Salvi indignantly. “Do you know, Gabrielle, I am a good-natured woman, but there is one liberty I do not stand lightly, and that is a liberty about my voice.”

“Oh, my dear!” cried Madame Torialli, “don’t be too angry with the good Louis; his head is perhaps a little turned

with his new toy, but he has, I know, such an eagerness to have you."

"His head had better be turned round the other way, then," said Salvi, grimly. "And as for his eagerness, as far as I know, that is no new quality in people who ask favours. You may tell him from me that I shall do nothing of the kind! You have reminded me that I sing for you on Wednesday. I shall not sing twice in one week."

"Our poor Louis will be horribly desolated," said Madame cheerfully; "but of course you are right. However, my dear, don't refuse to come to the ball; that will be magnificent and quite amusing."

"No, I will come to the ball," said Salvi. "And I shan't tell him that I won't sing till I get there; that will pay him out!"

Madame Torialli laughed her gay child's laughter.

"But what a mind you have!" she said. "It would be enough even without your voice, dear Salvi."

"I flatter myself that I was not born a fool," said Madame Salvi, complacently; and it is true that she flattered herself.

"What has become of the new little *accompagnateur*? Has he too fallen in love with you like the last?" she said.

Jean moved hastily. There was a sudden pause between the two ladies. Madame Torialli realized that Jean had overheard the conversation; she did not change a muscle of her face.

"But he is writing letters for me in the next room," she said. "You must ask him yourself, my dear; Monsieur Jean?"

she added.

Jean came into the room; he could not hide his feelings as well as Madame Torialli. His eyes were full of pain and bewilderment.

“I think you have already met Madame Salvi?” said Gabrielle quietly.

Jean bowed very low.

Madame Salvi chuckled till she shook again like a vast crumpled jelly fish.

“You came in first, or I was going to be very indiscreet,” she said. “If you had been a wise young man you would have waited and profited by the indiscretion.”

“Madame is too kind,” murmured Jean. He wanted immensely to get away. Madame Torialli held him for a moment with her eyes.

“Madame,” asked Jean, “am I still to post these letters?”

Madame stared at him.

“But why not?” she said. “Of course!”

Jean would have given anything in the world for her to have told him to tear them up; they were the letters to the Princes asking them to hear Salvi sing, and Madame Torialli knew it.

“I am consumed with curiosity,” cried Salvi. “Dear good Monsieur Jean, have the kindness to show me those addresses. I am an expert in handwriting.”

“My dear!” said Madame Torialli, “that must be for some other time—the post goes.”

Jean seized the opportunity to make his farewells and to hurry downstairs and out of the house. He posted the letters, and when he had posted them he obeyed a sudden impulse and, calling a taxi, he drove direct to Margot’s. He felt that he wanted to hear her voice.

CHAPTER XXIII

LOUIS Flaubert was not satisfied with what nature had done for him. It seemed to him that he was born to rival Torialli, and so far facts had disagreed with him. Yet he was far cleverer than the famous singer (who, after all, wasn't singing any more); he could trick him and hoodwink and bearlead him. Why, then, did all Paris turn its head to look after one man and remain blindly unconscious of the other?

Flaubert could not answer this question, but he could at any rate defy it; and he thought, as the frog thought in the fable, that a little self-advertisement was all that he really needed. He would draw the eye of Paris to him. And when Paris had looked he would trust to his own wits to keep her attention. It was for this end alone that Flaubert was prepared to fling a small fortune into the entertainment at which he hoped that Salvi was to sing.

A fashionable Revue suggested itself to his mind as the most taking thing for Paris. Paris is very fond of Revues—so many things can be put in a Revue that sound quite harmless when they are sung, without being nearly as harmless as they sound; and that is what Paris likes, because half the charm of a bad thing would cease to exist if it could not be made to resemble a good one. To appear to be what you are bores Paris. She would always dress her peasants to look like kings and queens, and her kings and queens to look like peasants.

To make the Revue a success Flaubert had obtained the consent of Prince Ivan and Prince Rudolph to appear in it. They were delighted with the idea, but they made several

stipulations. They must have at least four changes of costume each, and no fatigue, and Flaubert must invite all the jolliest fellows to write them up. They did not wish to appear as royalties; that rôle was a bore and only suitable for republicans and rich *canaille* of all sorts; but they did wish to be thought great singers, and, of course, they knew as well as Flaubert did that a very little voice will go a very great way —in a Prince.

The Revue was written by a man of fashion. This was necessary, because nobody else would have understood how to construct each scene merely from the point of view of the actors who were to take part in it.

Naturally, no one wanted the play to interfere with the necessity for becoming attitudes or the costumes which suited them best. A critical observer might have suggested that the dramatic situation had no direct bearing upon the plot; but he would soon have been disarmed by the discovery that a plot was considered wholly superfluous.

"Nobody," as the author remarked, "writes a plot nowadays; they go in for psychology and atmosphere." It is true that the critical observer might still have wished to know if doing what you felt like to an irrelevant tune was psychology, and if "atmosphere" was most happily expressed by ladies who were under the impression that a few veils and half a dozen dancing lessons from a famous *danseuse* fitted them for the leading parts in a Russian ballet. But no doubt the critical observer would not have been of sufficient importance to receive an invitation.

The great artists were coming, but they weren't coming to criticize, they were coming so that to-morrow they might

see their names on the same page as the *grand monde*, and the *grand monde* was coming because it had to go somewhere and because it believed that it might behave rather worse at an affair of that sort than if it was simply by itself.

All Paris was coming; but they weren't coming to consider Flaubert. They would laugh at him, perhaps, if they noticed him at all, but they would not even laugh for very long. And yet Flaubert believed that if they could be made to look in his direction they would compare him to his advantage with Torialli!

It is so difficult for some people to realize that very few people look in their direction at all!

Flaubert had spared no expense to conquer his world; it had wrung his heart, for he loved his money only less than himself; but he had built a theatre in the garden—a vast affair with a stage and a dressing-room at the back, and a tent to roof it over. The house was filled with orchids in the shape of doves. They hung in festoons from the walls of the dining-room downstairs, and lined the corridor, springing from baskets of ferns as if they were brooding over fairy nests; on the way that led to the garden cunningly arranged electric lamps shone on their weird hoverings. They were like doves; but they were like doves which had been long enough in Paris to lose their innocence.

The entrance hall was made as much as possible to equal Torialli's. Louis had placed various busts of his master there; he had hated to do it, but he had not as yet seen his way to having his own bust taken. He was careful, however, to give the best light to a small charcoal drawing of himself playing

the piano, and he had chosen one or two busts of Torialli which emphasized the mark of the years. Flaubert always spoke of Torialli as “Mon cher vieux maître” when Torialli wasn’t there.

Madame Torialli looked lovelier than ever on the great night, and yet she had worked all day long with Louis and Jean under a tension which might have overwhelmed a stronger woman. To Gabrielle it had only lent an air of extra softness and stillness. She wore a gown of the palest, vaguest blue—a blue which seemed to have lost itself in a white cloud; out of the cloud her bare neck and shoulders gleamed softly, as if they were powdered with pearls; the heavy black shadows under her eyes brought out afresh their startling azure innocence.

“Why Gabrielle should manage to look as if she were going to her first communion when she wears the lowest dress in the room, I cannot understand!” said her sister-in-law enviously. “But no one could suspect her of impropriety whatever she was doing—they would think she was saying her prayers!”

As for Jean, he said to himself that night, as he had said to himself a hundred times before in the long ten days which followed Salvi’s visit:

“I must have been mistaken, she is too beautiful—she cannot be false.”

Louis had been in such a frantic state all day that Jean was astonished at his bounding vivacity to-night. At breakfast he had lost a temper which Jean had never known him to possess, struck a terrified servant, and filled the house

with irritated nerves. At lunch he had wept and only an hour before the first guest arrived Jean had been forced to give him brandy, while Louis lay in a collapse on the sofa, moaning and asking for a revolver.

Now, however, the hour had made the man. He received his guests with a perfect mixture of respect and affability, and with careful shades of manner which expressed to a nicety his reverential delight in receiving his royal guests, his cordial appreciation of the presence of certain members of the best French world (friends and relatives of Gabrielle), his *camaraderie* with men and women of talent, and the temporary vogue of mere originality; and a patronizing pleasure at the appearance of the less important pupils. Torialli stood a little behind him, and kept as much in the background as his friends would let him. He was honestly delighted to see his secretary receiving the big world, and he had set his heart on Louis' success. So apparently had Madame Torialli, for she said so at intervals throughout the evening.

La Salvi came alarmingly early; she timed her arrival to take place during the long dead time of the *soirée*, while the princes were quarrelling in their dressing-rooms over their respective costumes, and taking drinks to strengthen their nerves for the ordeal of the Revue, which could not take place until the professional artists had finished their evening's work at the different theatres.

Louis hastened half way downstairs to greet her. Gabrielle Torialli leaned over the top of the staircase, one slim ringless hand on the banisters between. La Salvi shot a

glance up at her, past her obsequious host, out of her bright, malicious little eyes.

“Ah! my dear Monsieur Flaubert!” she said. “How early I am. You see, I am so anxious to see you! But this isn’t a new house at all! It’s a magician’s palace! Why, what an interior! I shall never forget it! The truth is I am fatigued, I can hardly stand, and I said to myself, ‘If I don’t go early I shan’t have any time there at all!’ I’m like Cinderella, I must run away before the clock strikes twelve!”

