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JEAN-CHRISTOPHE: ANTOINETTE

TRANSLATED FROM THE FRENCH

by

GILBERT CANNAN

HENRY HOLT AND COMPANY

NEW YORK

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ANTOINETTE

(Book II, Part 2)

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I

The Jeannins wore one of those old French families who have remained stationary for centuries in the same little corner of a province, and have kept themselves pure from any infusion of foreign blood. There are more of them than one would think in France, in spite of all the changes in the social order; it would need a great upheaval to uproot them from the soil to which they are held by so many ties, the profound nature of which is unknown to them. Reason counts for nothing in their devotion to the soil, and interest for very little; and as for sentimental historic memories, they only hold good for a few literary men. What does bind them irresistibly is the obscure though very strong feeling, common to the dull and the intelligent alike, of having been for centuries past a parcel of the land, of living in its life, breathing the same air, hearing the heart of it beating against their own, like the heart of the beloved, feeling its slightest tremor, the changing hours and seasons and days, bright or dull, and hearing the voices and the silence of all things in Nature. It is not always the most beautiful country, nor that which has the greatest charm of life, that most strongly grips the affections, but rather it is the region where the earth seems simplest and most humble, nearest man, speaking to him in a familiar friendly tongue.

Such was the country in the center of France where the Jeannins lived. A flat, damp country, an old sleepy little town, wearily gazing at its reflection in the dull waters of a still canal; round about it were monotonous fields, plowed fields, meadows, little rivers, woods, and again monotonous

fields.... No scenery, no monuments, no memories. Nothing attractive. It is all dull and oppressive. In its drowsy torpor is a hidden force. The soul tasting it for the first time suffers and revolts against it. But those who have lived with it for generations cannot break free; it eats into their very bones; and the stillness of it, the harmonious dullness, the monotony, have a charm for them and a sweet savor which they cannot analyze, which they malign, love, and can never forget.

The Jeannins had always lived there. The family could be traced back to the sixteenth century, living in the town or its neighborhood; for of course they had a great-uncle who had devoted his life to drawing up the genealogical tree of their obscure line of humble, industrious people; peasants, farmers, artisans, then clerks, country notaries, working in the sub-prefecture of the district, where Augustus Jeannin, the father of the present head of the house, had successfully established himself as a banker; he was a clever man, with a peasant's cunning and obstinacy, but honest as men go, not over-scrupulous, a great worker, and a good liver; he had made himself respected and feared everywhere by his genial malice, his bluntness of speech, and his wealth. Short, thick-set, vigorous, with little sharp eyes set in a big red face, pitted with smallpox, he had been known as a petticoat-hunter; and he had not altogether lost his taste for it. He loved a spicy yarn and good eating. It was a sight to see him at meals, with his son Antoine sitting opposite him, with a few old friends of their kidney; the district judge, the notary,

the Archdeacon of the Cathedral;—(old Jeannin loved stuffing the priest; but also he could stuff with the priest, if the priest were good at it);—hearty old fellows built on the same Rabelaisian lines. There was a running fire of terrific stories to the accompaniment of thumps on the table and roars of laughter, and the row they made could be heard by the servants in the kitchen and the neighbors in the street.

Then old Augustus caught a chill, which turned to pneumonia, through going down into his cellars one hot summer's day in his shirt-sleeves to bottle his wine. In less than twenty-four hours he had departed this life for the next world, in which he hardly believed, properly equipped with all the Sacraments of the Church, having, like a good Voltairian provincial, submitted to it at the last moment in order to pacify his women, and also because it did not matter one way or the other.... And then, one never knows....

His son Antoine succeeded him in business. He was a fat little man, rubicund and expansive, clean-shaven, except for his mutton-chop whiskers, and he spoke quickly and with a slight stutter, in a loud voice, accompanying his remarks with little quick, curt gestures. He had not his father's grasp of finance; but he was quite a good manager. He had only to look after the established undertakings, which went on developing day by day, by the mere fact of their existence. He had the advantage of a business reputation in the district, although he had very little to do with the success of the firm's ventures. He only contributed method and industry. For the rest he was absolutely honorable, and was everywhere deservedly esteemed. His pleasant unctuous manners, though perhaps a little too familiar for some people, a little too expansive, and just a little common, had

won him a very genuine popularity in the little town and the surrounding country. He was more lavish with his sympathy than with his money; tears came readily to his eyes; and the sight of poverty so sincerely moved him that the victim of it could not fail to be touched by it.

Like most men living in small towns, his thoughts wore much occupied with politics. He was an ardent moderate Republican, an intolerant Liberal, a patriot, and, like his father, extremely anti-clerical. He was a member of the Municipal Council; and, like the rest of his colleagues, he delighted in playing tricks on the *curé* of the parish, or on the Lent preacher, who roused so much enthusiasm in the ladies of the town. It must not be forgotten that the anti-clericalism of the little towns in France is always, more or less, an episode in domestic warfare, and is a subtle form of that silent, bitter struggle between husbands and wives, which goes on in almost every house.

Antoine Jeannin had also some literary pretensions. Like all provincials of his generation, he had been brought up on the Latin Classics, many pages of which he knew by heart, and also a mass of proverbs, and on La Fontaine and Boileau, —the Boileau of *L'Art Poétique*, and above all, of *Lutrin*,— on the author of *La Pucelle*, and the *poetæ minores* of the eighteenth century, in whose manner he squeezed out a certain number of poems. He was not the only man of his acquaintance possessed by that particular mania, and his reputation gained by it. His rhyming jests, his quatrains, couplets, acrostics, epigrams, and songs, which were sometimes rather risky, though they had a certain coarsely witty quality, were often quoted. He was wont to sing the

mysteries of digestion; the Muse of the Loire districts is fain to blow her trumpet like the famous devil of Dante:

"*.. . Ed egli avea del cul fatio trombetta*."

This sturdy, jovial, active little man had taken to wife a woman of a very different character,—the daughter of a country magistrate, Lucie de Villiers. The De Villiers—or rather Devilliers, for their name had split in its passage through time, like a stone which cracks in two as it goes hurtling down a hillside—were magistrates from father to son; they were of that old parliamentary race of Frenchmen who had a lofty idea of the law, and duty, the social conventions, their personal, and especially their professional, dignity, which was fortified by perfect honesty, tempered with a certain conscious uprightness. During the preceding century they had been infected by non-conformist Jansenism, which had given them a grumbling pessimistic quality, as well as a contempt for the Jesuit attitude of mind. They did not see life as beautiful; and, rather than smooth away life's difficulties, they preferred to exaggerate them so as to have good reason to complain. Lucie de Villiers had certain of these characteristics, which were so directly opposed to the not very refined optimism of her husband. She was tall—taller than he by a head—slender, well made; she dressed well and elegantly, though in a rather sober fashion, which made her seem—perhaps designedly—older than she was; she was of a high moral quality; but she was hard on other people; she would countenance no fault, and hardly even a caprice; she was thought cold and disdainful. She was very pious, and that gave rise to perpetual disputes with her husband. For the rest, they were very fond of each other; and, in spite of their frequent disagreements, they could not have

lived without each other. They were both rather unpractical; he from want of perception—(he was always in danger of being taken in by good looks and fine words),—she from her absolute inexperience of business—(she knew nothing about it; and having always been kept outside it, she took no interest in it).

They had two children; a girl, Antoinette, the elder by five years; and a boy, Olivier.

Antoinette was a pretty dark-haired child, with a charming, honest face of the French type, round, with sharp eyes, a round forehead, a fine chin, a little straight nose —"one of those very pretty, fine, noble noses" (as an old French portrait-painter says so charmingly) "in which there was a certain imperceptible play of expression, which animated the face, and revealed the subtlety of the workings of her mind as she talked or listened." She had her father's gaiety and carelessness.

Olivier was a delicate fair boy, short, like his father, but very different in character. His health had been undermined by one illness after another when he was a child; and although, as a result, he was petted by his family, his physical weakness had made him a melancholy, dreamy little boy, who was afraid of death and very poorly equipped for life. He was shy, and preferred to be alone; he avoided the society of other children; he was ill at ease with them; he hated their games and quarrels; their brutality filled him with horror. He let them strike him, not from want of courage, but

from timidity, because he was afraid to defend himself, afraid of hurting them; they would have bullied the life out of him, but for the safeguard of his father's position. He was tender-hearted and morbidly sensitive; a word, a sign of sympathy, a reproach, were enough to make him burst into tears. His sister was much sturdier, and laughed at him, and called him a "little fountain."

The two children were devoted to each other; but they were too different to live together. They went their own ways and lived in their own dreams. As Antoinette grew up, she became prettier; people told her so, and she was well aware of it; it made her happy, and she wove romances about the future. Olivier, in his sickly melancholy, was always rubbed up the wrong way by contact with the outer world; and he withdrew into the circle of his own absurd little brain; and he told himself stories. He had a burning, almost feminine, longing to love and be loved; and, living alone, away from boys of his own age, he had invented two or three imaginary friends; one was called Jean, another Étienne, another François; he was always with them. He never slept well, and he was always dreaming. In the morning, when he was lifted out of bed, he would forget himself, and sit with his bare legs dangling down, or sometimes with two stockings on one leg. He would go off into a dream with his hands in the basin. He would forget himself at his desk in the middle of writing or learning a lesson; he would dream for hours on end; and then he would suddenly wake up, horrified to find that he had learned nothing. At dinner he was abashed if any one spoke to him; he would reply two minutes after he had been spoken to; he would forget what he was going to say in the middle of a sentence. He would doze off to the murmuring of his

thoughts and the familiar sensations of the monotonous provincial days that marched so slowly by; the great half-empty house, only part of which they occupied; the vast and dreadful barns and cellars; the mysterious closed rooms, the fastened shutters, the covered furniture, veiled mirrors, and the chandeliers wrapped up; the old family portraits with their haunting smiles; the Empire engravings, with their virtuous, suave heroism; *Alcibiades and Socrates in the House of the Courtezan*, *Antiochus and Stralonice*, *The Story of Epaminondas*, *Belisarius Begging*.... Outside, the sound of the smith shoeing horses in the smithy opposite, the uneven clink of the hammers on the anvil, the snorting of the broken-winded horses, the smell of the scorched hoofs, the slapping of the pats of the washerwomen kneeling by the water, the heavy thuds of the butcher's chopper next door, the clatter of a horse's hoofs on the stones of the street, the creaking of a pump, or the drawbridge over the canal, the heavy barges laden with blocks of wood, slowly passing at the end of the garden, drawn along by a rope; the little tiled courtyard, with a square patch of earth, in which two lilac-trees grew, in the middle of a clump of geraniums and petunias; the tubs of laurel and flowering pomegranate on the terrace above the canal; sometimes the noise of a fair in the square hard by, with peasants in bright blue smocks, and grunting pigs.... And on Sunday, at church, the precentor, who sang out of tune, and the old priest, who went to sleep as he was saying Mass; the family walk along the station road, where all the time he had to take off his hat politely to other wretched beings, who were under the same impression of the necessity of going for a walk all together,—until at last they reached the sunny fields, above which larks soared invisible,—or along by the still mirror of the canal, on both sides of which

were poplars rustling in line.... And then there was the great provincial Sunday dinner, when they went on and on eating and talking about food learnedly and with gusto; for everybody was a connoisseur; and, in the provinces, eating is the chief occupation, the first of all the arts. And they would talk business, and tell spicy yarns, and every now and then discuss their neighbors' illnesses, going into endless detail.... And the little boy, sitting in his corner, would make no more noise than a little mouse, pick at his food, eat hardly anything, and listen with all his ears. Nothing escaped him; and when he did not understand, his imagination supplied the deficiency. He had that singular gift, which is often to be remarked in the children of old families and an old stock, on which the imprint of the ages is too strongly marked, of divining thoughts, which have never passed through their minds before, and are hardly comprehensible to them.—Then there was the kitchen, where bloody and succulent mysteries were concocted; and the old servant who used to tell him frightful and droll stories.... At last came evening, the silent flitting of the bats, the terror of the monstrous creatures that were known to swarm in the dark depths of the old house; huge rats, enormous hairy spiders; and he would say his prayers, kneeling at the foot of his bed, and hardly know what he was saying; the little cracked bell of the convent hard by would sound the bedtime of the nuns;—and so to bed, the Island of Dreams....