Louis Flaubert’s face was a study. If she was so tired, did she intend to sing? He dared not ask her; Gabrielle had been so certain that she would sing for him; but the crudity of a direct request appalled him. It seemed as if all Paris was listening over the banisters to hear.

The royal princes in the garden, swearing bitterly over the enormous difficulty of getting into black tights for their first scene—what would they say if they did not hear La Salvi? Perhaps, if he got her alone into the garden, he would dare to ask the boon. But no! La Salvi would not go into the garden.

“I daren’t, my dear man!” she said, puffing relentlessly on up the stairs. “I daren’t; there’s a feeling of damp in the air, and I think it’s going to rain! Does one, I ask you, carry one’s only child out into a storm? Do not then suggest that I should expose my one offspring—my poor little changeling of a voice! Ah, my little angel Gabrielle! so, there, you are all in blue and white, fresh from the Madonna, as it were! What a pleasure again! And what a drawing-room, Monsieur Flaubert! You don’t think it large enough to sing in? My good man, don’t sing! One cannot play every part at once.

You make a perfect host! And those pink cakes over there; are they brought up on purpose for me? What an imagination! Aladdin himself never managed better with his lantern! Where do you keep your lantern, Monsieur Aladdin? Or do the Toriallis keep it for you? It's just the kind of thing, now, that I see our dear Gabrielle collecting! Ah, here is the great Torialli himself!"

Madame Salvi sat down by the pink cakes and motioned Torialli to the seat next to her.

"Now I think," he said with a good-natured smile, "that this is really capital of Flaubert, dear old man! he has such a head on his shoulders! I should never get on without him. Don't you think he has done all this very well? I assure you I can't think how he manages it—those flowers now—Gabrielle and I couldn't run to orchids like this! I don't believe Paris held them all; they tell me he wired to London; did you ever hear of such a man? You'll sing for him to-night, won't you, Salvi?"

La Salvi ate another pink cake before she answered. Flaubert was receiving Hester Lévi; for her, too, he went half way downstairs; she was the richest woman in Paris.

"No," said Salvi at length. "I have a cold in my head, I think, or the bubonic plague, or perhaps the cholera; one never knows the beginning of those things. Why should I sing? I am not a gramophone to be turned on and off at everybody's garden party! Why don't you sing yourself, then, if you want so to please him?"

"I? Oh well, you know, I'm an old man now," said Torialli, rather sadly. "When one has sung, as I have sung,

one does not come up after the resurrection. It is better to stay dead, my dear Salvi—it's better to stay dead!"

"Well, for my part," said Salvi, taking up a green cake instead of a pink one, "I think it better not to die, so I take things very easily and in half an hour I go to bed. Is that the Duchesse de Richemont talking to your wife; because, if it is, bring her over to me; she's a young woman, and she hasn't eaten so many cakes, so she may as well do the moving! Thank you, Torialli, you're a good fellow!"

Torialli was a very good fellow, and he proved it in more ways than one; when he had given his dear Salvi the young duchesse for her companion he did his best to brighten up the waiting *soirée*.

Still there it was! It would wait. It was waiting to hear La Salvi, and when the element of suspense has been introduced into pleasure the pleasure recedes before it like the ebb of a relentless tide. In vain Torialli moved everywhere with his friendly compliments to Flaubert and his good-tempered laughter; in vain Madame Torialli, always tactful, always serene, glided about among the guests, leaving behind her a wake of gratified smiles and purring *amour propre*. The evening dragged and people waited. The princes sent a message in from the theatre to ask when La Salvi was coming out, or were they to come in to hear her? because if they were, they would have to take off their tights, which would be really too many kinds of a picturesque nuisance; but at any rate something must be done promptly or they would be bored.

Flaubert took his courage in both hands and approached La Salvi. La Salvi went on talking to the Duchesse de

Richemont and did not appear to see him coming. When he had reached her a hush came over the two drawing-rooms. Madame Salvi looked up and smiled.

"What!" she said. "Has Aladdin a new surprise for us?"

"My dear Madame," said poor Flaubert, "do not talk as if I could work a miracle when I come to ask for one. You will take away the little courage I have if you do that!"

"You have enough," interrupted Salvi softly. "Rest assured, Monsieur Flaubert, I think you have enough!"

"Madame, will you do me the infinite honour, will, you make me the happiest of men, and sing for us to-night?" Flaubert persevered waveringly, though he felt the conviction ebbing out of his voice. Ah! he had said it at last; the perspiration broke out on his forehead, he felt, as he afterwards expressed it, as if white ants were eating his spine!

"But I am shocked! I am desolated!" cried Madame Salvi. "To disappoint you is a horror to me! But was it what you expected, that I should sing to-night?"

"I do not dare to say *expected*, Madame," murmured the wretched Flaubert. "But I had humbly hoped——"

"Ah well! if you did not expect it," said Salvi. "So much the better! Still I regret to have to take away your humble hopes. Wednesday, I sing for our dear Torialli; I must preserve my poor little efforts till then."

"Ah, Madame!" pleaded Flaubert. "Just one song, your magnificent organ——"

“My dear good Flaubert, impossible!” said Salvi, slowly rising. “I have eaten six cakes, the duchesse is a witness, in the last ten minutes. I never eat before I sing, only afterwards. Consider, then, that I have sung. And now, my good friend, I must really go. My glass slipper has begun to pinch in such a manner that I am sure in five minutes it will be off. A thousand thanks for the entertainment of a life-time. I do not readily forget such attentions as yours, my dear Flaubert. Tell our good princes I would have given much to see their costumes and to hear them sing, of course! Their parts must be ravishing! So clever of you to have an entertainment in the garden.” And La Salvi was gone.

It was Madame Torialli who suggested to Louis that they should have supper at once instead of waiting until after the Revue. Flaubert was almost too crushed to accept the suggestion and to send out appropriate excuses to the princes.

The guests rallied a little under the approach of food. The princes came in rather sulkily, but as they found some particular friends in the dining-room they recovered enough to behave a little worse than anyone had quite expected, which was gratifying to Flaubert, for they only behaved well when they were bored. A famous *danseuse* who had just arrived was quite shocked; she was accustomed to quieter manners. Only Madame Torialli’s untroubled child-like blue eyes remained as serene as ever. She took the boisterously pronounced attention of Prince Ivan and his roars of laughter with an air of such perfect blandness and self-possession as to rob his behaviour of half its barbarism.

“Una and the Lion,” the Marquis de Trévaillant pointed out to Romain D’Ucelles. Romain lifted his eyebrows and looked at Madame Torialli.

“Ah, my dear Marquis,” he said. “Did Una first incite the Lion before she tamed him?”

“You see too much,” said his friend.

Romain laughed.

“That robs my speech of half its sting,” he murmured. “One need say so little, you know, if one has been fortunate enough to see too much!”

Jean overheard his uncle and hated him. He felt that he must speak or die.

“Madame Torialli is trying to save the situation, my uncle,” he said stiffly. Romain laughed.

“Ah! Is that you, my dear Jean?” he said. “Surely it must be, one cannot have two such ingenuous nephews! You must not think I underrate your clever friend. She is one of those kind-hearted women who are so fond of saving situations that they create them first. It is the true instinct of the reformer! Our charming ancestress Eve, now, I fancy, had the same motive in urging the fruit upon Adam. She had no opportunity, you see, to raise his nature until after the fall! Think of it! Eternity in a garden with a good man! What a horrible idea! It is enough to intrigue any woman!”

“*Farceur!*” laughed the Marquis de Trévaillant. “And now we have eaten, what happens next? It is another hour before the Revue can begin. What a tedious affair! And these artists of yours, when do they come, Monsieur D’Ucelles?”

“Flaubert has just sent a message to hurry them,” said Jean over his shoulder, as he hastened away to where Flaubert was beckoning him.

“What can I do? What can I do?” moaned the distracted Louis. “You must go and play, but I doubt if they will listen to you for an hour—if only you could sing comic songs!”

Jean glanced round the decorated dining-room, the tables loaded with delicate foods, the rich and exquisite dresses of the women, the carefully valeted men with their well-cut evening clothes, and the weary, hard, cruel faces! It seemed to him as if these over-civilized and pampered creatures had reverted in heart to the lowest level of nature, and as if their life had become the mere struggle of wild beasts for temporary desires—creatures all teeth and claws for their particular morsel of prey! Fortunately at this moment the artists were announced and good-naturedly offered to postpone their own suppers until after the Revue.

The Revue began in the most brilliant manner; everybody on the stage was anxious, self-conscious, and jealous; every one in the audience was amused. These were their best friends making themselves ridiculous under the impression that they were appearing particularly attractive; what more could an audience want? Prince Ivan and Prince Rudolph fulfilled every one’s expectation of the absurd. Prince Ivan managed to fall over a footstool which had been most carefully placed out of his way as far as possible, and swore audibly in the middle of his song. Prince Rudolph forgot his stage directions, and turned his back to the audience so that his voice floated away into somebody else’s garden. Still,

considering they were royalty, they managed very well and were immensely applauded.

The *femmes du monde* danced beautifully; at least they wore practically nothing and moved about the stage very gracefully while some one was playing the piano.

The famous *danseuse* was overheard remarking that as far as she could see they might just as well have executed that kind of dance in the bathroom to the noise of a hot-water tap; but that was put down to professional jealousy.

The real artists went through their parts perfunctorily and tried to flirt with the society ladies; only they became a little frightened because the society ladies went so far.

Just as every one was beginning to warm to the work, and the author had received his first call for saying something wholly disgraceful about a thinly veiled identity whom everybody guessed, Salvi's prophecy came to pass. The gathered grey clouds came down with unequivocal ardour; no light unmethodical showers which might be trusted to trickle through the tent unobtrusively, but the unhurried obstinacy of a thorough soak. It was in vain that Jean rushed madly to and fro with rugs and waterproofs to cover the thin roofing. It was in vain that Flaubert expostulated and implored. Every one was desolated, every one had been charmed and delighted; but couldn't under any circumstances stay and risk a wetting.

Flaubert stood disconsolately in his grand new hall and the crowd of his hastily departing guests swayed all around him. They passed away with the relieved celerity of those who have borne enough. Their perfunctory thin thanks hardly

lasted till they reached the door. The fable had ended. The poor frog had puffed his longest and his loudest. Now he had burst, and nobody for a single moment had mistaken him for the ox!

Jean was honestly distressed for Louis, and as for Madame Torialli, she remained there to the very end with such grave and sympathetic eyes, as to make Jean feel almost more sorry for her than for Flaubert. He thought that she looked more than ever like an angel as she stood there among the drooping flowers that looked so curiously like doves; and he did not think that the angel—like the flowers, perhaps—had been rather too long a time in Paris.

CHAPTER XXIV

A WONDERFUL thing had happened to Jean. Gabrielle had smiled at him. Her eyes, serene and secret, had for one swift moment met his with sudden tenderness.

It made Jean, on his way home to Rue Lalo, almost too happy to breathe.

The May night swept his blood with hurrying magic, and in his heart a tiny thread of golden melody was born.

It was the hour when Paris awoke; rich, expensive, passionate Paris, and launched itself into swift, tireless motors, racing to and fro through the transient pleasure of the night. The Champs Élysées stretched before him like a coil of swiftly flashing jewels. Fire and speed, and the gay faculty of easy living, flamed its message home to the world. It was to this great stream that Madame Torialli belonged—belonged, that is, by birth, by position, by success; but Jean no longer believed that she shared its life; the gay world was such a small affair. The music in his brain sang a different story to him. Gabrielle was a child at heart, she was like the soft unfolding of the spring.

It was easy to think of her on a night full of stars. He knew that Paris could not count for her any more than for him. It was a mere glittering screen between them and their joy.

Jean flew up his steep, dark stairs in the Rue Lalo, and found Margot tidying up his things. The most fatal mistake a woman can make, in the eyes of a young man, is to be

present when he is thinking of somebody else. Margot had made it and she saw by Jean's eyes that she had made it, and she did not feel as if she could ever see anything else.

Jean recognized that Margot was unhappy, and this angered him—he was by nature sympathetic—but there are moments in life when even to the sympathetic the sorrows of others bear a grotesque insignificance. Jean hoped that Margot would not tell him why she was unhappy. It seemed to him frankly incredible that anyone need be unhappy who lived in the same world as Gabrielle's smile.

And Margot had come there to tell him—still she, too, for the moment saw the wisdom of putting it off.

They fell back on her music. Jean threw himself on the music-stool and suggested that Margot should sing first this and then that. Never had Jean given her such a comprehensive and variable singing lesson or paid less attention to what she sang. At last the music came to an abrupt end; there was no more music Margot could sing, and it appeared that there was nothing more for either of them to say. Jean lit a cigarette and sat there, shaking his foot to and fro in an agony of suppressed impatience. He could not very well turn Margot out of his room, and yet her very presence made the music that was within him less—the melody seemed dwindling like a tiny stream choked by a fall of sand.

And then Margot spoke.

"Jean," she said very simply, "you've been for six months at the Toriallis' now; do you like it there?"

It was an unfortunate choice of subjects—the last thing that Jean wished to discuss with Margot or with anyone else

was the Toriallis; one of them he wished to forget, the other was too sacred for him to dare to remember. He dropped his eyes and shrugged his shoulders.

“Yes, I like it there well enough,” he said. “It has drawbacks—one cannot have the flower without the root—music...” He stopped, the words choked him. To speak of music was to hear the sound of Gabrielle’s voice.

“Music?” echoed Margot, and really a candid judge might have thought Margot’s voice as satisfactory as Madame Torialli’s. However, a young lover is not a candid judge; Margot’s little echo irritated Jean.

“What do you mean, Margot?” he asked impatiently, although he did not really want to know what Margot meant.

“I somehow thought,” she answered, “that you hadn’t had much lately—not real music, I mean. Everything at the Boulevard Malesherbes seems so—so mixed up with other things. They are of the great world, aren’t they—the Toriallis—she goes out so much—and they entertain a great deal. I wondered if you ever got enough time and freedom for your real work?”

“It’s very good of you,” said Jean, “to bother about me....”

“Oh, Jean!” said Margot.

Jean bit his lips—he knew he mustn’t talk like this to Margot—he made a great effort, an effort so great that it showed.

“Honestly, I get time enough,” he said. “And you? Flaubert is all right, isn’t he? Your voice has improved

greatly.”

Margot rose to go—and Jean thought that he had succeeded in hiding his relief; still he felt a little ashamed of being relieved.

“One thing I do want you to remember, Margot,” he said, helping her on with her jacket. “Nobody’s voice will ever mean what yours does to me, and if I ever can—we *are* friends, aren’t we? Here are your gloves—and you’ll come again sometimes on Sunday evening, won’t you? Are you sure you can get home alone all right?”

Margot nodded—she was quite sure she could get home alone all right; the difficulty would be if she were not alone. The door closed after her.

Jean returned to the piano—but the joy was gone now—the mysterious Ariadne thread of Gabrielle’s smile had broken—instead he could see only the little cloud in Margot’s eyes—he could hear the break in her voice when she said, “Oh, Jean!” She used to say that so differently when he was ill and she was nursing him.

He flung over the music-stool and rushed downstairs—they were long stairs and he caught Margot up before she had reached the bottom. He seized her hands and turned her round so that he could see her face.

Margot was crying.

He made an exclamation of regret and self-reproach and dragged her upstairs again without a word. Margot expostulated faintly—but she followed.

“Now,” he said, drawing her into his one armchair and seating himself beside her. “What is it—I know I’ve been a beast—but it can’t be helped now—I won’t be any more. Tell me, Margot.”

“If I tell you you’ll be so angry, Jean,” whispered Margot.

“Well, I’m angry now,” said Jean; “I’m angry with myself—I can’t be angrier—what have you done?”

“It isn’t me,” said Margot, wiping away her tears. “It’s just Paris, I suppose—it’s just everything—but I can’t help it, Jean. I don’t like the Toriallis.”

Jean frowned; he drew a little further away from her. “Suppose we leave them out?” he suggested.

“I would if I could,” said Margot; “but you see, Jean—she does do the accounts with Flaubert.”

“Do the accounts with Flaubert! Do you mean Madame?” Jean rose to his feet. “You’re mad, my dear,” he said brusquely. “Madame has nothing whatever to do with the business—what accounts do you mean?”

“They all say so,” said Margot; “and after all, it’s the Toriallis’ business, they must come in somewhere!”

Jean swore at the business.

“They don’t,” he added, and as Margot seemed to fancy that swearing had not yet cleared up the situation. “But what’s wrong with your account?” he added. “Flaubert promised me to charge you merely a nominal sum.”

“It’s four hundred francs for a dozen lessons, Jean,” said Margot.

Jean started as if he had been stung.

“You’ve read the figures wrong!” he asserted.

She showed him the figures, but she kept her hand over the rest of Monsieur Flaubert’s letter.

“There’s some mistake,” Jean urged.

“No—” said Margot. Then she said timidly: “It’s not the kind of thing a girl can make a mistake about, Jean. I wish it was.”

Jean looked at her quickly.

“You remember Monsieur Picot?” Margot went on in a very low voice. “Monsieur Flaubert offers to teach me—in that way, Jean—instead of the money, I mean! If I can’t pay—and of course I can’t pay four hundred francs down—but don’t look like that, Jean!”

Jean, however, continued to look like that—his one overwhelming desire was to have the thick, pink neck of Monsieur Louis Flaubert between his fingers. He no longer resented Margot’s trouble; for the moment it was his own, he had forgotten Gabrielle—all he remembered was his little comrade facing Paris, with her intrepid eyes—it made it no less wonderful that she faced it in great part for the sake of Madame Selba, with the brandy bottle behind her; and to see that little figure menaced and outraged by Monsieur Flaubert was more than Jean felt called upon to bear. In the explosion that followed Margot became conscious of three things—and the first was wholly good, because it showed her how much

Jean still cared for her; and the second was magnificent, because it proved Jean to be what she knew he was—a knight and hero; but the third was not quite so consolatory, because it occurred to Margot that in Jean's eyes the Toriallis had no fault at all—apparently they were to be avenged too. It was obvious that Jean considered that Flaubert had deceived them. Particularly Madame, of course—this *lâcheté* on the part of Louis would be incredible to her!

"Yes—I also think," murmured Margot, "that this would be incredible to Madame."

"But of course!" said Jean; "all evil would be incredible to her!"

Margot said nothing—she wondered if Jean knew how old Madame Torialli was.