The best times of the year were those that they spent in spring and autumn at their country house some miles away from the town. There he could dream at his ease; he saw nobody. Like most of the children of their class, the little Jeannins were kept apart from the common children; the

children of servants and farmers, who inspired them with fear and disgust. They inherited from their mother an aristocratic—or, rather, essentially middle-class—disdain for all who worked with their hands. Olivier would spend the day perched up in the branches of an ash reading marvelous stories; delightful folk-lore, the *Tales* of Musæus, or Madame d'Aulnoy, or the *Arabian Nights*, or stories of travel. For he had that strange longing for distant lands, "those oceanic dreams," which sometimes possess the minds of boys in the little provincial towns of France. A thicket lay between the house and himself, and he could fancy himself very far away. But he knew that he was really near home, and was quite happy; for he did not like straying too far alone; he felt lost with Nature. Round him the wind whispered through the trees. Through the leaves that hid his nest he could see the yellowing vines in the distance, and the meadows where the straked cows were at pasture, filling the silence of the sleeping country-side with their plaintive long-drawn lowing. The strident cocks crowed to each other from farm to farm. There came up the irregular beat of the flails in the barns. The fevered life of myriads of creatures swelled and flowed through the peace of inanimate Nature. Uneasily Olivier would watch the ever hurrying columns of the ants, and the bees big with their booty, buzzing like organ-pipes, and the superb and stupid wasps who know not what they want—the whole world of busy little creatures, all seemingly devoured by the desire to reach their destination.... Where is it? They do not know. No matter where! Somewhere.... Olivier was fearful amid that blind and hostile world. He would start, like a young hare, at the sound of a pine-cone falling, or the breaking of a rotten branch.... He would find his courage again when he heard the rattling of the chains of the swing at

the other end of the garden, where Antoinette would be madly swinging to and fro.

She too, would dream; but in her own fashion. She would spend the day prowling round the garden, eating, watching, laughing, picking at the grapes on the vines like a thrush, secretly plucking a peach from the trellis, climbing a plum-tree, or giving it a little surreptitious shake as she passed to bring down a rain of the golden mirabelles which melt in the mouth like scented honey. Or she would pick the flowers, although that was forbidden; quickly she would pluck a rose that she had been coveting all day, and run away with it to the arbor at the end of the garden. Then she would bury her little nose in the delicious scented flower, and kiss it, and bite it, and suck it; and then she would conceal her booty, and hide it in her bosom between her little breasts, at the wonder of whose coming she would gaze in eager fondness.... And there was an exquisite forbidden joy in taking off her shoes and stockings, and walking barefoot on the cool sand of the paths, and on the dewy turf, and on the stones, cold in the shadow, burning in the sun, and in the little stream that ran along the outskirts of the wood, and kissing with her feet, and legs, and knees, water, earth, and light. Lying in the shadow of the pines, she would hold her hands up to the sun, and watch the light play through them, and she would press her lips upon the soft satin skin of her pretty rounded arms. She would make herself crowns and necklets and gowns of ivy-leaves and oak-leaves; and she would deck them with the blue thistles, and barberry and little pine-branches, with their green fruit; and then she looked like a little savage Princess. And she would dance for her own delight round and round the fountain; and, with arms outstretched, she would turn and

turn until her head whirled, and she would slip down on the lawn and bury her face in the grass, and shout with laughter for minutes on end, unable to stop herself, without knowing why.

So the days slipped by for the two children, within hail of each other, though neither ever gave a thought to the other,—except when it would suddenly occur to Antoinette to play a prank on her brother, and throw a handful of pine-needles in his face, or shake the tree in which he was sitting, threatening to make him fall, or frighten him by springing suddenly out upon him and yelling:

"Ooh! Ooh!..."

Sometimes she would be seized by a desire to tease him. She would make him come down from his tree by pretending that her mother was calling him. Then, when he had climbed down, she would take his place and refuse to budge. Then Olivier would whine and threaten to tell. But there was no danger of Antoinette staying in the tree for long; she could not keep still for two minutes. When she had done with taunting Olivier from the top of his tree, when she had thoroughly infuriated him and brought him almost to tears, then she would slip down, fling her arms round him, shake him, and laugh, and call him a "little muff," and roll him on the ground, and rub his face with handfuls of grass. He would try to struggle; but he was not strong enough. Then he would lie still, flat on his black, like a cockchafer, with his thin arms pinned to the ground by Antoinette's strong little hands; and he would look piteous and resigned. Antoinette could not resist that; she would look at her vanquished prisoner, and burst out laughing and kiss him suddenly, and

let him go—not without the parting attention of a little gag of fresh grass in his mouth; and that he detested most of all, because it made him sick. And he would spit and wipe his mouth, and storm at her, while she ran away as hard as she could, pealing with laughter. She was always laughing. Even when she was asleep she laughed. Olivier, lying awake in the next room, would suddenly start up in the middle of the stories he was telling himself, at the sound of the wild laughter and the muttered words which she would speak in the silence of the night. Outside, the trees would creak with the wind, an owl would hoot, in the distant villages and the farms in the heart of the woods dogs would bark. In the dim phosphorescence of the night Olivier would see the dark, heavy branches of the pines moving like ghosts outside his window; and Antoinette's laughter would comfort him.

The two children were very religious, especially Olivier. Their father used to scandalize them with his anti-clerical professions of faith, but he did not interfere with them; and, at heart, like so many men of his class who are unbelievers, he was not sorry that his family should believe for him; for it is always good to have allies in the opposing camp, and one is never sure which way Fortune will turn. He was a Deist, and he reserved the right to summon a priest when the time came, as his father had done; even if it did no good, it could do no harm; one insures against fire, even if one has no reason to believe that the house will be burned down.

Olivier was morbidly inclined towards mysticism. There were times when he doubted whether he existed. He was

credulous and soft-hearted, and needed a prop; he took a sorrowful delight in confession, in the comfort of confiding in the invisible Friend, whose arms are always open to you, to whom you can tell everything, who understands and forgives everything; he tasted the sweetness of the waters of humility and love, from which the soul issues pure, cleansed, and comforted. It was so natural to him to believe, that he could not understand how any one could doubt; he thought people did so from wickedness, and that God would punish them. He used to pray secretly that his father might find grace; and he was delighted when, one day, as they went into a little country church, he saw his father mechanically make the sign of the cross. The stories of the Gospel were mixed up in his mind with the marvelous tales of Rübezahl, and Gracieuse and Percinet, and the Caliph Haroun-al-Raschid. When he was a little boy he no more doubted the truth of the one than the other. And just as he was not sure that he did not know Shacabae of the cleft lips, and the loquacious barber, and the little hunchback of Casgar, just as when he was out walking he used to look about for the black woodpecker which bears in its beak the magic root of the treasure-seeker, so Canaan and the Promised Land became in his childish imagination certain regions in Burgundy or Berrichon. A round hill in the country, with a little tree, like a shabby old feather, at the summit, seemed to him to be like the mountain where Abraham had built his pyre. A large dead bush by the edge of a field was the Burning Bush, which the ages had put out. Even when he was older, and his critical faculty had been awakened, he loved to feed on the popular legends which enshrined his faith; and they gave him so much pleasure, though he no longer accepted them implicitly, that he would amuse himself by pretending to do so. So for a long

time on Easter Saturday he would look out for the return of the Easter bells, which went away to Rome on the Thursday before, and would come floating through the air with little streamers. He did finally admit that it was not true; but he did not give up looking skywards when he heard them ringing; and once—though he knew perfectly well that it could not be—he fancied he saw one of them disappearing over the house with blue ribbons.

It was vitally necessary for him to steep himself in the world of legend and faith. He avoided life. He avoided himself. Thin, pale, puny, he suffered from being so, and could not bear its being talked about. He was naturally pessimistic, no doubt inheriting it from his mother, and his pessimism was fed by his morbidity. He did not know it; thought everybody must be like himself; and the queer little boy of ten, instead of romping in the gardens during his play-time, used to shut himself up in his room, and, carefully picking his words, wrote his will.

He used to write a great deal. Every evening he used laboriously and secretly to write his diary—he did not know why, for he had nothing to say, and he said nothing worth saying. Writing was an inherited mania with him, the age-old itch of the French provincial—the old indestructible stock—who every day, until the day of his death, with an idiotic patience which is almost heroic, writes down in detail what he has seen, said, done, heard, eaten, and drunk. For his own pleasure, entirely. It is not for other eyes. No one will ever read it; he knows that; he never reads it again himself.

Music, like religion, was for Olivier a shelter from the too vivid light of day. Both brother and sister were born musicians,—especially Olivier, who had inherited the gift from his mother. Their taste, as it needed to be, was excellent. There was no one capable of forming it in the province, where no music was ever heard but that of the local band, which played nothing but marches, or—on its good days—selections from Adolphe Adam, and the church organist who played romanzas, and the exercises of the young ladies of the town who strummed a few valses and polkas, the overture to the *Caliph of Bagdad*, *la Chasse du Jeune Henri*, and two or three sonatas of Mozart, always the same, and always with the same mistakes, on instruments that were sadly out of tune. These things were invariably included in the evening's program at parties. After dinner, those who had talent were asked to display it; at first they would blush and refuse, but then they would yield to the entreaties of the assembled company; and they would play their stock pieces without their music. Every one would then admire the artist's memory and her beautiful touch.

The ceremony was repeated at almost every party, and the thought of it would altogether spoil the children's dinner. When they had to play the *Voyage en Chine* of Bazin, or their pieces of Weber as a duet, they gave each other confidence, and were not very much afraid. But it was torture to them to have to play alone. Antoinette, as usual, was the braver of the two. Although it bored her dreadfully,—as she knew that there was no way out of it, she would go through with it, sit at the piano with a determined air, and gallop through her *rondo* at breakneck speed, stumbling over certain passages,

make a hash of others, break off, turn her head, and say, with a smile:

"Oh! I can't remember...."

Then she would start off again a few bars farther on, and go on to the end. And she would make no attempt to conceal her pleasure at having finished; and when she returned to her chair, amid the general chorus of praise, she would laugh and say:

"I made such a lot of mistakes."

But Olivier was not so easy to handle. He could not bear making a show of himself in public, and being "the observed of all observers." It was bad enough for him to have to speak in company. But to have to play, especially for people who did not like music—(that was obvious to him)—for people whom music actually bored, people who only asked him to play as a matter of habit, seemed to him to be neither more nor less than tyranny, and he tried vainly to revolt against it. He would refuse obstinately. Sometimes he would escape and go and hide in a dark room, in a passage, or even in the barn, in spite of his horror of spiders. His refusal would make the guests only insist the more, and they would quiz him; and his parents would sternly order him to play, and even slap him when he was too impudently rebellious. And in the end he always had to play,—of course unwillingly and sulkily. And then he would suffer agonies all night because he had played so badly, partly from vanity, and partly from his very genuine love for music.

The taste of the little town had not always been so banal. There had been a time when there were quite good chamber

concerts at several houses. Madame Jeannin used often to speak of her grandfather, who adored the violoncello, and used to sing airs of Gluck, and Dalayrae, and Berton. There was a large volume of them in the house, and a pile of Italian songs. For the old gentleman was like M. Andrieux, of whom Berlioz said; "He *loved* Gluck." And he added bitterly; "He also *loved* Piccinni."—Perhaps of the two he preferred Piccinni. At all events, the Italian songs were in a large majority in her grandfather's collection. They had been Olivier's first musical nourishment. Not a very substantial diet, rather like those sweetmeats with which provincial children are stuffed; they corrupt the palate, destroy the tissues of the stomach, and there is always a danger of their killing the appetite for more solid nutriment. But Olivier could not be accused of greediness. He was never offered any more solid food. Having no bread, he was forced to eat cake. And so, by force of circumstance, it came about that Cimarosa, Paesiello, and Rossini fed the mystic, melancholy little boy, who was more than a little intoxicated by his draughts of the *Asti spumante* poured out for him, instead of milk, by these bacchanalian Satyrs, and the two lively, ingenuously, lasciviously smiling Bacchante of Naples and Catania—Pergolesi and Bellini.

He played a great deal to himself, for his own pleasure. He was saturated with music. He did not try to understand what he was playing, but gave himself up to it. Nobody ever thought of teaching him harmony, and it never occurred to him to learn it. Science and the scientific mind were foreign to the nature of his family, especially on his mother's side. All the lawyers, wits, and humanists of the De Villiers were baffled by any sort of problem. It was told of a member of

the family—a distant cousin—as a remarkable thing that he had found a post in the *Bureau des Longitudes*. And it was further told how he had gone mad. The old provincial middle-classes, robust and positive in temper, but dull and sleepy as a result of their gigantic meals and the monotony of their lives, are very proud of their common sense; they have so much faith in it that they boast that there is no difficulty which cannot be resolved by it; and they are never very far from considering men of science as artists of a sort, more useful than the others, but less exalted, because at least artists serve no useful purpose, and there is a sort of distinction about their lounging existence.—(Besides, every business man flatters himself that he might have been an artist if he had cared about it.)—While scientists are not far from being manual laborers,—(which is degrading),—just master-workmen with more education, though they are a little cracked; they are mighty fine on paper; but outside their arithmetic factories they're nobody. They would not be much use without the guidance of common-sense people who have some experience of life and business.

Unfortunately, it is not proven that their experience of life and business goes so far as these people like to think, it is only a routine, ringing the changes on a few easy cases. If any unforeseen position arises, in which they have to decide quickly and vigorously, they are always disgruntled.

Antoine Jeannin was that sort of man. Everything was so nicely adjusted, and his business jogged along so comfortably in its place in the life of the province, that he had never encountered any serious difficulty. He had succeeded to his father's position without having any special aptitude for the business; and, as everything had gone well,

he attributed it to his own brilliant talents. He loved to say that it was enough to be honest, methodical, and to have common sense; and he intended handing down his business to his son, without any more regard for the boy's tastes than his father had had for his own. He did not do anything to prepare him for it. He let his children grow up as they liked, so long as they were good, and, above all, happy; for he adored them. And so the two children were as little prepared for the struggle of life as possible; they were like hothouse flowers. But, surely, they would always live like that? In the soft provincial atmosphere, in the bosom of their wealthy, influential family, with a kindly, gay, jovial father, surrounded by friends, one of the leading men of the district, life was so easy, so bright and smiling.