Jean was very kind and very protective; on the way home he explained to Margot that if there were to be any serious difficulty about the four hundred francs he would get his uncle's assistance; it was an affair of honour and concerned his whole family—the D'Ucelles would protect Margot. "It is I who have driven you into this mud," Jean asserted. "Rely on me to rescue you from it!"

Margot should have felt very much relieved. The whole affair was taken out of her hands, Jean was not in the least angry with her; he had been wonderfully angry with Flaubert—and he informed her that he was going to speak, with reservations, of course, to Madame. Perhaps Margot was very much relieved—that at any rate was the impression which Jean carried away with him.

CHAPTER XXV

MADAME Torialli had once told Jean that if he ever wanted a private talk with her he might send his name up to her maid early in the morning, and she would see him in the dressing-room. She often received visitors there while she was putting those finishing touches which, besides making her look ten years younger than her age and the most dangerous woman in Paris, slipped into the interviews themselves and were apt to make the rawest materials change swiftly into the most miraculous results. Jean hardly knew why he had not taken advantage of the invitation before; he did not realize that what held him back was the reverence of a great passion which had now reached its maturity and was unconsciously afraid of its own strength. He had not gone to her room because he had known how much it would mean to him.

Even now he trembled as he sent up his name, and almost hoped that the maid would bring him down a refusal; but she did not. Madame would receive him. Jean followed her blindly to a new quarter of the house over the noiseless carpets, and through passages which seemed full of light and air, the discreetest colours, and an absence of superfluous things. Jean felt that he would have turned and run downstairs if he had had to knock at the door himself; but the maid knocked for him. And when he heard Madame's "Entrez donc!" his courage came back to him again. It was a part of Gabrielle's charm that no situation was ever unusual with her, and when Jean found himself a moment later seated in a chair beside her dressing-table he felt as if he had been

there all his life, and as if it were the most natural thing in the world.

Gabrielle was dressed in a soft green chiffon peignoir, with pale blue forget-me-not embroideries. Her maid had just finished piling up the golden masses of her hair (an astounding quantity of which was still her own), and she was seated in the shaded light of a big bay window, delicately manipulating various small boxes and bottles in front of her, and carrying into the operation the masterly light handling of an artist. Her room was painted a rich creamy pink, and everything in it was either mother-of-pearl or of such material as exactly matched it. The door opening into Madame's bedroom was shut, but another door stood open leading down four marble steps into a spacious bath, very deep and wide, taking up the entire room and lined with old dutch tiles.

Gabrielle gave Jean her left hand while she continued to use a long thin brush in her right.

"So you've come at last," she said, "to see me—ah, how vainly, my dear Jean—trying to cheat old time! I don't dare look at you, for I know how terribly well youth appears early in the morning, and I don't at this moment want to be reminded how little one can manage to replace its beautiful bloom! All these little pots and pans help, but when you are thirty-five you'll know what it feels like to remember that you can't for one moment get on without them! And even then you won't know the dreadful pang a woman has when she discovers a new wrinkle and has to fall back on a paint brush. When she doesn't, poor, dreadful old thing, any longer dare to trust to the use of her smile!" Gabrielle glanced over

her shoulder at Jean as she spoke, and if she did not trust to the use of her smile she was needlessly sceptical of her powers; for if there had been anything in Jean which had not wholly succumbed to her it succumbed to her then. A stupid woman would only have owned to thirty years, for Gabrielle looked very little more; but Gabrielle knew that to have made Torialli's career in Paris required time, so that it would be wiser to allow for it. It was very wise, for Jean perfectly believed her; and she was forty-three.

"As if you needed to talk like that, Madame," he said in a low voice. "One never thinks of youth or of age when one is with you, for you have all that is most beautiful in either; one thinks only of—you."

"As a reward for that sweet little speech," said Gabrielle laughing quietly, "I shall ask you to manicure my hands. I know well enough that those clever musician's hands of yours can do anything they are put to. Here are mine, then; make of them what you can!" And Gabrielle slipped both her dainty, slim, little hands into his, while he held his breath and wondered. They were ringless and soft as a child's, and the palms and finger-tips were pink as sea-shells. Their touch made his blood run like fire.

"Here are the things," said Gabrielle lightly. She was smiling a little, she saw that Jean dared not meet her eyes, and she felt him tremble. She had given him her hands, it was true, but she had surrendered nothing; she was apt to give a great deal, but she had never been known to surrender—the surrendering invariably came from the person to whom she gave. This is the secret of success in passion. Jean had forgotten the existence of Margot; all the mind he had at

present and all his strength were needed if he was to keep his head. Meanwhile he took up Gabrielle's manicure things, and if he did not make a clumsy job of it, it was entirely due to the fact to which Madame had already alluded, that he had great skill in the use of his hands. Still, Gabrielle could have done it better herself. Gabrielle let a silence come between them, but she saw that she must not let it last very long. She watched the colour rise in Jean's face with her innocent, untroubled eyes.

"I wish I could believe that you came here only to see me," she said at last. "But I don't. I am sure you had some other intention, or you would have been at work long ago. You see, I know what a faithful workman my little Jean is."

"I want only to see you, and if I work it is only for you," muttered Jean. "And if——"

"No, that little box on the right," said Madame coolly. "Torialli looked all over Paris for it. You see, I wanted it to match the rest. You have no idea how difficult it is to get a perfect match in mother-of-pearl. Well! what were you saying? Oh yes! you work only for me—that is charming of you, my dear boy. And now I think you've worked on that finger long enough! Not even a genius like you can climb past perfection. Then there is nothing you want to ask me?"

"If I dared," said Jean, suddenly crushing the hand he held.

"No! don't spoil your work!" said Madame quickly. Jean pulled himself together. He dragged Margot's name into his mind and held it there.

“Yes, yes,” he said; “there is something about a poor girl in trouble. I want your help, Gabrielle.”

Again she let her Christian name pass; he hardly dared to believe it, but perhaps she had not heard.

“Ah! I am glad you came to me,” said Madame. “Tell me about her, Jean! it’s not the dear funny little person who’s to marry the grocer, is it? I rather hope it is, you know. I should always love her for having nursed you when you were ill.”

“Yes, Madame, it is my friend—it is Margot Selba,” said Jean, thinking how differently in her tolerant sweetness Gabrielle spoke of little Margot from foolish Margot’s vindictive unreasoning bitterness about Madame!

“Margot Selba!” said Gabrielle slowly. “Surely I must have seen her! isn’t that the little brown-eyed one I discovered singing in Louis’ room? Yes, I am sure it must be—her eyes were so frightened, and I remember thinking that brown eyes always show terror so easily. Now, I have never seen blue eyes frightened.” And Madame opened her own a little wider. Jean looked so long at them that Madame had to move her hand to draw his attention back to his work. “What about this little person?” she asked.

“She is in most terrible distress,” said Jean. “She works for her mother and herself. I want you to help me about the account; it’s a very large one, and she can’t pay it. She’s asked for a month’s grace, and if she doesn’t get it she’ll be turned out into the streets of Paris; and, Madame, it seems to me for the lessons she has received from Flaubert altogether too large a sum!”

“Oh, my dear boy, how terrible!” cried Gabrielle quickly. “It seems to me that all girls with voices have to support a mother! I have heard, ah! so many such sad tales, and you believe it all, of course!”

“These are my friends—I know that it is true,” said Jean, simply.

Gabrielle shivered a little.

“Ah! how hard life is!” she murmured. “We sometimes ask God why? But there is never any answer.”

“I knew—I knew that you’d feel like that,” said Jean. “I should have come to you before, there is no one like you in the world for courage and kindness. You’re—you’re so beautiful, Gabrielle!”

This time he knew that she had heard him.

“Hush! Hush, my child!” she said gently. “We must think, mustn’t we? Do you know, years ago when I was first married Torialli’s pupils came to me very often—oh, with such tragic stories! How I cried over them, and I would go to him and tease him to alter the accounts, and he was too good to me—dear old Torialli—he always altered them, and he worked so hard. And then one day he was ill; I shall never forget it. He said to me ‘Little one, I must go on working as hard as I can, because you see my work is cheap.’ And Jean, it was I who had made it so by my foolish woman’s sympathy. I had made my husband’s work cheap! I promised him then, and I have always kept it, never to interfere with his business again.”

“But she isn’t Torialli’s pupil, you know; she’s Flaubert’s,” Jean explained. “And it’s only that I do not feel

the account to be fair!—I have said I think it is too much. If it is necessary to pay it—I will try to do so, but it seems to me that Flaubert has asked more than he has earned!”

Gabrielle pressed his hand.

“You dear, dear boy!” she said. “You bring me back my youth, that happy, happy time when I was generously ignorant and impetuously wrong! How I loved that time, and how I love these things in you! But, my dear Jean, in the old days to be a Knight Errant was a simple matter; you rushed out into a wood, found a demoiselle in distress, and ran a wicked villain through the body. Things are not quite so simple nowadays; the distress is the same, but everything else is different. The demoiselle probably is entirely in the wrong. The villain is possibly a kind-hearted misunderstood person, trying to get his deserts, and if you run him through the body you will be certain to suffer for it, without at all profiting the lady. As for me—what can I do to help you? If I give four hundred francs to this poor girl, which would be my impulse, of course, however much a secret we make of it, in fact the moment we attempt to make a secret of it, it would be all over Paris by to-morrow! And I should simply ruin my poor old Louis! I don’t speak of my good name, though that wouldn’t be worth an hour’s purchase. Paris has a quick brain, as you know, and unless a quick brain is also a very pure one it is apt to jump at incredibly ugly conclusions. I should be accused of privately buying one of Louis’ pupils off to cover up a scandal! And it will be the same if you do it for the little Margot. And what right have I—or you either, my dear Jean, to interfere with poor Louis’ business? He may have his reasons for pushing this affair, reasons which you and I know nothing at all about, but which, if they were any

affairs of ours, might appear to be very good ones. Only, don't you see, *mon petit*, they aren't?"

Jean sat silent under Gabrielle's quick, soft words; they fell upon him and drowned his reason. He had finished his work on her delicate hands, but they still lay in his, and though he had ceased to work it is possible that they had not. He was so near Gabrielle that he could see the quick heaving of her breast, and feel her very thoughts run into his answering blood. He tried valiantly to keep his head clear and to think of Margot; but what is a boy of twenty-three in the hands of a woman like Gabrielle when he loves her, and she does not love him? He fought, fought better than Madame had expected he would fight, but that is all that can be said for him.

"Then you can do nothing?" he whispered.

"I don't say that," said Gabrielle very gently. "I even hope we may be able to do something; but nothing immediately, nothing rash! Will you leave it all to me, dear Jean?"

Jean hesitated. Even now he hesitated.

Gabrielle withdrew her hands. He caught them back.

"Yes! yes!" he stammered. "Everything—everything to you, Gabrielle!"

Then she let him kiss her hands. She did not need to give him any more. She had only, after a moment or two, to say:

"But Jean—I trusted you——"

That was enough. He left her.

It is easy to manage a man who has a certain kind of honour. You touch his pride, and you touch the one thing in him more fundamental than his desires, and by which he can control them. “I cannot think,” said Gabrielle to herself, “why Louis finds him difficult to deal with; men are so stupid.” Then she rang for her maid and finished her toilette. Madame Torialli never wasted her time.

CHAPTER XXVI

"IS that thing yours?" asked Cartier.

It was Sunday evening in the vast solitude of Cartier's music room. There was nothing in it but space—a couple of armchairs and the blur of tobacco smoke. The sound of Jean's playing on Cartier's perfect grand reached his listener's ear without anything to deaden or blur the clear stream of the falling notes.

"Yes, it's mine," replied Jean wearily. "At least I suppose it is—it may be an imitation of yours, *mon maître*, for anything I know to the contrary. I was half dead with sleep last night when it came to me. Flaubert broke down, you know, after his ball, and went off for a week—so I've been doing his work for him—and, to tell you the truth, I prefer his work to his company. But you like it—this little idea? I call it 'Autumn in Spring'—because I feel it is that moment when the dead leaves are still in the ground and yet life stirs."

"I don't know whether I like it or not," said Cartier slowly, "but you should do nothing else."

"That is easily said," Jean answered a little bitterly; "only there must be a basis for bread and butter—I used to think one had nothing to do but to sit and hear music come, but when everything else went I found myself getting up and going after it. Counterpoint and harmony—even the study of *les vieux*—they weren't worth the smell of a cup of coffee

and a fresh *petit pain*; and—well, it's thanks to you, Cartier, that I'm not starving now."

"It's not thanks to me," said Cartier quietly. "But, Jean, you've got to get back to counterpoint and harmony and *les vieux*! I never much cared for the Toriallis for you; it's a footman's place with the jingle of the piano thrown in. Now you're on your feet again I have another idea. I want you to throw it up and come with me to Russia for a year. I promised to go back to play through the winter at St. Petersburg, but I have a notion to go off somewhere into the country for the summer. They've fine forests there and silences deeper than anything you've ever dreamed of. Friends of mine have offered me a house the size of a Paris boulevard. I don't want to go alone—but if you'd come with me it would give you time enough to yourself to hammer out a little stuff—and I should see then better what is in you. For me, unless I have one of *les jeunes* at my side I grow top-heavy and old-fashioned. Let it be a bargain then—you shall have all expenses paid and whatever the good Toriallis have seen fit to dole out to you thrown in!"

Jean drew a deep breath; then he got up and crossed the big, sounding *salon* to Cartier's side.

"That would be worth Heaven to me, *mon maître*," he said, "and it's rather like the other place having to say 'No!' But to tell the truth I'm in what's called a difficult position. I hadn't meant to consult you about it yet, but I can't let you think I give up your offer lightly. I've discovered that Flaubert is a thief and a fraud! He's worse. *Mon Dieu!* it's like touching dirt to speak of him! And Madame trusts him! Torialli too. I've got my proofs, but I'm hesitating. When he

comes back I shall confront him with them and ask him to resign; if he will not, I suppose I must expose him. But it will be a shock I should like to spare them.”

Cartier looked up quickly at Jean and puffed cautiously at his pipe for a moment; then he said in a tone Jean had never heard him use before: “Sit down, my boy. Now what is it exactly you propose to tell the Toriallis?”

Jean flushed a little; then he sat down and poured out in a quick, flashing stream of indignation the pent-up suspicions of six months, with the sequel of Margot’s preposterous account.

“You’d better not tell Madame Torialli that,” said Cartier quietly, when Jean had finished. “Part of it wouldn’t be any news to Madame, the part about the accounts. They make them up together. Of course I never knew to what length they carried it, but every one has known for some time that there was something a little sharp and backstairs about the business—only what will you—it’s the best method in Paris? I don’t say Torialli knows, probably not, but he must have to make an effort to remain ignorant! *Au reste*——” Cartier shut his eyes, opened them and shrugged his shoulders. “You won’t break Madame’s heart by pointing out the treachery of *ce beau garçon* of hers, but you’ll annoy her pretty considerably, and I shouldn’t choose to be the one who annoyed *le petit ange* Gabriel—she likes to be left to make her own annunciations!”

“What do you mean, Cartier?” asked Jean. He leaned forward; his eyes flickered like a trapped animal’s—they seemed almost to grow into Cartier’s face.

“Mais—c’est connu,” answered his companion. “Surely you are not ignorant that Torialli’s secretary is—*en général*—the lover of Madame? She doesn’t lose her heart, you understand, but she finds it works better. She has a great deal of discretion, but Flaubert doesn’t happen to be of the right *genre*. So it’s leaked out. Don’t take it too hard, my boy—all Paris knows it—except Torialli. There again he opens his mouth and shuts his eyes—and Madame fills it with what she thinks good for him. I think we may agree that it usually *is* good for him, though many men would prefer a more meagre diet, administered with a little less discretion.”

Then Cartier got up and walked away from Jean; he could not bear to see the boy’s face.

“It is not true,” muttered Jean, “it is not true!” but he did not get up and go after Cartier.

For a long while neither of the two men spoke. Then Cartier said:

“I wish you’d come with me to Russia, Jean; it’s the best place for you to get the taste of Paris out of your mouth! Paris is like this! You won’t get on here. You don’t understand her little ways. You think of things as if they were made of jewels; they’re not: they’re made, for the most part, of paste. When one knows that one pays the price for paste, but to pay as you do is to be ruined.”

“To tell the truth I had no idea how far things had gone. I believed it was only a case of the occasional bleeding of the rich—that one winks at oneself—it relieves the system, as it were—and at the same time there is always a profit for the anæmic. Torialli is a good fellow, he wouldn’t want more

than that; but she's ambitious—she's gone, even for Paris, a little far. Still, if I were you, I'd get that account of Margot's paid. I wouldn't fight her!"

"Fight her!" muttered Jean. "*Mon Dieu!* fight Gabrielle!"

"Don't think of her like that!" cried Cartier sharply, "or you'll go mad. Think of her as she is, a clever *intrigante*, with her hand in the pocket of the public."

"The Devil!" cried Jean, springing to his feet. "Don't push me too far, Cartier. I've stood a good deal because I suppose you believe what you say——" Jean stopped.

Cartier nodded. "You, too," he said quietly, "believe what I say. You're at liberty to knock me down if it'll relieve you. After all, I let you in for this thing. Only keep hold of the truth. Madame Torialli isn't worth breaking a stick for, let alone a man's life! You've got talent, my boy,—pull yourself together and use it. You happen to have seen a good woman, even though you haven't, I fancy, looked at her. Still, they exist, you know, and will continue to, but they're not as a rule quite as clever as Madame. We'll go to Russia next week if you're ready."

Jean made no answer; he hunted blindly for his hat, found it, and rushed out into the street.

It was a stifling May night; the hot air from the pavement rose up to meet the sultry breath of the sky. Jean did not feel it, it even seemed to him to be cold. He knew nothing, and saw nothing. A merciful blankness had descended upon his mind. He had this much of an idea—that he must go—but he was not sure where, or how. When he crossed a street he passed through the traffic as if it were something flung upon

a screen. People shouted after him, but he paid no attention to their cries. He did not dream of committing suicide, he did not feel as if there was anything as real as suicide. He neither knew nor cared where he went, though he was conscious of a feeling of ease as the hard glare of the Champs Élysées melted into the softer darkness of the Bois.

There were trees now, and whole empty spaces where the little figures of men and women ceased to jerk past him like children's painted toys.

By and by he came to a seat in the shadow of a big tree. It was quite dark and empty and Jean huddled there, cowering beside it as if it could afford him some kind of shelter against a special danger. He knew now that he was afraid. There was still something that might happen to him. He might remember Gabrielle's face.