Antoinette was sixteen. Olivier was about to be confirmed. His mind was filled with all kinds of mystic dreams. In her heart Antoinette heard the sweet song of new-born hope soaring, like the lark in April, in the springtime of her life. It was a joy to her to feel the flowering of her body and soul, to know that she was pretty, and to be told so. Her father's immoderate praises were enough to turn her head.

He was in ecstasies over her; he delighted in her little coquetries, to see her eying herself in her mirror, to watch her little innocent tricks. He would take her on his knees, and tease her about her childish love-affairs, and the conquests she had made, and the suitors that he pretended had come to him a-wooing; he would tell her their names; respectable citizens, each more old and ugly than the last. And she would

cry out in horror, and break into rippling laughter, and put her arms about her father's neck, and press her cheek close to his. And he would ask which was the happy man of her choice; was it the District Attorney, who, the Jeannins' old maid used to say, was as ugly as the seven deadly sins? Or was it the fat notary? And she would slap him playfully to make him cease, or hold her hand over his mouth. He would kiss her little hands, and jump her up and down on his knees, and sing the old song

"What would you, pretty maid?
An ugly husband, eh?"

And she would giggle and tie his whiskers under his chin, and reply with the refrain:

"A handsome husband I,
No ugly man, madame."

She would declare her intention of choosing for herself. She knew that she was, or would be, very rich,—(her father used to tell her so at every turn)—she was a "fine catch." The sons of the distinguished families of the country were already courting her, setting a wide white net of flattery and cunning snares to catch the little silver fish. But it looked as though the fish would elude them all; for Antoinette saw all their tricks, and laughed at them; she was quite ready to be caught, but not against her will. She had already made up her mind to marry.

The noble family of the district—(there is generally one noble family to every district, claiming descent from the ancient lords of the province, though generally its origin goes no farther back than some purchaser of the national estates, some commissary of the eighteenth century, or some Napoleonic army-contractor)—the Bonnivets, who lived some few miles away from the town, in a castle with tall towers with gleaming slates, surrounded by vast woods, in which were innumerable fish-ponds, themselves proposed for the hand of Mademoiselle Jeannin. Young Bonnivet was very assiduous in his courtship of Antoinette. He was a handsome boy, rather stout and heavy for his age, who did nothing but hunt and eat, and drink and sleep; he could ride, dance, had charming manners, and was not more stupid than other young men. He would ride into the town, or drive in his buggy and call on the banker, on some business pretext; and sometimes he would bring some game or a bouquet of flowers for the ladies. He would seize the opportunity to pay court to Antoinette. They would walk in the garden together. He would pay her lumbering compliments, and pull his mustache, and make jokes, and make his spurs clatter on the tiles of the terrace. Antoinette thought him charming. Her pride and her affections were both tickled. She would swim in those first sweet hours of young love. Olivier detested the young squire, because he was strong, heavy, brutal, had a loud laugh, and hands that gripped like a vise, and a disdainful trick of always calling him; “Boy ...” and pinching his cheeks. He detested him above all,—without knowing it,—because he dared to love his sister;... his sister, his very own, his, and she could not belong to any one else!...

Disaster came. Sooner or later there must come a crisis in the lives of the old middle-class families which for centuries have vegetated in the same little corner of the earth, and have sucked it dry. They sleep in peace, and think themselves as eternal as the earth that bears them. But the soil beneath them is dry and dead, their roots are sapped; just the blow of an ax, and down they come. Then they talk of accidents and unforeseen misfortunes. There would have been no accident if there had been more strength in the tree; or, at least, would have been no more than a sudden storm, wrenching away a few branches, but never shaking the tree.

Antoine Jeannin was weak, trustful, and a little vain. He loved to throw dust in people's eyes, and easily confounded "seeming" and "being." He spent recklessly, though his extravagance, moderated by fits of remorse as the result of the age-old habit of economy—(he would fling away pounds, and haggle over a farthing)—never seriously impaired his capital. He was not very cautious in business either. He never refused to lend money to his friends; and it was not difficult to be a friend of his. He did not always trouble to ask for a receipt; he kept a rough account of what was owing to him, and never asked for payment before it was offered him. He believed in the good faith of other men, and supposed that they would believe in his own. He was much more timid than his jocular, easy-going manners led people to suppose. He would never have dared to refuse certain importunate borrowers, or to let his doubts of their solvency appear. That arose from a mixture of kindness and pusillanimity. He did not wish to offend anybody, and he was afraid of being insulted. So he was always giving way. And, by way of carrying it off, he would lend with alacrity, as though his

debtors were doing him a service by borrowing his money. And he was not far from believing it; his vanity and optimism had no difficulty in persuading him that every business he touched was good business.

Such ways of dealing were not calculated to alienate the sympathies of his debtors; he was adored by the peasants, who knew that they could always count on his good nature, and never hesitated to resort to him. But the gratitude of men—even of honest men—is a fruit that must be gathered in good season. If it is left too long upon the tree, it quickly rots. After a few months M. Jeannin's debtors would begin to think that his assistance was their right; and they were even inclined to think that, as M. Jeannin had been so glad to help them, it must have been to his interest to do so. The best of them considered themselves discharged—if not of the debt, at least of the obligation of gratitude—by the present of a hare they had killed, or a basket of eggs from their fowlyard, which they would come and offer to the banker on the day of the great fair of the year.

As hitherto only small sums had been lent, and M. Jeannin had only had to do with fairly honest people, there were no very awkward consequences; the loss of money—of which the banker never breathed a word to a soul—was very small. But it was a very different matter when M. Jeannin knocked up against a certain company promoter who was launching a great industrial concern, and had got wind of the banker's easy-going ways and financial resources. This gentleman, who wore the ribbon of the Legion of Honor, and pretended to be intimate with two or three Ministers, an Archbishop, an assortment of senators, and various celebrities of the literary and financial world, and to be in

touch with an omnipotent newspaper, had a very imposing manner, and most adroitly assumed the authoritative and familiar tone most calculated to impress his man. By way of introduction and recommendation, with a clumsiness which would have aroused the suspicions of a quicker man than M. Jeannin, he produced certain ordinary complimentary letters which he had received from the illustrious persons of his acquaintance, asking him to dinner, or thanking him for some invitation they had received; for it is well known that the French are never niggardly with such epistolary small change, nor particularly chary of shaking hands with, and accepting invitations from, an individual whom they have only known for an hour—provided only that he amuses them and does not ask them for money; and even as regards that, there are many who would not refuse to lend their new friend money so long as others did the same. And it would be a poor lookout for a clever man bent on relieving his neighbor of his superfluous money if he could not find a sheep who could be induced to jump the fence so that all the rest would follow.—If other sheep had not taken the fence before him, M. Jeannin would have been the first. He was of the woolly tribe which is made to be fleeced. He was seduced by his visitor's exalted connections, his fluency and his trick of flattery, and also by the first fine results of his advice. He only risked a little at first, and won; then he risked much; finally he risked all; not only his own money, but that of his clients as well. He did not tell them about it; he was sure he would win; he wanted to overwhelm them with the great thing he had done for them.

The venture collapsed. He heard of it indirectly through one of his Parisian correspondents who happened to mention

the new crash, without ever dreaming that Jeannin was one of the victims; for the banker had not said a word to anybody; with incredible irresponsibility, he had not taken the trouble—even avoided—asking the advice of men who were in a position to give him information; he had done the whole thing secretly, in the infatuated belief in his infallible common sense, and he had been satisfied with the vaguest knowledge of what he was doing. There are such moments of aberration in life; moments, it would seem, when a man is marked out for ruin, when he is fearful lest any one should come to his aid, when he avoids all advice that might save him, hides away, and rushes headlong, madly, shaking himself free for the fatal plunge.

M. Jeannin rushed to the station, utterly sick at heart, and took train for Paris. He went to look for his man. He flattered himself with the hope that the news might be false, or, at least, exaggerated. Naturally he did not find the fellow, and received further news of the collapse, which was as complete as possible. He returned distracted, and said nothing. No one had any idea of it yet. He tried to gain a few weeks, a few days. In his incurable optimism, he tried hard to believe that he would find a way to make good, if not his own losses, at least those of his clients. He tried various expedients, with a clumsy haste which would have removed any chance of succeeding that he might have had. He tried to borrow, but was everywhere refused. In his despair, he staked the little he had left on wildly speculative ventures, and lost it all. From that moment there was a complete change in his character. He relapsed into an alarming state of terror; still he said nothing; but he was bitter, violent, harsh, horribly sad. But still, when he was with strangers, he affected his old gaiety;

but no one could fail to see the change in him; it was attributed to his health. With his family he was less guarded; and they saw at once that he was concealing some serious trouble. They hardly knew him. Sometimes he would burst into a room and ransack a desk, flinging all the papers higgledy-piggledy on to the floor, and flying into a frenzy because he could not find what he was looking for, or because some one offered to help him. Then he would stand stock still in the middle of it all, and when they asked him what he was looking for, he did not know himself. He seemed to have lost all interest in his family; or he would kiss them with tears in his eyes. He could not sleep. He could not eat.

Madame Jeannin saw that they were on the eve of a catastrophe; but she had never taken any part in her husband's affairs, and did not understand them. She questioned him; he repulsed her brutally; and, hurt in her pride, she did not persist. But she trembled, without knowing why.

The children could have no suspicion of the impending disaster. Antoinette, no doubt, was too intelligent not, like her mother, to have a presentiment of some misfortune; but she was absorbed in the delight of her budding love; she refused to think of unpleasant things; she persuaded herself that the clouds would pass—or that it would be time enough to see them when it was impossible to disregard them.

Of the three, the boy Olivier was perhaps the nearest to understanding what was going on in his unhappy father's soul. He felt that his father was suffering, and he suffered with him in secret. But he dared not say anything; naturally

he could do nothing, and he was helpless. And then he, too, thrust back the thought of sad things, the nature of which he could not grasp; like his mother and sister, he was superstitiously inclined to believe that perhaps misfortune, the approach of which he did not wish to see, would not come. Those poor wretches who feel the imminence of danger do readily play the ostrich; they hide their heads behind a stone, and pretend that Misfortune will not see them.

Disturbing rumors began to fly. It was said that the bank's credit was impaired. In vain did the banker assure his clients that it was perfectly all right, on one pretext or another the more suspicious of them demanded their money. M. Jeannin felt that he was lost; he defended himself desperately, assuming a tone of indignation, and complaining loftily and bitterly of their suspicions of himself; he even went so far as to be violent and angry with some of his old clients, but that only let him down finally. Demands for payment came in a rush. On his beam-ends, at bay, he completely lost his head. He went away for a few days to gamble with his last few banknotes at a neighboring watering-place, was cleaned out in a quarter of an hour, and returned home. His sudden departure set the little town by the ears, and it was said that he had cleared out; and Madame Jeannin had had great difficulty in coping with the wild, anxious inquiries of the people; she begged them to be patient, and swore that her husband would return. They did not believe her, although they would have been only too glad

to do so. And so, when it was known that he had returned, there was a general sigh of relief; there were many who almost believed that their fears had been baseless, and that the Jeannins were much too shrewd not to get out of a hole by admitting that they had fallen into it. The banker's attitude confirmed that impression. Now that he no longer had any doubt as to what he must do, he seemed to be weary, but quite calm. He chatted quietly to a few friends whom he met in the station road on his way home, talking about the drought and the country not having had any water for weeks, and the superb condition of the vines, and the fall of the Ministry, announced in the evening papers.

When he reached home he pretended not to notice his wife's excitement, who had run to meet him when she heard him come in, and told him volubly and confusedly what had happened during his absence. She scanned his features to try and see whether he had succeeded in averting the unknown danger; but, from pride, she did not ask him anything; she was waiting for him to speak first. But he did not say a word about the thing that was tormenting them both. He silently disregarded her desire to confide in him, and to get him to confide in her. He spoke of the heat, and of how tired he was, and complained of a racking headache; and they sat down to dinner as usual.

He talked little, and was dull, lost in thought, and his brows were knit; he drummed with his fingers on the table; he forced himself to eat, knowing that they were watching him, and looked with vague, unseeing eyes at his children, who were intimidated by the silence, and at his wife, who sat stiffly nursing her injured vanity, and, without looking at him, marking his every movement. Towards the end of

dinner he seemed to wake up; he tried to talk to Antoinette and Olivier, and asked them what they had been doing during his absence; but he did not listen to their replies, and heard only the sound of their voices; and although he was staring at them, his gaze was elsewhere. Olivier felt it; he stopped in the middle of his prattle, and had no desire to go on. But, after a moment's embarrassment, Antoinette recovered her gaiety; she chattered merrily, like a magpie, laid her head on her father's shoulder, or tugged his sleeve to make him listen to what she was saying. M. Jeannin said nothing; his eyes wandered from Antoinette to Olivier, and the crease in his forehead grew deeper and deeper. In the middle of one of his daughter's stories he could bear it no longer, and got up and went and looked out of the window to conceal his emotion. The children folded their napkins, and got up too. Madame Jeannin told them to go and play in the garden; in a moment or two they could be heard chasing each other down the paths and screaming. Madame Jeannin looked at her husband, whose back was turned towards her, and she walked round the table as though to arrange something. Suddenly she went up to him, and, in a voice hushed by her fear of being overheard by the servants and by the agony that was in her, she said:

"Tell me, Antoine, what is the matter? There is something the matter.... You are hiding something.... Has something dreadful happened? Are you ill?"