The birds twittered and murmured to each other in the trees, the far-off voice of Paris came lightly to Jean, without the menace of its accustomed speed. He tried to think of Margot and picture what she was doing, but something quickly warned him not to do that. If he thought of Margot he might remember what he was trying to forget; and then it came; though he had shut his eyes and covered his face with his hands he saw her. He saw Gabrielle's face.

She was smiling at him as she had smiled last night with serene and intimate tenderness.

The merciful blankness was over now, pain poured into him, pain so abominable and heart-rending that he cried aloud. He could not bear it. He must not bear it, it was as physical as scorching flame. He saw the way she moved, her

dresses and the crystal heart she wore and played with in her delicate hands.

The birds were quiet now, but it was no longer any use their being quiet. He heard instead every tone of her delicious voice, its little soft falls into contralto like the depth of velvet, or its sudden lifting into clear, sweet notes like the chiming of a silver bell. She was horribly near him, the night was full of her, he could even breathe the exquisite faint perfume of her hair.

He flung himself face downwards on the ground.

Oh, to grow into the stupid, painless earth, to feel without sense or sound the slow pulsations of the grass! To lose himself, to forget himself and her!

The sweet, soft night passed over him, hour by hour, until it seemed as if the earth below him turned in sleep. He lifted his face up to the sky. There was no moon and all the stars were small and glimmered far away. At first he thought still that it was the night; and then he knew that the darkness was moving.

The dawn wind rose and sent its stealthy whispering through the trees. The birds awoke and called short, sharp liquid cries of half-awakened love. Then a gust, borne across the speeding darkness, broke in a soft shower of rain. It was the last gift of the retreating night.

Jean stumbled to his feet and crept back to Paris to meet the new, intolerable day.

CHAPTER XXVII

JEAN knew that there was one thing more he had to do, and it seemed to him as if it were the only thing in the world left to him to do. He could procure the four hundred francs for Margot. He found his Uncle Romain in the best of humours; his wife had gone to the country to see her mother for some days, and he felt half-empty Paris delightful.

"Ah, my dear boy!" he cried as Jean came into the smoking room. "You will never know freedom until you marry! No bachelor can understand the joys of escape, for he has nothing really to escape from. Freedom, I have always thought, is the absence of restraint; and I take it one must have restraint in order to lose it. The absence of restraint is merely another way of saying 'Your dear aunt has gone into the country to see her mother.' What a blessed institution one's family is! To me this aspect of the mother-in-law at some little distance in the country, liable to occasional attacks of indigestion which she mistakes for heart failure, has about it something that is very touching, almost sacred! I believe in preserving these relationships. All relationships are to my mind a direct ministration of Providence to prevent the dangers of intimacy. This, Jean, is a very important thing for you to remember. I sometimes think you overlook the value of relationships; a mind that is not divided against itself is a bore. I see that you are having one of those attacks of concentration at the present moment! Light a cigarette, and you will find the liqueurs behind the billiard table—take one and think of something else! It is much too hot to be in earnest!"

“*Mon oncle*,” said Jean, waving his hand to decline the cigarette, the liqueur, or any other consideration than his purpose, “I have worked here now for three years in Paris, and I have not asked you for money, have I?”

Romain leaned back in his immense armchair and opened his eyes very wide with a charming smile in them.

“But my dear boy,” he said, “do not tell me that at the end of three years you know less of life than at the beginning? I have never heard such a confession of failure. Besides, you can’t sincerely mean to ask me for money now —I never lend, you know, I borrow, and I don’t even borrow as often as I could wish; but that, however, is not my fault. It would charm me to be of service to you, of course, but tell me about it; if it was the good Liane, now, I should be tempted; I met her the other night, I thought her looking a little—well, as if she should begin to lay up pears for the thirst. She won’t, you know, last much longer. They say she eats nothing and sleeps in her stays. But the years that take away from us everything else add, in spite of all we may do to prevent it, to the figure. It is, indeed, the only addition they seem prepared to make for us.”

“It is not Liane, *man oncle*,” said Jean. “I want to tell you the story; you know, after all, we’re the same flesh and blood, and it is good blood too, isn’t it? I think you’ll feel as I do, that something horribly bad must be stopped.”

Romain did not become serious, but something in Jean’s tone silenced him. He listened to his brother’s son, and as Jean told him the story of Flaubert’s baseness to Margot he felt a curious twinge of sentiment; he almost wished for a moment that Jean had been his own son instead. He was

silent when Jean had finished, and he let his cigarette go out; he almost stopped smiling.

"Oh well, you know, my dear fellow," he said at last, "the man's *canaille*, that's all! there are those in Paris! Certainly one mustn't dun a woman for money when one is in search of her favour, that is understood. Yes! it is rather base, that money! He must have bourgeois blood. It reminds one of politics! It is quite the trick of a politician that! Yes, your friend Flaubert leaves an unpleasant taste in one's mouth. I should like to help you. I don't think I can, but I should like to. Why didn't you marry the little Pauline? It is such a pity you let her slip into Pierre de Lodéve's hands. Of course, it is his aunt's doing; she is an admirable woman, so pious! She made the girl make magnificent settlements. I always rely on truly religious people for the business instinct. They manage very thoroughly on earth and we are told that they also lay up for themselves treasure in heaven. I can well believe it. Now, as to the four hundred francs—I have no money at all at present, but I happen to know that your dear aunt has a thousand francs, I think—a sum in a little blue bag in her desk, which she has set apart for a Home for Girls. I went there with her once; it was a most painful sight, and I thought unnecessary. There were two hundred of them; I did not think France had so many plain daughters; they were to be saved from destruction, and really, as I pointed out to your aunt at the time, nature had already provided for their safety. It is a pity to try to improve upon Nature's methods. Now one might very well, I think, take the money to help a pretty girl! I remember that the little Margot is pretty?"

Jean smiled in spite of himself.

“Yes, Uncle Romain,” he said, “very pretty.”

“And your friend, your charming friend, Madame Torialli, is she also interested in the case?” asked Romain carelessly. Jean flushed to his forehead.

“I—I have not spoken to her of it lately,” he said in a stifled voice.

“Ah well,” said Romain, “perhaps you are right. She is a sympathetic woman, but, of course, in your situation it would be difficult to unmask Flaubert.”

“I may have to leave the situation,” said Jean. “It will be impossible for me to stay longer with Monsieur Flaubert.”

Romain looked at him again, and again he was sharply conscious of the wish that Jean had been his son. It was absurd, he would have disliked to have a son of that age very much, and three years ago he had actually despised Jean; he despised him now a little, but he liked him more than he despised him.

“*Bon!*” he said. “I will go and fetch the little bag; your aunt will be enraged, but I shall tell her the goodness of the case and conceal the prettiness of the girl; and, Jean, I cannot give you anything for yourself. I should, you know, rather like to. Go and order a suit at my tailor’s. You know the man? I never pay him. No, don’t thank me, only if you should find yourself in any particularly bad place—or rather in no place at all—I have a little *châlet* at Joinville by the river. You might run down there for a few days; they’ll look after you all right—only let me know first, as it is sometimes occupied, and be careful that you never let your aunt have the address. I do not think the climate would suit her. You are

sure you won't have anything to drink? I have an engagement to lunch out, or I should ask you to stay."

"Thank you, Uncle Romain," said Jean simply. "I felt sure you would help me. I fear I shall not see you for some time. Jacques Cartier has suggested my going with him to Russia for a year; I think that I shall go."

Romain glanced keenly at his nephew; then he looked away.

"And the Toriallis," he drawled indifferently, "you will not return to them?"

"It is not likely that I shall return to them," said Jean.

Romain rose to his feet and tapped Jean lightly on the shoulder.

"*Mon vieux*," he said, "this good Cartier is playing the part *du bon Dieu*. It is a part I should rather like to play myself; but I have never learnt how, I think I am too young for it!

"It does not matter, for I have always found there are others to whom the rôle comes more naturally.

"You will do very well to accompany Cartier to Russia; when you come back you will find many things different. A year is a very long time in the life of a beautiful woman of middle age; it requires an infinite amount of pains to hide it; whereas at your time of life it is less than nothing to the appearance; but the amount of experience that it contains—*mon Dieu*, that is colossal! I assure you, at your age I once lost my heart, the whole of it—and I had an immense amount at the time—twice in three weeks! It was a charming period;

I nearly drowned myself; but as a matter of fact I took a little voyage into the country with a friend, and it came to quite the same thing in the end! Try it, Jean—try it—*au revoir*!”

Romain followed Jean out into the hall with his hands in his pockets, and his agreeable smile slightly deepened as he exclaimed: “After all, it is in my power to offer you something; should you care for any of those walking sticks in the stand, they look a little stouter than yours, pray take one—but avoid any that have initials.

“I don’t suppose Monsieur Flaubert will give you much trouble; should he wish more satisfaction than you intend to give him, you will of course call on me; but *ces gens-là* prefer the law. Look out your trains and pack your things before you pay your little visit! You leave your best respects for your aunt Marie, of course—doubtless they will be worth a thousand francs to her—*au revoir*!”

Jean stepped back and shook his uncle’s hand again; their eyes met and a light passed between them; they were of the same blood and at length they understood each other.

“*Adieu*,” said Jean simply, and he picked out the strongest stick in the hall, without initials, while Romain looked on smiling.

CHAPTER XXVIII

THERE was no meal that Flaubert enjoyed so much as his breakfast. It seemed to him to be the great opportunity of appearing as a grand *seigneur*; for, in his opinion, to take your breakfast in a blue boudoir leading from your bed room, attired in a flowered silk dressing-gown, sufficiently expressed every claim of ancient blood.