But once more M. Jeannin put her off, and shrugged his shoulders, and said harshly:

"No! No, I tell you! Let me be!"

She was angry, and went away; in her fury, she declared that, no matter what happened to her husband, she would not bother about it any more.

M. Jeannin went down into the garden. Antoinette was still larking about, and tugging at her brother to make him run. But the boy declared suddenly that he was not going to play any more; and he leaned against the wall of the terrace a few yards away from his father. Antoinette tried to go on teasing him; but he drove her away and sulked; then she called him names; and when she found she could get no more fun out of him, she went in and began to play the piano.

M. Jeannin and Olivier were left alone.

"What's the matter with you, boy? Why won't you play?" asked the father gently.

"I'm tired, father."

"Well, let us sit here on this seat for a little."

They sat down. It was a lovely September night. A dark, clear sky. The sweet scent of the petunias was mingled with the stale and rather unwholesome smell of the canal sleeping darkly below the terrace wall. Great moths, pale and sphinx-like, fluttered about the flowers, with a little whirring sound. The even voices of the neighbors sitting at their doors on the other side of the canal rang through the silent air. In the house Antoinette was playing a florid Italian cavatina. M. Jeannin held Olivier's hand in his. He was smoking. Through the darkness behind which his father's face was slowly disappearing the boy could see the red glow of the pipe, which gleamed, died away, gleamed again, and finally went out. Neither spoke. Then Olivier asked the names of the

stars. M. Jeannin, like almost all men of his class, knew nothing of the things of Nature, and could not tell him the names of any save the great constellations, which are known to every one; but he pretended that the boy was asking their names, and told him. Olivier made no objection; it always pleased him to hear their beautiful mysterious names, and to repeat them in a whisper. Besides, he was not so much wanting to know their names as instinctively to come closer to his father. They said nothing more. Olivier looked at the stars, with his head thrown back and his mouth open; he was lost in drowsy thoughts; he could feel through all his veins the warmth of his father's hand. Suddenly the hand began to tremble. That seemed funny to Olivier, and he laughed and said sleepily:

"Oh, how your hand is trembling, father!"

M. Jeannin removed his hand.

After a moment Olivier, still busy with his own thoughts, said:

"Are you tired, too, father?"

"Yes, my boy."

The boy replied affectionately:

"You must not tire yourself out so much, father."

M. Jeannin drew Olivier towards him, and held him to his breast and murmured:

"My poor boy!..."

But already Olivier's thoughts had flown off on another tack. The church clock chimed eight o'clock. He broke away,

and said:

"I'm going to read."

On Thursdays he was allowed to read for an hour after dinner, until bedtime; it was his greatest joy; and nothing in the world could induce him to sacrifice a minute of it.

M. Jeannin let him go. He walked up and down the terrace for a little in the dark. Then he, too, went in.

In the room his wife and the two children were sitting round the lamp. Antoinette was sewing a ribbon on to a blouse, talking and humming the while, to Olivier's obvious discomfort, for he was stopping his ears with his fists so as not to hear, while he pored over his book with knitted brows, and his elbows on the table. Madame Jeannin was mending stockings and talking to the old nurse, who was standing by her side and giving an account of her day's expenditure, and seizing the opportunity for a little gossip; she always had some amusing tale to tell in her extraordinary lingo, which used to make them roar with laughter, while Antoinette would try to imitate her. M. Jeannin watched them silently. No one noticed him. He wavered for a moment, sat down, took up a book, opened it at random, shut it again, got up; he could not sit still. He lit a candle and said good-night. He went up to the children and kissed them fondly; they returned his kiss absently without looking up at him,—Antoinette being absorbed in her work, and Olivier in his book. Olivier did not even take his hands from his ears, and grunted "Good-night," and went on reading;—(when he was reading even if one of his family had fallen into the fire, he would not have looked up).—M. Jeannin left the room. He lingered in the next room, for a moment. His wife came out soon, the

old nurse having gone to arrange the linen-cupboard. She pretended not to see him. He hesitated, then came up to her, and said:

"I beg your pardon. I was rather rude just now."

She longed to say to him:

"My dear, my dear, that is nothing; but, tell me, what is the matter with you? Tell me, what is hurting you so?"

But she jumped at the opportunity of taking her revenge, and said:

"Let me be! You have been behaving odiously. You treat me worse than you would a servant."

And she went on in that strain, setting forth all her grievances volubly, shrilly, rancorously.

He raised his hands wearily, smiled bitterly, and left her.

No one heard the report of the revolver. Only, next day, when it was known what had happened, a few of the neighbors remembered that, in the middle of the night, when the streets were quiet, they had noticed a sharp noise like the cracking of a whip. They did not pay any attention to it. The silence of the night fell once more upon the town, wrapping both living and dead about with its mystery.

Madame Jeannin was asleep, but woke up an hour or two later. Not seeing her husband by her side she got up and went anxiously through all the rooms, and downstairs to the

offices of the bank, which were in an annex of the house; and there, sitting in his chair in his office, she found M. Jeannin huddled forward on his desk in a pool of blood, which was still dripping down on to the floor. She gave a scream, dropped her candle, and fainted. She was heard in the house. The servants came running, picked her up, took care of her, and laid the body of M. Jeannin on a bed. The door of the children's room was locked. Antoinette was sleeping happily. Olivier heard the sound of voices and footsteps; he wanted to go and see what it was all about; but he was afraid of waking his sister, and presently he went to sleep again.

Next morning the news was all over the town before they knew anything. Their old nurse came sobbing and told them. Their mother was incapable of thinking of anything; her condition was critical. The two children were left alone in the presence of death. At first they were more fearful than sorrowful. And they were not allowed to weep in peace. The cruel legal formalities were begun the first thing in the morning. Antoinette hid away in her room, and with all the force of her youthful egoism clung to the only idea which could help her to thrust back the horror of the overwhelming reality; the thought of her lover; all day long she waited for him to come. Never had he been more ardent than the last time she had seen him, and she had no doubt that, as soon as he heard of the catastrophe, he would hasten to share her grief.—But nobody came, or wrote, or gave one sign of sympathy. As soon as the news of the suicide was out, people who had intrusted their money to the banker rushed to the Jeannins' house, forced their way in, and, with merciless cruelty, stormed and screamed at the widow and the two children.

In a few days they were faced with their utter ruin; the loss of a dear one, the loss of their fortune, their position, their public esteem, and the desertion of their friends. A total wreck. Nothing was left to provide for them. They had all three an uncompromising feeling for moral purity, which made their suffering all the greater from the dishonor of which they were innocent. Of the three Antoinette was the most distraught by their sorrow, because she had never really known suffering. Madame Jeannin and Olivier, though they were racked by it, were more inured to it. Instinctively pessimistic, they were overwhelmed but not surprised. The idea of death had always been a refuge to them, as it was now, more than ever; they longed for death. It is pitiful to be so resigned, but not so terrible as the revolt of a young creature, confident and happy, loving every moment of her life, who suddenly finds herself face to face with such unfathomable, irremediable sorrow, and death which is horrible to her....

Antoinette discovered the ugliness of the world in a flash. Her eyes were opened; she saw life and human beings as they are; she judged her father, her mother, and her brother. While Olivier and Madame Jeannin wept together, in her grief she drew into herself. Desperately she pondered the past, the present, and the future; and she saw that there was nothing left for her, no hope, nothing to support her; she could count on no one.

The funeral took place, grimly, shamefully. The Church refused to receive the body of the suicide. The widow and orphans were deserted by the cowardice of their former friends. One or two of them came for a moment; and their embarrassment was even harder to bear than the absence of

the rest. They seemed to make a favor of it, and their silence was big with reproach and pitying contempt. It was even worse with their relations; not only did they receive no single word of sympathy, but they were visited with bitter reproaches. The banker's suicide, far from removing ill-feeling, seemed to be hardly less criminal than his failure. Respectable people cannot forgive those who kill themselves. It seems to them monstrous that a man should prefer death to life with dishonor; and they would fain call down all the rigor of the law on him who seems to say:

"There is no misery so great as that of living with you."

The greatest cowards are not the least ready to accuse him of cowardice. And when, in addition, the suicide, by ending his life, touches their interests and their revenge, they lose all control.—Not for one moment did they think of all that the wretched Jeannin must have suffered to come to it. They would have had him suffer a thousand times more. And as he had escaped them, they transferred their fury to his family. They did not admit it to themselves; for they knew they were unjust. But they did it all the same, for they needed a victim.

Madame Jeannin, who seemed to be able to do nothing but weep and moan, recovered her energy when her husband was attacked. She discovered then how much she had loved him; and she and her two children, who had no idea what would become of them in the future, all agreed to renounce their claim to her dowry, and to their own personal estate, in order, as far as possible, to meet M. Jeannin's debts. And, since it had become impossible for them to stay in the little town, they decided to go to Paris.

Their departure was something in the nature of a flight.

On the evening of the day before,—(a melancholy evening towards the end of September; the fields were disappearing behind the white veil of mist, out of which, as they walked along the road, on either side the fantastic shapes of the dripping, shivering bushes started forth, looking like the plants in an aquarium),—they went together to say farewell to the grave where he lay. They all three knelt on the narrow curbstone which surrounded the freshly turned patch of earth. They wept in silence; Olivier sobbed. Madame Jeannin mopped her eyes mournfully. She augmented her grief and tortured herself by saying to herself over and over again the words she had spoken to her husband the last time she had seen him alive. Olivier thought of that last conversation on the seat on the terrace. Antoinette wondered dreamily what would become of them. None of them ever dreamed of reproaching the wretched man who had dragged them down in his own ruin. But Antoinette thought:

“Ah! dear father, how we shall suffer!”

The mist grew more dense, the cold damp pierced through to their bones. But Madame Jeannin could not bring herself to go. Antoinette saw that Olivier was shivering and she said to her mother:

“I am cold.”

They got up. Just as they were going. Madame Jeannin turned once more towards the grave, gazed at it for the last time, and said:

“My dear, my dear!”

They left the cemetery as night was falling. Antoinette held Olivier’s icy hand in hers.

They went back to the old house. It was their last night under the roof-tree where they had always slept, where their lives and the lives of their parents had been lived—the walls, the hearth, the little patch of earth were so indissolubly linked with the family’s joys and sorrows, as almost themselves to be part of the family, part of their life, which they could only leave to die.

Their boxes were packed. They were to take the first train next day before the shops were opened; they wanted to escape their neighbors’ curiosity and malicious remarks.—They longed to cling to each other and stay together; but they went instinctively to their rooms and stayed there; there they remained standing, never moving, not even taking off their hats and cloaks, touching the walls, the furniture, all the things they were going to leave, pressing their faces against the window-panes, trying to take away with them in memory the contact of the things they loved. At last they made an effort to shake free from the absorption of their sorrowful thoughts and met in Madame Jeannin’s room,—the family room, with a great recess at the back, where, in old days, they always used to foregather in the evening, after dinner, when there were no visitors. In old days!... How far off they seemed now!—They sat silently round the meager fire; then they all knelt by the bed and said their prayers; and they went to bed very early, for they had to be up before dawn. But it was long before they slept.

About four o'clock in the morning Madame Jeannin, who had looked at her watch every hour or so to see whether it was not time to get ready, lit her candle and got up. Antoinette, who had hardly slept at all, heard her and got up too. Olivier was fast asleep. Madame Jeannin gazed at him tenderly and could not bring herself to wake him. She stole away on tiptoe and said to Antoinette:

"Don't make any noise; let the poor boy enjoy his last moments here!"

The two women dressed and finished their packing. About the house hovered the profound silence of the cold night, such a night as makes all living things, men and beasts, cower away for warmth into the depths of sleep. Antoinette's teeth were chattering; she was frozen body and soul.

The front door creaked upon the frozen air. The old nurse, who had the key of the house, came for the last time to serve her employers. She was short and fat, short-winded, and slow-moving from her portliness, but she was remarkably active for her age; she appeared with her jolly face muffled up, and her nose was red, and her eyes were wet with tears. She was heart-broken when she saw that Madame Jeannin had got up without waiting for her, and had herself lit the kitchen fire.—Olivier woke up as she came in. His first impulse was to close his eyes, turn over, and go to sleep again. Antoinette came and laid her hand gently on her brother's shoulder, and she said in a low voice:

"Olivier, dear, it is time to get up."

He sighed, opened his eyes, saw his sister's face leaning over him; she smiled sadly and caressed his face with her hand. She said:

"Come!"

He got up.