It was here that he received the younger secretary and dictated to him any part of his correspondence he could induce Jean to accept as the business of Torialli, and tried to impress that impatient youth with the belief that the remainder of his letters were the subdued tributes of every young and beautiful woman in Paris.

To-day Flaubert had reached his second cup of chocolate before Jean's knock sounded at the door.

He did not at once notice anything unusual in Jean's appearance except that he carried a new and rather formidable walking-stick.

"That memento *d'un Apâche*, my dear fellow, you might have left in the hall," Flaubert observed "Think of my china!"

"I will try to bear it in mind," said Jean briefly.

Flaubert took a mouthful of egg without salt and made a face. There was something discomposing in the voice of Jean D'Ucelles; it sounded like that of a man who is standing on the edge of his patience.

“In the first place,” said Jean, approaching the table, “I should be obliged if you would give me a receipt for this,” and he laid in front of Monsieur Flaubert Margot’s bill, with the notes for four hundred francs. “I come on the part of Mademoiselle Selba,” Jean finished in the same dry manner.

“Business *now*, Jean!” cried Flaubert, playfully lifting a reproving forefinger. “You know my habits! You don’t want to make a dose of my morning chocolate. All this affair of the little Selba, see, let us go into it later! You settle her little bills for her do you, then, *hein*? Shocking, shocking! And I who thought you so fresh from the country!”

“I would like the receipt now, Monsieur,” said Jean; his nostrils twitched, and as he moved nearer Flaubert his hand opened and closed about the handle of his walking-stick.

Flaubert looked furtively at the bell; it was at some little distance from the table. He pushed away his unfinished egg and signed the paper.

“Thank you,” said Jean, putting the receipt in his pocket. “And now, Monsieur Flaubert, it is my regrettable duty to show you why I have not left my stick in the hall—if you wish to defend yourself I will give you time to reach the poker—but I am afraid I must stand between you and the bell. I will do my best to avoid the china.”

Flaubert was not usually a quick man, but he acted with the agility of a cat at this crisis of his career. He had no intention whatever of trying to defend himself, but he lost no time in disappearing swiftly under the table.

There was a crash of china, the cloth was swept on to the floor, the azure carpet was drenched in broken foods,

priceless blue Worcester lay in fragments, and then Jean kicked the table over and clutched the flowered dressing-gown. Shriek after shriek rose on the air; the present of Romain did its work with swiftness and skill; only one of Flaubert's vases was broken, and this disaster was simply owing to his having clung at the wrong moment to one of his companion's legs.

Suddenly the cries ceased, the *portière* at the door was thrown aside, and Gabrielle stood in the room.

Jean flung down his stick and turned to face her. Flaubert cringed, white and trembling, against the useless shelter of the table. None of the three spoke for a moment.

Then Madame closed the door behind her and floated forward into the middle of the room; her eyes wavered and passed over the broken crockery, they glanced lightly at Louis' prostrate form, and rested on the open window and the blue, spring sky.

Something extraordinarily different had come into the atmosphere of Flaubert's room; nothing had changed, chocolate still dripped on to the azure carpet, and yet Jean could have sworn it was all a dream. Nothing violent had happened, nothing violent could happen in the presence of Gabrielle Torialli.

She stood there, with the sun on her hair, in a grey Japanese silk gown; there were faint peach-blossom embroideries here and there, and the lining looked like a soft pink cloud.

"I came down rather early," said Madame gently and impersonally. "Torialli has just received a message from one

of the Princes, who has sprained his ankle and wants to amuse himself with a lesson, *chez lui*! Torialli would like you to go to him, Louis—you know the Prince's ways."

Self-pity choked Flaubert completely for a moment; then he managed to gasp out: "How can I? Madame—ask yourself—like this?"

Gabrielle's grave, child-like eyes rested on him for a moment, and then returned dreamily to the broken vase.

"Jean," she said, "do you know, I think I should pick up the table and these things. Servants are always so in the way. It is a bad example for them too, to see broken china. As for you, Louis, certainly you had better not go to Torialli in that dressing-gown; it is an extraordinarily good one. Your taste in such matters is doubtless infallible. Still I should recommend you to change it; with that difference, and a brandy-and-soda to put you in your usual spirits, you should do very well. Do you know, I think I should go at once, Louis."

Flaubert groaned, dragged himself up by the table, and with a vicious look at Jean crept sullenly out of the room.

Gabrielle sank into a low chair by the window; she leaned back peacefully, her little feet in slippers of peach blossom crossed at her ankles. She was smoking a very delicately scented cigarette, and she looked like a child holding out a flower. When Jean turned towards her she put down her cigarette, her lips began to curve, a little flame of merriment sprang into her blue, untroubled eyes. She threw back her head and laughed aloud; the music of her laughter shook Jean's heart; it was like the liquid leaping notes of a

blackbird in the spring. She laughed till the tears came into her eyes; then she grew grave again.

"And now, Jean," she said, "we must have this affair out, you and I. Alas! alas! why will men think a great big stick an inducement in getting what they want? Even you, Jean—who are, in so many ways, so civilized—even you must break a Sèvres vase and upset a table! Why did you not come to me instead?"

"Madame!" stammered Jean. Gabrielle raised her eyebrows; he had not called her "Madame" twenty-four hours ago. "I had to do what I have done, it was an affair of business, a matter that I could not have troubled you with. It was very base."

"Ah," said Gabrielle softly, "my dear Jean, you speak as if I was a child. I have lived long enough in Paris to have seen ugliness! Shall I tell you the history of this great affair of yours? Indeed I know it already. In the first place, it began with that stupid bill of which you told me, *non*?" Jean nodded. "Yes—and then I told you to wait," Gabrielle continued. "I had my reasons for telling you to wait, Jean. When I say reasons I mean more than reasons—those I would have told you. I had suspicions! It was foolish of me, I see that now, not to have confided those also to you. But I shrank from putting the reputation of an old friend altogether at the mercy of a new one. Torialli and I are not sudden persons; for five years we have known and trusted Louis—we have lived next door to him—with a covered passage; it has been the intimacy of a little household at peace with each other. And suddenly I had these suspicions! I won't weary you with when they began—I am so ignorant of business that

I daresay you, or even a cleverer woman than myself, would have begun to suspect long ago. Little by little I felt the dissatisfaction of the pupils—and above all, Jean, I felt—yours—" Madame paused a moment; then she added very softly: "that meant more to me, perhaps, than any other proof."

Jean said nothing; he sat at some little distance from Madame, and most of the time he kept his eyes on the floor; he would have kept them there all the time if he could.

"*Eh bien!*" said Madame, "I waited until you told me of that bill—sent to your poor little friend. I knew then it was time to make sure. Men are human, Jean; it occurred to me that the account was absurdly large, and I guessed the reason. I guessed," said Madame, leaning forward and touching Jean's arm with her delicate finger-tips, "I guessed that Flaubert intended to make terms out of his account—she is very pretty, the poor little Selba! Ah Jean! one does not live as I live and keep free from these things; the poison of them is in the air!"

Jean started; he had not expected this; with all his heart he wished that Gabrielle had not guessed the truth.

"And this is why you came here with your big stick, *mon cher*!" she finished softly. "After all, perhaps you were wisest—I would have used another method for dismissing our old friend—but then I am older than you—I have grown tortuous and worldly wise!" Gabrielle paused a moment; she expected Jean to say that she was not older and that she had not grown worldly wise; but Jean sat there obstinately, with his eyes on the broken vase; and said nothing. He was leaving a great deal for her to do this morning; he had missed

several of his cues; still Gabrielle could do a great deal, and she had never in her life missed a single cue.

She did not miss one now; she sighed gently, the delicate ghost of a sigh, then she said: “Jean, *petit* Jean, since it is all over, since we can consider Flaubert as already gone, you will stay with us? You will take his place?”

At last Jean turned his eyes on her, and she saw a most peculiar look in them; it was the same look she had seen once in the eyes of a dog which had been run over in the street.

“*Jamais*, Madame,” said Jean in a very low voice, “*jamais*!”

“*Mais pourquoi pas*, Jean?” she murmured; her hands moved towards him.

Jean rose to his feet; he felt dizzy and uncertain of himself; he could not stay near her any more.

“One moment, Jean,” said Gabrielle quietly, “sit down again.” Jean obeyed her. “What has happened?” she asked very simply.

Jean bowed his head in his hands; he could not tell her what had happened—she might make him believe that it had not happened; she was almost making him believe it now.

“Don’t you think you owe me the truth?” said Gabrielle at last. It was she who rose now; she stood before him with the dignity of a proud woman who has not been justly used. She threw back her head and looked at Jean. “Indeed it seems to me you owe me that,” she said.

Jean got up and came close to her.

“Madame,” he said, “just now you said to me that you wished me to take Flaubert’s place. What is Flaubert’s place?”

Gabrielle drew back a little; she did not attempt to defend herself, or to deny anything. She merely met Jean’s eyes.

A long silence fell between them. Jean breathed quickly, he tried not to throw himself at her feet. It was he who felt ashamed.

Then she said, with all the exquisite proud gentleness of a friend who has been cruelly wronged. “*Alors, c’est fini*, Jean?”

She stood there still, but it seemed to Jean as if all the light had gone out of the room. He moved towards the door without answering her; but as he reached it he turned back and looked at her as if he would keep her face forever in his eyes.