They crept out of the house, noiselessly, like thieves. They all had parcels in their hands. The old nurse went in front of them trundling their boxes in a wheelbarrow. They left behind almost all their possessions, and took away, so to speak, only what they had on their backs and a change of clothes. A few things for remembrance were to be sent after them by goods-train; a few books, portraits, the old grandfather's clock, whose tick-tock seemed to them to be the beating of their hearts.—The air was keen. No one was stirring in the town; the shutters were closed and the streets empty. They said nothing; only the old servant spoke. Madame Jeannin was striving to fix in her memory all the images which told her of all her past life.

At the station, out of vanity, Madame Jeannin took second-class tickets, although she had vowed to travel third; but she had not the courage to face the humiliation in the presence of the railway clerks who knew her. She hurried into an empty compartment with her two children and shut the door. Hiding behind the curtains they trembled lest they should see any one they knew. But no one appeared; the town was hardly awake by the time they left; the train was empty; there were only a few peasants traveling by it, and some oxen, who hung their heads out of their trucks and bellowed mournfully. After a long wait the engine gave a slow whistle, and the train moved on through the mist. The

fugitives drew the curtains and pressed their faces against the windows to take a last long look at the little town, with its Gothic tower just appearing through the mist, and the hill covered with stubby fields, and the meadows white and steaming with the frost; already it was a distant dream-landscape, fading out of existence. And when the train turned a bend and passed into a cutting, and they could no longer see it, and were sure there was no one to see them, they gave way to their emotion. With her handkerchief pressed to her lips Madame Jeannin sobbed. Olivier flung himself into her arms and with his head on her knees he covered her hands with tears and kisses. Antoinette sat at the other end of the compartment and looked out of the window and wept in silence. They did not all weep for the same reason. Madame Jeannin and Olivier were thinking only of what they had left behind them. Antoinette was thinking rather of what they were going to meet; she was angry with herself; she, too, would gladly have been absorbed in her memories....—She was right to think of the future; she had a truer vision of the world than her mother and brother. They were weaving dreams about Paris. Antoinette herself had little notion of what awaited them there. They had never been there. Madame Jeannin imagined that, though their position would be sad enough, there would be no reason for anxiety. She had a sister in Paris, the wife of a wealthy magistrate; and she counted on her assistance. She was convinced also that with the education her children had received and their natural gifts, which, like all mothers, she overestimated, they would have no difficulty in earning an honest living.

Their first impressions were gloomy enough. As they left the station they were bewildered by the jostling crowd of people in the luggage-room and the confused uproar of the carriages outside. It was raining. They could not find a cab, and had to walk a long way with their arms aching with their heavy parcels, so that they had to stop every now and then in the middle of the street at the risk of being run over or splashed by the carriages. They could not make a single driver pay any attention to them. At last they managed to stop a man who was driving an old and disgustingly dirty barouche. As they were handing in the parcels they let a bundle of rugs fall into the mud. The porter who carried the trunk and the cabman traded on their ignorance, and made them pay double. Madame Jeannin gave the address of one of those second-rate expensive hotels patronized by provincials who go on going to them, in spite of their discomfort, because their grandfathers went to them thirty years ago. They were fleeced there. They were told that the hotel was full, and they were accommodated with one small room for which they were charged the price of three, for dinner they tried to economize by avoiding the table d'hôte; they ordered a modest meal, which cost them just as much and left them famishing. Their illusions concerning Paris had come toppling down as soon as they arrived. And, during that first night in the hotel, when they were squeezed into one little, ill-ventilated room, they could not sleep; they were hot and cold by turns, and could not breathe, and started at every footstep in the corridor, and the banging of the doors, and the furious ringing of the electric bells; and their heads throbbed with the incessant roar of the carriages and heavy drays; and altogether they felt terrified of the monstrous city into which they had plunged to their utter bewilderment.

Next day Madame Jeannin went to see her sister, who lived in a luxurious flat in the *Boulevard Hausmann*. She hoped, though she did not say so, that they would be invited to stay there until they had found their feet. The welcome she received was enough to undeceive her. The Poyet-Delormes were furious at their relative's failure; especially Madame Delorme, who was afraid that it would be set against her, and might injure her husband's career, and she thought it shameless of the ruined family to come and cling to them, and compromise them even more. The magistrate was of the same opinion; but he was a kindly man; he would have been more inclined to help, but for his wife's intervention—to which he knuckled under. Madame Poyet-Delorme received her sister with icy coldness. It cut Madame Jeannin to the heart; but she swallowed down her pride; she hinted at the difficulty of her position and the assistance she hoped to receive from the Poyets. Her sister pretended not to understand, and did not even ask her to stay to dinner; they were ceremoniously invited to dine at the end of the week. The invitation did not come from Madame Poyet either, but from the magistrate, who was a little put out at his wife's treatment of her sister, and tried to make amends for her curtness; he posed as the good-natured man; but it was obvious that it did not come easily to him and that he was really very selfish. The unhappy Jeannins returned to their hotel without daring to say what they thought of their first visit.

They spent the following days in wandering about Paris, looking for a flat; they were worn out with going up stairs, and disheartened by the sight of the great barracks crammed full of people, and the dirty stairs, and the dark rooms, that

seemed so depressing to them after their own big house in the country. They grew more and more depressed. And they were always shy and timid in the streets, and shops, and restaurants, so that they were cheated at every turn. Everything they asked for cost an exorbitant sum; it was as though they had the faculty of turning everything they touched into gold; only, it was they who had to pay out the gold. They were incredibly simple and absolutely incapable of looking after themselves.

Though there was little left to hope for from Madame Jeannin's sister, the poor lady wove illusions about the dinner to which they were invited. They dressed for it with fluttering hearts. They were received as guests, and not as relations—though nothing more was expended on the dinner than the ceremonious manner. The children met their cousins, who were almost the same age as themselves, but they were not much more cordial than their father and mother. The girl was very smart and coquettish, and spoke to them with a lisp and a politely superior air, with affectedly honeyed manners which disconcerted them. The boy was bored by this duty-dinner with their poor relations; and he was as surly as could be. Madame Poyet-Delorme sat up stiffly in her chair, and, even when she handed her a dish, seemed to be reading her sister a lesson. Madame Poyet-Delorme talked trivialities to keep the conversation from becoming serious. They never got beyond talking of what they were eating for fear of touching upon any intimate and dangerous topic. Madame Jeannin made an effort to bring them round to the subject next her heart; Madame Poyet-Delorme cut her short with some pointless remark, and she had not the courage to try again.

After dinner she made her daughter play the piano by way of showing off her talents. The poor girl was embarrassed and unhappy and played execrably. The Poyets were bored and anxious for her to finish. Madame Poyet exchanged glances with her daughter, with an ironic curl of her lips; and as the music went on too long she began to talk to Madame Jeannin about nothing in particular. At last Antoinette, who had quite lost her place, and saw to her horror that, instead of going on, she had begun again at the beginning, and that there was no reason why she should ever stop, broke off suddenly, and ended with two inaccurate chords and a third which was absolutely dissonant. Monsieur Poyet said:

"Bravo!"

And he asked for coffee.

Madame Poyet said that her daughter was taking lessons with Pugno; and the young lady "who was taking lessons with Pugno" said:

"Charming, my dear ..."

And asked where Antoinette had studied.

The conversation dropped. They had exhausted the knick-knacks in the drawing-room and the dresses of Madame and Mademoiselle Poyet. Madame Jeannin said to herself:

"I must speak now. I must ..."

And she fidgeted. Just as she had pulled herself together to begin, Madame Poyet mentioned casually, without any attempt at an apology, that they were very sorry but they had

to go out at half-past nine; they had an invitation which they had been unable to decline. The Jeannins were at a loss, and got up at once to go. The Poyets made some show of detaining them. But a quarter of an hour later there was a ring at the door; the footman announced some friends of the Poyets, neighbors of theirs, who lived in the flat below. Poyet and his wife exchanged glances, and there were hurried whisperings with the servants. Poyet stammered some excuse, and hurried the Jeannins into the next room. (He was trying to hide from his friends the existence, and the presence in his house, of the compromising family.) The Jeannins were left alone in a room without a fire. The children were furious at the affront. Antoinette had tears in her eyes and insisted on their going. Her mother resisted for a little; but then, after they had waited for some time, she agreed. They went out. In the hall they were caught by Poyet, who had been told by a servant, and he muttered excuses; he pretended that he wanted them to stay; but it was obvious that he was only eager for them to go. He helped them on with their cloaks, and hurried them to the door with smiles and handshakes and whispered pleasantries, and closed the door on them. When they reached their hotel the children burst into angry tears. Antoinette stamped her foot, and swore that she would never enter their house again.

Madame Jeannin took a flat on the fourth floor near the *Jardin des Plantes*. The bedrooms looked on to the filthy walls of a gloomy courtyard; the dining-room and the drawing-room—(for Madame Jeannin insisted on having a drawing-room)—on to a busy street. All day long steam-trams went by and hearses crawling along to the Ivry Cemetery. Filthy Italians, with a horde of children, loafed

about on the seats, or spent their time in shrill argument. The noise made it impossible to have the windows open; and in the evening, on their way home, they had to force their way through crowds of bustling, evil-smelling people, cross the thronged and muddy streets, pass a horrible pothouse, that was on the ground floor of the next house, in the door of which there were always fat, frowsy women with yellow hair and painted faces, eying the passers-by.

Their small supply of money soon gave out. Every evening with sinking hearts they took stock of the widening hole in their purse. They tried to stint themselves; but they did not know how to set about it; that is a science which can only be learned by years of experimenting, unless it has been practised from childhood. Those who are not naturally economical merely waste their time in trying to be so; as soon as a fresh opportunity of spending money crops up, they succumb to the temptation; they are always going to economize next time; and when they do happen to make a little money, or to think they have made it, they rush out and spend ten times the amount on the strength of it.

At the end of a few weeks the Jeannins' resources were exhausted. Madame Jeannin had to gulp down what was left of her pride, and, unknown to her children, she went and asked Poyet for money. She contrived to see him alone at his office, and begged him to advance her a small sum until they had found work to keep them alive. Poyet, who was weak and human enough, tried at first to postpone the matter, but finally acceded to her request. He gave her two hundred francs in a moment of emotion, which mastered him, and he repented of it immediately afterwards,—when he had to

make his peace with Madame Poyet, who was furious with her husband's weakness, and her sister's slyness.

All day and every day the Jeannins were out and about in Paris, looking for work. Madame Jeannin, true to the prejudices of her class, would not hear of their engaging in any other profession than those which are called "liberal"—no doubt because they leave their devotees free to starve. She would even have gone so far as to forbid her daughter to take a post as a family governess. Only the official professions, in the service of the State, were not degrading in her eyes. They had to discover a means of letting Olivier finish his education so that he might become a teacher. As for Antoinette, Madame Jeannin's idea was that she should go to a school to teach, or to the Conservatoire to win the prize for piano playing. But the schools at which she applied already had teachers enough, who were much better qualified than her daughter with her poor little elementary certificate; and, as for music, she had to recognize that Antoinette's talent was quite ordinary compared with that of so many others who did not get on at all. They came face to face with the terrible struggle for life, and the blind waste of talent, great and small, for which Paris can find no use.

The two children lost heart and exaggerated their uselessness; they believed that they were mediocre, and did their best to convince themselves and their mother that it was so. Olivier, who had had no difficulty in shining at his provincial school, was crushed by his various rebuffs; he seemed to have lost possession of all his gifts. At the school

for which he won a scholarship, the results of his first examinations were so disastrous that his scholarship was taken away from him. He thought himself utterly stupid. At the same time he had a horror of Paris, and its swarming inhabitants, and the disgusting immorality of his schoolfellows, and their shameful conversation, and the bestiality of a few of them who did not spare him from their abominable proposals. He was not even strong enough to show his contempt for them. He felt degraded by the mere thought of their degradation. With his mother and sister, he took refuge in the heartfelt prayers which they used to say every evening after the day of deceptions and private humiliations, which to their innocence seemed to be a taint, of which they dared not tell each other. But, in contact with the latent spirit of atheism which is in the air of Paris, Olivier's faith was beginning to crumble away, without his knowledge, like whitewash trickling down a wall under the beating of the rain. He went on believing; but all about him God was dying.

His mother and sister pursued their futile quest. Madame Jeannin turned once more to the Poyets, who were anxious to be quit of them, and offered them work. Madame Jeannin was to go as reader to an old lady who was spending the winter in the South of France. A post was found for Antoinette as governess in a family in the West, who lived all the year round in the country. The terms were not bad, but Madame Jeannin refused. It was not so much for herself that she objected to a menial position, but she was determined that Antoinette should not be reduced to it, and unwilling to part with her. However unhappy they might be, just because they were unhappy, they wished to be together.—Madame

Poyet took it very badly. She said that people who had no means of living had no business to be proud. Madame Jeannin could not refrain from crying out upon her heartlessness. Madame Poyet spoke bitterly of the bankruptcy and of the money that Madame Jeannin owed her. They parted, and the breach between them was final. All relationship between them was broken off. Madame Jeannin had only one desire left; to pay back the money she had borrowed. But she was unable to do that.

They resumed their vain search for work. Madame Jeannin went to see the deputy and the senator of her department, men whom Monsieur Jeannin had often helped. Everywhere she was brought face to face with ingratitude and selfishness. The deputy did not even answer her letters, and when she called on him he sent down word that he was out. The senator commiserated her ponderously on her unhappy position, which he attributed to "the wretched Jeannin," whose suicide he stigmatized harshly. Madame Jeannin defended her husband. The senator said that of course he knew that the banker had acted, not from dishonesty, but from stupidity, and that he was a fool, a poor gull, who knew nothing, and would go his own way without asking anybody's advice or taking a warning from any one. If he had only ruined himself, there would have been nothing to say; that would have been his own affair. But—not to mention the ruin that he had brought on others,—that he should have reduced his wife and children to poverty and deserted them and left them to get out of it as best they could ... it was Madame Jeannin's own business if she chose to forgive him, if she were a saint, but for his part, he, the senator, not being a saint—(s, a, i, n, t),—but, he flattered

himself, just a plain man—(s, a, i, n),—a plain, sensible, reasonable human being,—he could find no reason for forgiveness; a man who, in such circumstances, could kill himself, was a wretch. The only extenuating circumstance he could find in Jeannin's case was that he was not responsible for his actions. With that he begged Madame Jeannin's pardon for having expressed himself a little emphatically about her husband; he pleaded the sympathy that he felt for her; and he opened his drawer and offered her a fifty-franc note,—charity—which she refused.

She applied for a post in the offices of a great Government department. She set about it clumsily and inconsequently, and all her courage oozed out at the first attempt. She returned home so demoralized that for several days she could not stir. And, when she resumed her efforts, it was too late. She did not find help either with the church-people, either because they saw there was nothing to gain by it, or because they took no interest in a ruined family, the head of which had been notoriously anti-clerical. After days and days of hunting for work Madame Jeannin could find nothing better than a post as music-teacher in a convent—an ungrateful task, ridiculously ill-paid. To eke out her earnings she copied music in the evenings for an agency. They were very hard on her. She was severely called to task for omitting words and whole lines, as she did in spite of her application, for she was always thinking of so many other things and her wits were wool-gathering. And so, after she had stayed up through the night till her eyes and her back ached, her copy was rejected. She would return home utterly downcast. She would spend days together moaning, unable to stir a finger. For a long time she had been suffering from heart trouble,

which had been aggravated by her hard struggles, and filled her with dark forebodings. Sometimes she would have pains, and difficulty in breathing as though she were on the point of death. She never went out without her name and address written on a piece of paper in her pocket in case she should collapse in the street. What would happen if she were to disappear? Antoinette comforted her as best she could by affecting a confidence which she did not possess; she begged her to be careful and to let her go and work in her stead. But the little that was left of Madame Jeannin's pride stirred in her, and she vowed that at least her daughter should not know the humiliation she had to undergo.

In vain did she wear herself out and cut down their expenses; what she earned was not enough to keep them alive. They had to sell the few jewels which they had kept. And the worst blow of all came when the money, of which they were in such sore need, was stolen from Madame Jeannin the very day it came into her hands. The poor flustered creature took it into her head while she was out to go into the *Bon Marché*, which was on her way; it was Antoinette's birthday next day, and she wanted to give her a little present. She was carrying her purse in her hand so as not to lose it. She put it down mechanically on the counter for a moment while she looked at something. When she put out her hand for it the purse was gone. It was the last blow for her.

A few days later, on a stifling evening at the end of August,—a hot steaming mist hung over the town,—Madame Jeannin came in from her copying agency, whither she had been to deliver a piece of work that was wanted in a hurry. She was late for dinner, and had saved her three sous'

bus fare by hurrying home on foot to prevent her children being anxious. When she reached the fourth floor she could neither speak nor breathe. It was not the first time she had returned home in that condition; the children took no notice of it. She forced herself to sit down at table with them. They were both suffering from the heat and did not eat anything; they had to make an effort to gulp down a few morsels of food, and a sip or two of stale water. To give their mother time to recover they did not talk—(they had no desire to talk)—and looked out of the window.

Suddenly Madame Jeannin waved her hands in the air, clutched at the table, looked at her children, moaned, and collapsed. Antoinette and Olivier sprang to their feet just in time to catch her in their arms. They were beside themselves, and screamed and cried to her:

"Mother! Mother! Dear, dear mother!"

But she made no sound. They were at their wit's end. Antoinette clung wildly to her mother's body, kissed her, called to her. Olivier ran to the door of the flat and yelled:

"Help! Help!"

The housekeeper came running upstairs, and when she saw what had happened she ran for a doctor. But when the doctor arrived, he could only say that the end had come. Death had been instantaneous—happily for Madame Jeannin—although it was impossible to know what thoughts might have been hers during the last moments when she knew that she was dying and leaving her children alone in such misery.

They were alone to bear the horror of the catastrophe, alone to weep, alone to perform the dreadful duties that

follow upon death. The porter's wife, a kindly soul, helped them a little; and people came from the convent where Madame Jeannin had taught; but they were given no real sympathy.

The first moments brought inexpressible despair. The only thing that saved them was the very excess of that despair, which made Olivier really ill. Antoinette's thoughts were distracted from her own suffering, and her one idea was to save her brother; and her great, deep love filled Olivier and plucked him back from the violent torment of his grief. Locked in her arms near the bed where their mother was lying in the glimmer of a candle, Olivier said over and over again that they must die, that they must both die, at once; and he pointed to the window. In Antoinette, too, there was the dark desire; but she fought it down; she wished to live....

"Why? Why?"

"For her sake," said Antoinette—(she pointed to her mother).—"She is still with us. Think ... after all that she has suffered for our sake, we must spare her the crowning sorrow, that of seeing us die in misery.... Ah!" (she went on emphatically).... "And then, we must not give way. I will not! I refuse to give in. You must, you shall be happy, some day!"

"Never!"

"Yes. You shall be happy. We have had too much unhappiness. A change will come; it must. You shall live your life. You shall have children, you shall be happy, you shall, you shall!"

"How are we to live? We cannot do it...."

“We can. What is it, after all? We have to live somehow until you can earn your living. I will see to that. You will see; I’ll do it. Ah! If only mother had let me do it, as I could have done....”

“What will you do? I will not have you degrading yourself. You could not do it.”

“I can.... And there is nothing humiliating in working for one’s living—provided it be honest work. Don’t you worry about it, please. You will see, everything will come right. You shall be happy, we shall be happy; dear Olivier, *she* will be happy through us....”

The two children were the only mourners at their mother’s grave. By common consent they agreed not to tell the Poyets; the Poyets had ceased to exist for them; they had been too cruel to their mother; they had helped her to her death. And, when the housekeeper asked them if they had no other relations, they replied:

“No. Nobody.”

By the bare grave they prayed hand in hand. They set their teeth in desperate resolve and pride and preferred their solitude to the presence of their callous and hypocritical relations.—They returned on foot through the throng of people who were strangers to their grief, strangers to their thoughts, strangers to their lives, and shared nothing with them but their common language. Antoinette had to support Olivier.

They took a tiny flat in the same house on the top floor—two little attics, a narrow hall, which had to serve as a dining-room, and a kitchen that was more like a cupboard.

They could have found better rooms in another neighborhood; but it seemed to them that they were still with their mother in that house. The housekeeper took an interest in them for a time; but she was soon absorbed in her own affairs and nobody bothered about them. They did not know a single one of the other tenants; and they did not even know who lived next door.

Antoinette obtained her mother's post as music-teacher at the convent. She procured other pupils. She had only one idea; to educate her brother until he was ready for the *École Normale*. It was her own idea, and she had decided upon it after mature reflection; she had studied the syllabus and asked about it, and had also tried to find out what Olivier thought;—but he had no ideas, and she chose for him. Once at the *École Normale* he would be sure of a living for the rest of his life, and his future would be assured. He must get in, somehow; whatever it cost, they would have to keep alive till then. It meant five or six terrible years; they would win through. The idea possessed Antoinette, absorbed her whole life. The poor solitary existence which she must lead, which she saw clearly mapped out in front of her, was only made bearable through the passionate exaltation which filled her, her determination, by all means in her power, to save her brother and make him happy. The light-hearted, gentle girl of seventeen or eighteen was transfigured by her heroic resolution; there was in her an ardent quality of devotion, a pride of battle, which no one had suspected, herself least of all. In that critical period of a woman's life, during the first fevered days of spring, when love fills all her being, and like a hidden stream murmuring beneath the earth, laves her soul, envelops it, floods it with tenderness, and fills it with sweet

obsessions, love appears in divers shapes; demanding that she should give herself, and yield herself up to be its prey; for love the least excuse is enough, and for its profound yet innocent sensuality any sacrifice is easy. Love made Antoinette the prey of sisterly devotion.

Her brother was less passionate and had no such stay. Besides, the sacrifice was made for him, it was not he who was sacrificed—which is so much easier and sweeter when one loves. He was weighed down with remorse at seeing his sister wearing herself out for him. He would tell her so, and she would reply:

"Ah! My dear!... But don't you see that that is what keeps me going? Without you to trouble me, what should I have to live for?"

He understood. He, too, in Antoinette's position, would have been jealous of the trouble he caused her; but to be the cause of it!... That hurt his pride and his affection. And what a burden it was for so weak a creature to bear such a responsibility, to be bound to succeed, since on his success his sister had staked her whole life! The thought of it was intolerable to him, and, instead of spurring him on, there were times when it robbed him of all energy. And yet she forced him to struggle on, to work, to live, as he never would have done without her aid and insistence. He had a natural predisposition towards depression,—perhaps even towards suicide;—perhaps he would have succumbed to it had not his sister wished him to be ambitious and happy. He suffered from the contradiction of his nature; and yet it worked his salvation. He, too, was passing through a critical age, that fearful period when thousands of young men succumb, and

give themselves up to the aberrations of their minds and senses, and for two or three years' folly spoil their lives beyond repair. If he had had time to yield to his thoughts he would have fallen into discouragement or perhaps taken to dissipation; always when he turned in upon himself he became a prey to his morbid dreams, and disgust with life, and Paris, and the impure fermentation of all those millions of human beings mingling and rotting together. But the sight of his sister's face was enough to dispel the nightmare; and since she was living only that he might live, he would live, yes, he would be happy, in spite of himself.

So their lives were built on an ardent faith fashioned of stoicism, religion, and noble ambition. All their endeavor was directed towards the one end; Olivier's success. Antoinette accepted every kind of work, every humiliation that was offered her; she went as a governess to houses where she was treated almost as a servant; she had to take her pupils out for walks, like a nurse, wandering about the streets with them for hours together under pretext of teaching them German. In her love for her brother and her pride she found pleasure even in such moral suffering and weariness.

She would return home worn out to look after Olivier, who was a day-boarder at his school and only came home in the evening. She would cook their dinner—a wretched dinner—on the gas-stove or over a spirit-lamp. Olivier had never any appetite and everything disgusted him, and his gorge would rise at the food; and she would have to force him to eat, or cudgel her brains to invent some dish that would catch his fancy, and poor Antoinette was by no means a good cook. And when she had taken a great deal of trouble she would have the mortification of hearing him declare that her

cooking was uneatable. It was only after moments of despair at her cooking-stove,—those moments of silent despair which come to inexperienced young housekeepers and poison their lives and sometimes their sleep, unknown to everybody—that she began to understand it a little.

After dinner, when she had washed up the dishes—(he would offer to help her, but she would never let him),—she would take a motherly interest in her brother's work. She would hear him his lessons, read his exercises, and even look up certain words in the dictionary for him, always taking care not to ruffle up his sensitive little soul. They would spend the evening at their one table at which they had both to eat and write. He would do his homework, she would sew or do some copying. When he had gone to bed she would sit mending his clothes or doing some work of her own.

Although they had difficulty in making both ends meet, they were both agreed that every penny they could put by should be used in the first place to settle the debt which their mother owed to the Poyets. It was not that the Poyets were importunate creditors; they had given no sign of life; they never gave a thought to the money, which they counted as lost; they thought themselves very lucky to have got rid of their undesirable relatives so cheaply. But it hurt the pride and filial piety of the young Jeannins to think that their mother should have owed anything to these people whom they despised. They pinched and scraped; they economized on their amusements, on their clothes, on their food, in order to amass the two hundred francs—an enormous sum for them. Antoinette would have liked to have done the saving by herself. But when her brother found out what she was up to, nothing could keep him from doing likewise. They wore

themselves out in the effort, and were delighted when they could set aside a few sous a day.

In three years, by screwing and scraping, sou by sou, they had succeeded in getting the sum together. It was a great joy to them. Antoinette went to the Poyets one evening. She was coldly received, for they thought she had come to ask for help. They thought it advisable to take the initiative; and reproached her for not letting them have any news of them; and not having even told them of the death of her mother, and not coming to them when she wanted help. She cut them short calmly by telling them that she had no intention of incommoding them; she had come merely to return the money which had been borrowed from them; and she laid two banknotes on the table and asked for a receipt. They changed their tone at once, and pretended to be unwilling to accept it; they were feeling for her that sudden affection which comes to the creditor for the debtor, who, after many years, returns the loan which he had ceased to reckon upon. They inquired where she was living with her brother, and how they lived. She did not reply, asked once more for the receipt, said that she was in a hurry, bowed coldly, and went away. The Poyets were horrified at the girl's ingratitude.