“*C’est fini*, Madame,” he muttered, but she did not need his words to see that it was finished.

Gabrielle stood quite still for a moment after he had left her.

“*Pauvre petit* Jean!” she murmured softly. “He came straight from Heaven—but alas! men like that are never very practical. They serve God better than they serve women!”

Then she knocked at the door which led to Flaubert’s bedroom.

“*Bon, mon ami*,” she called, “it is all over, I have dismissed him. I fancy the sprained ankle of Prince Rudolph has recovered by now. It will not be necessary for you to go

to Torialli—for I have an idea he is out. There is just half an hour before the pupils come.”

It has been said already that Madame Torialli never wasted her time.

CHAPTER XXIX

THE days had no separate meaning to Jean; they came upon him with the orderly formation of advancing waves, line upon line, they hung above his little island of consciousness, ominous, cold and dark, to break and cover him under bitter waters.

He was not conscious that he was unhappy, but he knew that he was fighting with the hours. They were formidable and long and quite extraordinarily empty; now and then, indeed, to vary their insistent monotony, he would feel a sharp stab at the sight or scent of the flowering spring. A girl with a lilac plume in her hand, the flutter of the new-born leaves in the garden of the Luxembourg, the gaiety in the eyes of a child—these things Jean had never known before, but he knew them now—they were the signals of his retreating joy.

Cartier watched him anxiously; the look of youth had wholly passed from the boy's face; it was grey and old, without expression. The features seemed sunk and the vivid eyes no longer held their light.

It was not Jean who answered Cartier when he spoke to him, but a creature that seemed dragged up from the depths of the sea. He was held on the surface for a moment by the brief compulsion of Cartier's voice, and when it ceased he sank back without a struggle into an alien element.

Jean was very docile, he followed Cartier meekly to his rooms for his last week in Paris. What he liked to do best

was to walk up and down, up and down the long music room with the measured tread of a wild thing in a cage, but he never did this unless he thought Cartier was out. There were only two things Jean thought of, one that he might have killed Flaubert, and the other that he had not stayed with Gabrielle; but these two things never left him; they rose in turn and possessed his mind in an orderly routine that did not vary. He might have killed Flaubert, and he had not stayed with Gabrielle. Cartier interrupted him sometimes and Jean had to keep his thoughts back from one of these great wheels, and then as Cartier withdrew his claim Jean's mind sprang back released, and he found himself once more turning on his inexorable wheels.

As the days passed he grew nearer the hidden boundary where madness lurks; sleep withdrew from him, at first imperceptibly and gently, a new elastic lengthening of the hours of the night, and then altogether, with a complete and terrible absence of unconsciousness.

For twenty-four hours Jean was bound on his two wheels swinging in the chaos of his breaking mind. Then Cartier came to him again. Jean had to hold his head for a moment to hear what Cartier said; a strange idea flickered into his mind, without root or continuity, that it might be easier to kill Cartier than to listen to him; but he put it away; he could still listen.

Cartier said: "Jean, I've heard from Margot; she wants us both to go to hear her sing to-night; it's a great occasion, she has an important part in the new Revue at 'Le Matin.' It's our last evening, you know, in Paris. You'll come, won't you, to hear the little Margot?"

“I have already said good-bye to Margot,” said Jean slowly; and then he murmured half to himself: “I asked her if she prayed for me, and she said, ‘Ah Jean! the Blessed Virgin knows that I have prayed.’ I do not want to hear her say that again. Her eyes are like a sword.”

“She doesn’t want us to go and see her,” Cartier explained carefully. “She writes that it’s the music she wants you to hear—they’ve given her a good part.”

“But you don’t know what her voice is like,” expostulated Jean impatiently. “If I were dead and Margot sang I should know it was her voice, and I should say, ‘Go slowly, little Margot, fold your wings!’ She is eager like a child, or a bird that must run up into the sky and cannot wait to get there before he sings.”

Cartier nodded; he understood Margot’s letter now. “Bring him, please bring him—it’s not me—I never was any good to him, but when I sing he’ll listen—I think it will make a difference—a difference to him, I mean.”

Cartier hoped that it might make a difference, for he remembered, as he looked at Jean, that men had gone mad for love, and he thought that they must have looked singularly like Jean, as Jean looked now.

“You’ll come,” Cartier pleaded. “You see you’ll help her; she says you’ve done such wonders for her voice. Why, it’s quite famous now! I had the pleasure of mentioning the fact to our good Liane the other night. I said, ‘You must really go and hear the little Selba, *ma fille*, she is getting a *réclame* here in Paris, and they say she owes it all to your little musician.’ *Ma foi!* The good Liane put back her big white

teeth and wished she could bite. I was not at all sure she wouldn't—so I ran away!"

Jean made an intense effort to listen; it seemed to him that he ought to know who Liane was; then he gave in—after all, it would be easier to give his consent than to have to talk any more. "I'll go," he said briefly.

It was strange on his way to the theatre that he should keep seeing Flaubert and Gabrielle in the streets, and it was trying, too, because he had to think two thoughts at once, and this is not easy without practice. It makes the mind go so quickly like the long, quivering, grey band in a threshing machine.

They would pass, Gabrielle and the fat little secretary, in a flying motor, only the next minute to turn in at a lighted café—though they might at the same time be standing on the steps of a house above the street. They even on one occasion leaned out of a window to laugh, and stood just in front of Jean on the pavement simultaneously; but one thing was always the same; they were laughing at Jean because he had not killed Flaubert and because he had not stayed with Gabrielle.

Cartier pretended not to see them; he kept his eyes carefully in front of him, and walked a little stiffly, with his hand on Jean's arm. Jean wasn't at all sure that Cartier was not laughing at him too; perhaps after all it would be simpler to kill Cartier; he at least was only capable of being in one place at a time.

They arrived at the big lighted hall; it was full of little tables and men smoking; there were women too, with jewels

on their necks. And lights, lights everywhere, and the orchestra played soft, gay music; but they none of them had a real existence; they all seemed to Jean like a hideous game of make-believe, played in order to drag him away from his two great ideas.

The Revue was very like all Revues; it was the latest thing; so that there wasn't a joke that was born as late as yesterday or would be remembered beyond to-morrow. Still it was very clever, very neat, and topical and gay, and the music was that fine malleable French art, which is as clear cut as a cameo and as hard as a problem in algebra.

Jean did not pay any attention to it because, of course, he knew it wasn't real; and then he suddenly saw Margot. He couldn't think what she was doing on a pretence stage and in a place that looked like a hall and was as hollow as a bad nut; it puzzled and annoyed him to see her there, but he did not doubt Margot's reality.

You could, if you were as clever and as cruel as sin, make up anything on earth, but you couldn't invent Margot.

"*C'est la petite* Margot," he muttered; then she sang.

All the music he had ever thought of, all the music he had ever heard, sang with her; and sang to set Jean free.

He did not realize at first what was happening to him. Her voice drowned the bitterness of his heart, there was something in it deeper than bitterness.

The hours he had starved in Paris drove their old meaning into his brain; he saw the Parc Monceau in the cold spring dusk, the smell of the coffee-stalls at dawn came back

to him, and the flash of the lights outside the theatre in the rain.

All these were in Margot's voice, for out of Jean's sufferings she had made her little songs; and as he listened he felt as if a band of iron had been broken, a band that was pressing his life out.

He was no longer possessed by phantoms. He saw instead the little figure on the stage. She stood close to the footlights; a tiny frown came between her brows; she always looked like that when she was very anxious to please Jean.

The song was over; she had only been singing one of the clever light songs like all the others, but she had put into it the whole quality of her voice; and she had pleased Paris. She stood there while the hall rang with applause and flowers fell right and left upon her.

The orchestra began again, they played a little haunting melody which laid a sudden hand upon Jean's heart. He knew this music better than any other, for he himself had written it for Margot.

It was called *La plainte de l'amour*.

Out of the flowers and the lights his gaze met Margot's.

Margot's eyes were very serious, very haunting, very grave. Her voice rose like a creature spreading great wings.

It was Jean's music, *La plainte de l'amour*, but it was Margot's heart.

Paris, that loves its dear, light mockeries, loves simple pathos too; not quite so much, perhaps; but the Manager was not dissatisfied with Margot's applause.

Margot bowed and smiled and stooped to pick up her splendid trophies; and Jean sprang to his feet, waved his hat and stick and applauded like the rest. Cartier saw that the transfiguration had come to him; he was no longer a creature of a different world. He hesitated for a moment, then he said: “You will come round to her—now?”

But Margot’s turn was over; she had slipped away with her arms full of flowers.

Jean put his hand on Cartier’s shoulder.

“No! no!” he said. “I will not go round, *mon vieux*! *Cela suffit*—we have already parted!

“But to-morrow you and I will go to Russia. I feel to-night as if after all I might do something—who knows—life is not over at twenty-five. Something has made a new man of me to-night, and I have an idea that this new man will make a little music. *Mon Dieu!* broken music, perhaps, but one cannot have everything complete! At the bottom of all beauty I find that there is grief.”

And Cartier sighed and smiled and said nothing.

After all there was nothing to be said. Margot was right; she had made a difference; but the difference was for Jean.

THE END.

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Transcriber’s Notes

Obvious typographical errors have been silently corrected. Variations in hyphenation and accents have been standardised but all other spelling and punctuation remains unchanged.

[The end of *"Broken Music"* by Phyllis Bottome]