Then, when she was rid of that obsession, Antoinette went on with the same sparing existence, but now it was entirely for her brother's sake. Only she concealed it more to prevent his knowing it; she economized on her clothes and sometimes on her food, to keep her brother well-dressed and amused, and to make his life pleasanter and gayer, and to let him go every now and then to a concert, or to the opera, which was Olivier's greatest joy. He was unwilling to go without her, but she would always make excuses for not

going so that he should feel no remorse; she would pretend that she was too tired and did not want to go out; she would even go so far as to say that music bored her. Her fond quibbles would not deceive him; but his boyish selfishness would be too strong for him. He would go to the theater; once inside, he would be filled with remorse, and it would haunt him all through the piece, and spoil his pleasure. One Sunday, when she had packed him off to the *Châtelet* concert, he returned half an hour later, and told Antoinette that when he reached the Saint Michel Bridge he had not the heart to go any farther; the concert did not interest him; it hurt him too much to have any pleasure without her. Nothing was sweeter to Antoinette, although she was sorry that her brother should be deprived of his Sunday entertainment because of her. But Olivier never regretted it; when he saw the joy that lit up his sister's face as he came in, a joy that she tried in vain to conceal, he felt happier than the most lovely music in the world could ever have made him. They spent the afternoon sitting together by the window, he with a book in his hand, she with her work, hardly reading at all, hardly sewing at all, talking idly of things that interested neither of them. Never had they had so delightful a Sunday. They agreed that they would never go alone to a concert again; they could never enjoy anything alone.

She managed secretly to save enough money to surprise and delight Olivier with a hired piano, which, on the hire-purchase system became their property at the end of a certain number of months. The payments for it were a heavy burden for her to shoulder! It often haunted her dreams, and she ruined her health in screwing together the necessary money. But, folly as it was, it did assure them both so much

happiness. Music was their Paradise in their hard life. It filled an enormous place in their existence. They steeped themselves in music so as to forget the rest of the world. There was danger in it too. Music is one of the great modern dissolvents. Its languorous warmth, like the heat of a stove, or the enervating air of autumn, excites the senses and destroys the will. But it was a relaxation for a creature forced into excessive, joyless activity as was Antoinette. The Sunday concert was the only ray of light that shone through the week of unceasing toil. They lived in the memory of the last concert and the eager anticipation of the next, in those few hours spent outside Paris and out of the vile weather. After a long wait outside in the rain, or the snow, or the wind and the cold, clinging together, and trembling lest all the places should be taken, they would pass into the theater, where they were lost in the throng, and sit on dark uncomfortable benches. They were crushed and stifling, and often on the point of fainting from the heat and discomfort of it all;—but they were happy, happy in their own and in each other's pleasure, happy to feel coursing through their veins the flood of kindness, light, and strength, that surged forth from the great souls of Beethoven and Wagner, happy, each of them, to see the dear, dear face light up—the poor, pale face worn by suffering and premature anxieties. Antoinette would feel so tired and as though loving arms were about her, holding her to a motherly breast! She would nestle in its softness and warmth; and she would weep quietly. Olivier would press her hand. No one noticed them in the dimness of the vast hall, where they were not the only suffering souls taking refuge under the motherly wing of Music.

Antoinette had her religion to support her. She was very pious, and every day never missed saying her prayers fervently and at length, and every Sunday she never missed going to Mass. Even in the injustice of her wretched life she could not help believing in the love of the divine Friend, who suffers with you, and, some day, will console you. Even more than with God, she was in close communion with the beloved dead, and she used secretly to share all her trials with them. But she was of an independent spirit and a clear intelligence; she stood apart from other Catholics, who did not regard her altogether favorably; they thought her possessed of an evil spirit; they were not far from regarding her as a Free Thinker, or on the way to it, because, like the honest little Frenchwoman she was, she had no intention of renouncing her own independent judgment; she believed not from obedience, like the base rabble, but from love.

Olivier no longer believed. The slow disintegration of his faith, which had set in during his first months in Paris, had ended in its complete destruction, he had suffered cruelly; for he was not of those who are strong enough or commonplace enough to dispense with faith; and so he had passed through crises of mental agony. But he was at heart a mystic; and, though he had lost his belief, yet no ideas could be closer to his own than those of his sister. They both lived in a religious atmosphere. When they came home in the evening after the day's parting their little flat was to them a haven, an inviolable refuge, poor, bitterly cold, but pure. How far removed they felt there from the noise and the corrupt thoughts of Paris!...

They never talked much of their doings; for when one comes home tired one has hardly the heart to revive the

memory of a painful day by the tale of its happenings. Instinctively they set themselves to forget it. Especially during the first hour when they met again for dinner they avoided questions of all kinds. They would greet each other with their eyes; and sometimes they would not speak a word all through the meal. Antoinette would look at her brother as he sat dreaming, just as he used to do when he was a little boy. She would gently touch his hand:

"Come!" she would say, with a smile. "Courage!"

He would smile too and go on eating. So dinner would pass without their trying to talk. They were hungry for silence. Only when they had done would their tongues be loosed a little, when they felt rested, and when each of them in the comfort of the understanding love of the other had wiped out the impure traces of the day.

Olivier would sit down at the piano. Antoinette was out of practice from letting him play always; for it was the only relaxation that he had; and he would give himself up to it whole-heartedly. He had a fine temperament for music; his feminine nature, more suited to love than to action, with loving sympathy could catch the thoughts of the musicians whose works he played, and merge itself in them and with passionate fidelity render the finest shades,—at least, within the limitations of his physical strength, which gave out before the Titanic effort of *Tristan*, or the later sonatas of Beethoven. He loved best to take refuge in Mozart or Gluck, and theirs was the music that Antoinette preferred.

Sometimes she would sing too, but only very simple songs, old melodies. She had a light mezzo voice, plaintive and delicate. She was so shy that she could never sing in

company, and hardly even before Olivier; her throat used to contract. There was an air of Beethoven set to some Scotch words, of which she was particularly fond; *Faithful Johnnie*; it was calm, so call ... and with what a depth of tenderness!... It was like herself. Olivier could never hear her sing it without the tears coming to his eyes.

But she preferred listening to her brother. She would hurry through her housework and leave the door of the kitchen open the better to hear Olivier; but in spite of all her care he would complain impatiently of the noise she made with her pots and pans. Then she would close the door; and, when she had finished, she would come and sit in a low chair, not near the piano—(for he could not bear any one near him when he was playing),—but near the fireplace; and there she would sit curled up like a cat, with her back to the piano, and her eyes fixed on the golden eyes of the fire, in which a lump of coal was smoldering, and muse over her memories of the past. When nine o'clock rang she would have to pull herself together to remind Olivier that it was time to stop. It would be hard to drag him, and to drag herself, away from dreams; but Olivier would still have some work to do. And he must not go to bed too late. He would not obey her at once; he always needed a certain time in which to shake free of the music before he could apply himself seriously to his work. His thoughts would be off wandering. Often it would be half-past nine before he could shake free of his misty dreams. Antoinette, bending over her work at the other side of the table, would know that he was doing nothing; but she dared not look in his direction too often for fear of irritating him by seeming to be watching him.

He was at the ungrateful age—the happy age—when a boy saunters dreamily through his days. He had a clear forehead, girlish eyes, deep and trustful, often with dark circles round them, a wide mouth with rather thick pouting lips, a rather crooked smile, vague, absent, taking; he wore his hair long so that it hung down almost to his eyes, and made a great bunch at the back of his neck, while one rebellious lock stuck up at the back; a neckerchief loosely tied round his neck—(his sister used to tie it carefully in a bow every morning);—a waistcoat which was always buttonless, although she was for ever sewing them on; no cuffs; large hands with bony wrists. He had a heavy, sleepy, bantering expression, and he was always wool-gathering. His eyes would blink and wander round Antoinette's room;—(his work-table was in her room);—they would light on the little iron bed, above which hung an ivory crucifix, with a sprig of box,—on the portraits of his father and mother,—on an old photograph of the little provincial town with its tower mirrored in its waters. And when they reached his sister's pallid face, bending in silence over her work, he would be filled with an immense pity for her and anger with himself; then he would shake himself in annoyance at his own indolence; and he would work furiously to make up for lost time.

He spent his holidays in reading. They would read together each with a separate book. In spite of their love for each other they could not read aloud. That hurt them as an offense against modesty. A fine book was to them as a secret which should only be murmured in the silence of the heart. When a passage delighted them, instead of reading it aloud,

they would hand the book over, with a finger marking the place; and they would say:

"Read that."

Then, while the other was reading, the one who had already read would with shining eyes gaze into the dear face to see what emotions were roused and to share the enjoyment of it.

But often with their books open in front of them they would not read; they would talk. Especially towards the end of the evening they would feel the need of opening their hearts, and they would have less difficulty in talking. Olivier had sad thoughts; and in his weakness he had to rid himself of all that tortured him by pouring out his troubles to some one else. He was a prey to doubt. Antoinette had to give him courage, to defend him against himself; it was an unceasing struggle, which began anew each day. Olivier would say bitter, gloomy things; and when he had said them he would be relieved; but he never troubled to think how they might hurt his sister. Only very late in the day did he see how he was exhausting her; he was sapping her strength and infecting her with his own doubts. Antoinette never let it appear how she suffered. She was by nature valiant and gay, and she forced herself to maintain a show of gaiety, even when that gracious quality was long since dead in her. She had moments of utter weariness, and revolt against the life of perpetual sacrifice to which she had pledged herself. But she condemned such thoughts and would not analyze them; they came to her in spite of herself, and she would not accept them. She found help in prayer, except when her heart could not pray—(as sometimes happens)—when it was, as it were,

withered and dry. Then she could only wait in silence, feverish and ashamed, for the return of grace. Olivier never had the least suspicion of the agony she suffered. At such times Antoinette would make some excuse and go away and lock herself in her room; and she would not appear again until the crisis was over; then she would be smiling, sorrowful, more tender than ever, and, as it were, remorseful for having suffered.

Their rooms were adjoining. Their beds were placed on either side of the same wall; they could talk to each other through it in whispers; and when they could not sleep they would tap gently on the wall to say:

"Are you asleep? I can't sleep."

The partition was so thin that it was almost as though they shared the same room. But the door between their rooms was always locked at night, in obedience to an instinctive and profound modesty,—a sacred feeling;—it was only left open when Olivier was ill, as too often happened.

He did not gain in health. Rather he seemed to grow weaker. He was always ailing; throat, chest, head or heart; if he caught the slightest cold there was always the danger of its turning to bronchitis; he caught scarlatina and almost died of it; but even when he was not ill he would betray strange symptoms of serious illnesses, which fortunately did not come to anything; he would have pains in his lungs or his heart. One day the doctor who examined him diagnosed pericarditis, or peripneumonia, and the great specialist who was then consulted confirmed his fears. But it came to nothing. It was his nerves that were wrong, and it is common knowledge that disorders of the nerves take the most

unaccountable shapes; they are got rid of at the cost of days of anxiety. But such days were terrible for Antoinette, and they gave her sleepless nights. She would lie in a state of terror in her bed, getting up every now and then to listen to her brother's breathing. She would think that perhaps he was dying, she would feel sure, convinced of it; she would get up, trembling, and clasp her hands, and hold them fast against her lips to keep herself from crying out.

"Oh! God! Oh! God!" she would moan. "Take him not from me! Not that ... not that. You have no right!... Not that, oh! God, I beg!... Oh, mother, mother! Come to my aid! Save him; let him live!..."

She would lie at full stretch.

"Ah! To die by the way, when so much has been done, when we were nearly there, when he was going to be happy ... no; that could not be; it would be too cruel!..."

It was not long before Olivier gave her other reasons for anxiety.

He was profoundly honest, like herself, but he was weak of will and too open-minded and too complex not to be uneasy, skeptical, indulgent towards what he knew to be evil, and attracted by pleasure. Antoinette was so pure that it was some time before she understood what was going on in her brother's mind. She discovered it suddenly, one day.

Olivier thought she was out. She usually had a lesson at that hour; but at the last moment she had received word from

her pupil, telling her that she could not have her that day. She was secretly pleased, although it meant a few francs less in that week's earnings; but she was very tired and she lay down on her bed; she was very glad to be able to rest for once without reproaching herself. Olivier came in from school bringing another boy with him. They sat down in the next room and began to talk. She could hear everything they said; they thought they were alone and did not restrain themselves. Antoinette smiled as she heard her brother's merry voice. But soon she ceased to smile, and her blood ran cold. They were talking of dirty things with an abominable crudity of expression; they seemed to revel in it. She heard Olivier, her boy Olivier, laughing; and from his lips, which she had thought so innocent, there came words so obscene that the horror of it chilled her. Keen anguish stabbed her to the heart. It went on and on; they could not stop talking, and she could not help listening. At last they went out, and Antoinette was left alone. Then she wept; something had died in her; the ideal image that she had fashioned of her brother—of her boy—was plastered with mud; it was a mortal agony to her. She did not say anything to him when they met again in the evening. He saw that she had been weeping and he could not think why. He could not understand why she had changed her manner towards him. It was some time before she was able to recover herself.

But the worst blow of all for her was one evening when he did not come home. She did not go to bed, but sat up waiting for him. It was not only her moral purity that was hurt; her suffering went down to the most mysterious inner depths of her heart—those same depths where there lurked

the most awful feelings of the human heart, feelings over which she cast a veil, to hide them from her sight.

Olivier's first aim had been the declaration of his independence. He returned in the morning, casting about for the proper attitude and quite prepared to fling some insolent remark at his sister if she had said anything to him. He stole into the flat on tiptoe so as not to waken her. But when he saw her standing there, waiting for him, pale, red-eyed from weeping, when he saw that, instead of making any effort to reproach him, she only set about silently cooking his breakfast, before he left for school, and that she had nothing to say to him, but was overwhelmed, so that she was, in herself, a living reproach, he could hold out no longer; he flung himself down before her, buried his face in her lap, and they both wept. He was ashamed of himself, sick at the thought of what he had done; he felt degraded. He tried to speak, but she would not let him and laid her hand on his lips; and he kissed her hand. They said no more; they understood each other. Olivier vowed that he would never again do anything to hurt Antoinette, and that he would be in all things what she wanted him to be. But though she tried bravely she could not so easily forget so sharp a wound; she recovered from it slowly. There was a certain awkwardness between them. Her love for him was just the same; but in her brother's soul she had seen something that was foreign to herself, and she was fearful of it.

She was the more overwhelmed by the glimpse she had had into Olivier's inmost heart, in that, about the same time,

she had to put up with the unwelcome attentions of certain men. When she came home in the evening at nightfall, and especially when she had to go out after dinner to take or fetch her copying, she suffered agonies from her fear of being accosted, and followed (as sometimes happened) and forced to listen to insulting advances. She took her brother with her whenever she could under pretext of making him take a walk; but he only consented grudgingly and she dared not insist; she did not like to interrupt his work. She was so provincial and so pure that she could not get used to such ways. Paris at night was to her like a dark forest in which she felt that she was being tracked by dreadful, savage beasts; and she was afraid to leave the house. But she had to go out. She would put off going out as long as possible; she was always fearful. And when she thought that her Olivier would be—was perhaps—like one of those men who pursued her, she could hardly hold out her hand to him when she came in. He could not think what he had done to change her so, and she was angry with herself.

She was not very pretty, but she had charm, and attracted attention though she did nothing to do so. She was always very simply dressed, almost always in black; she was not very tall, graceful, frail-looking; she rarely spoke; she tripped quietly through the crowded streets, avoiding attention, which, however, she attracted in spite of herself by the sweetness of the expression of her tired eyes and her pure young lips. Sometimes she saw that she had attracted notice; and though it put her to confusion she was pleased all the same. Who can say what gentle and chaste pleasure in itself there may be in so innocent a creature at feeling herself in sympathy with others? All that she felt was shown in a slight

awkwardness in her movements, a timid, sidelong glance; and it was sweet to see and very touching. And her uneasiness added to her attraction. She excited interest, and, as she was a poor girl, with none to protect her, men did not hesitate to tell her so.

Sometimes she used to go to the house of some rich Jews, the Nathans, who took an interest in her because they had met her at the house of some friends of theirs where she gave lessons; and, in spite of her shyness, she had not been able to avoid accepting invitations to their parties. M. Alfred Nathan was a well-known professor in Paris, a distinguished scientist, and at the same time he was very fond of society, with that strange mixture of learning and frivolity which is so common among the Jews. Madame Nathan was a mixture in equal proportions of real kindliness and excessive worldliness. They were both generous, with loud-voiced, sincere, but intermittent sympathy for Antoinette.— Generally speaking Antoinette had found more kindness among the Jews than among the members of her own sect. They have many faults; but they have one great quality— perhaps the greatest of all; they are alive, and human; nothing human is foreign to them and they are interested in every living being. Even when they lack real, warm sympathy they feel a perpetual curiosity which makes them seek out men and ideas that are of worth, however different from themselves they may be. Not that, generally speaking, they do anything much to help them, for they are interested in too many things at once and much more a prey to the vanities of the world than other people, while they pretend to be immune from them. But at least they do something; and that is saying a great deal in the present apathetic condition

of society. They are an active balm in society, the very leaven of life.—Antoinette who, among the Catholics, had been brought sharp up against a wall of icy indifference, was keenly alive to the worth of the interest, however superficial it might be, which the Nathans took in her. Madame Nathan had marked Antoinette's life of devoted sacrifice; she was sensible of her physical and moral charm; and she made a show of taking her under her protection. She had no children; but she loved young people and often had gatherings of them in her house; and she insisted on Antoinette's coming also, and breaking away from her solitude, and having some amusement in her life. And as she had no difficulty in guessing that Antoinette's shyness was in part the result of her poverty, she even went so far as to offer to give her a pretty frock or two, which Antoinette refused proudly; but her kindly patroness found a way of forcing her to accept a few of those little presents which are so dear to a woman's innocent vanity. Antoinette was both grateful and embarrassed. She forced herself to go to Madame Nathan's parties from time to time; and being young she managed to enjoy herself in spite of everything.

But in that rather mixed society of all sorts of young people Madame Nathan's protégée, being poor and pretty, became at once the mark of two or three young gentlemen, who with perfect confidence in themselves picked her out for their attentions. They calculated how far her timidity would go; they even made bets about her.

One day she received certain anonymous letters—or rather letters signed with a noble pseudonym—which conveyed a declaration of love; at first they were love-letters, flattering, ardent, appointing a rendezvous; then they quickly

became bolder, threatening, and soon insulting and basely slanderous; they stripped her, exposed her, besmirched her with their coarse expressions of desire; they tried to play upon Antoinette's simplicity by making her fearful of a public insult if she did not go to the appointed rendezvous. She wept bitterly at the thought of having called down on herself such base proposals; and these insults scorched her pride. She did not know what to do. She did not like to speak to her brother about it; she knew that he would feel it too keenly and that he would make the affair even more serious than it was. She had no friends. The police? She would not do that for fear of scandal. But somehow she had to make an end of it. She felt that her silence would not sufficiently defend her, that the blackguard who was pursuing her would hold to the chase and that he would go on until to go farther would be dangerous.

He had just sent her a sort of ultimatum commanding her to meet him next day at the Luxembourg. She went.—By racking her brains she had come to the conclusion that her persecutor must have met her at Madame Nathan's. In one of his letters he had alluded to something which could only have happened there. She begged Madame Nathan to do her a great favor and to drive her to the door of the gallery and to wait for her outside. She went in. In front of the appointed picture her tormentor accosted her triumphantly and began to talk to her with affected politeness. She stared straight at him without a word. When he had finished his remark he asked her jokingly why she was staring at him. She replied:

"You are a coward."

He was not put out by such a trifle as that, and became familiar in his manner. She said:

"You have tried to threaten me with a scandal. Very well, I have come to give you your scandal. You have asked for it!"

She was trembling all over, and she spoke in a loud voice to show him that she was quite equal to attracting attention to themselves. People had already begun to watch them. He felt that she would stick at nothing. He lowered his voice. She said once more, for the last time:

"You are a coward," and turned her back on him.

Not wishing to seem to have given in he followed her. She left the gallery with the fellow following hard on her heels. She walked straight to the carriage waiting there, wrenched the door open, and her pursuer found himself face to face with Madame Nathan, who recognized him and greeted him by name. His face fell and he bolted.

Antoinette had to tell the whole story to her companion. She was unwilling to do so, and only hinted roughly at the facts. It was painful to her to reveal to a stranger the intimate secrets of her life, and the sufferings of her injured modesty. Madame Nathan scolded her for not having told her before. Antoinette begged her not to tell anybody. That was the end of it; and Madame Nathan did not even need to strike the fellow off her visiting list; for he was careful not to appear again.

About the same time another sorrow of a very different kind came to Antoinette.

At the Nathans' she met a man of forty, a very good fellow, who was in the Consular service in the Far East, and had come home on a few months' leave. He fell in love with her. The meeting had been planned unknown to Antoinette, by Madame Nathan, who had taken it into her head that she must find a husband for her little friend. He was a Jew. He was not good-looking and he was no longer young. He was rather bald and round-shouldered; but he had kind eyes, an affectionate way with him, and he could feel for and understand suffering, for he had suffered himself. Antoinette was no longer the romantic girl, the spoiled child, dreaming of life as a lovely day's walk on her lover's arm; now she saw the hard struggle of life, which began again every day, allowing no time for rest, or, if rest were taken, it might be to lose in one moment all the ground that had been gained, inch by inch, through years of striving; and she thought it would be very sweet to be able to lean on the arm of a friend, and share his sorrows with him, and be able to close her eyes for a little, while he watched over her. She knew that it was a dream; but she had not had the courage to renounce her dream altogether. In her heart she knew quite well that a dowerless girl had nothing to hope for in the world in which she lived. The old French middle-classes are known throughout the world for the spirit of sordid interest in which they conduct their marriages. The Jews are far less grasping with money. Among the Jews it is no uncommon thing for a rich young man to choose a poor girl, or a young woman of fortune to set herself passionately to win a man of intellect. But in the French middle-classes, Catholic and provincial in their outlook, almost always money woos money. And to what end? Poor wretches, they have none but dull commonplace desires; they can do nothing but eat, yawn,

sleep—save. Antoinette knew them. She had observed their ways from her childhood on. She had seen them with the eyes of wealth and the eyes of poverty. She had no illusions left about them, nor about the treatment she had to expect from them. And so the attentions of this man who had asked her to marry him came as an unhoped for treasure in her life. At first she did not think of him as a lover, but gradually she was filled with gratitude and tenderness towards him. She would have accepted his proposal if it had not meant following him to the colonies and consequently leaving her brother. She refused; and though her lover understood the magnanimity of her reason for doing so, he could not forgive her; love is so selfish, that the lover will not hear of being sacrificed even to those virtues which are dearest to him in the beloved. He gave up seeing her; when he went away he never wrote; she had no news of him at all until, five or six months later, she received a printed intimation, addressed in his hand, that he had married another woman.

Antoinette felt it deeply. She was broken-hearted, and she offered up her suffering to God; she tried to persuade herself that she was justly punished for having for one moment lost sight of her one duty, to devote herself to her brother; and she grew more and more wrapped up in it.

She withdrew from the world altogether. She even dropped going to the Nathans', for they were a little cold towards her after she refused the marriage which they had arranged for her; they too refused to see any justification for her. Madame Nathan had decided that the marriage should take place, and her vanity was hurt at its missing fire through Antoinette's fault. She thought her scruples certainly quite praiseworthy, but exaggerated and sentimental; and thereafter

she lost interest in the silly little goose. It was necessary for her always to be helping people, with or without their consent, and she quickly found another protégée to absorb, for the time being, all the interest and devotion which she had to expend.

Olivier knew nothing of his sister's sad little romance. He was a sentimental, irresponsible boy, living in his dreams and fancies. It was impossible to depend on him in spite of his intelligence and charm and his very real tenderheartedness. Often he would fling away the results of months of work by his irresponsibility, or in a fit of discouragement, or by some boyish freak, or some fancied love affair, in which he would waste all his time and energy. He would fall in love with a pretty face, that he had seen once, with coquettish little girls, whom perhaps he once met out somewhere, though they never paid any attention to him. He would be infatuated with something he had read, a poet, or a musician; he would steep himself in their works for months together, to the exclusion of everything else and the detriment of his studies. He had to be watched always, though great care had to be taken that he did not know it, for he was easily wounded. There was always a danger of a seizure. He had the feverish excitement, the want of balance, the uneasy trepidation, that are often found in those who have a consumptive tendency. The doctor had not concealed the danger from Antoinette. The sickly plant, transplanted from the provinces to Paris, needed fresh air and light. Antoinette could not provide them. They had not enough money to be able to go away from Paris during the holidays. All the rest of their year every day in the week was full, and

on Sundays they were so tired that they never wanted to go out, except to a concert.

There were Sundays in the summer when Antoinette would make an effort and drag Olivier off to the woods outside Paris, near Chaville or Saint-Cloud. But the woods were full of noisy couples, singing music-hall songs, and littering the place with greasy bits of paper; they did not find the divine solitude which purifies and gives rest. And in the evening when they turned homewards they had to suffer the roar and clatter of the trains, the dirty, crowded, low, narrow, dark carriages of the suburban lines, the coarseness of certain things they saw, the noisy, singing, shouting, smelly people, and the reek of tobacco smoke. Neither Antoinette nor Olivier could understand the people, and they would return home disgusted and demoralized. Olivier would beg Antoinette not to go for Sunday walks again; and for some time Antoinette would not have the heart to go again. And then she would insist, though it was even more disagreeable to her than to Olivier; but she thought it necessary for her brother's health. She would force him to go out once more. But their new experience would be no better than the last, and Olivier would protest bitterly. So they stayed shut up in the stifling town, and, in their prison-yard, they sighed for the open fields.

Olivier had reached the end of his schooldays. The examinations for the *École Normale* were over. It was quite time. Antoinette was very tired. She was counting on his success; her brother had everything in his favor. At school he

was regarded as one of the best pupils; and all his masters were agreed in praising his industry and intelligence, except for a certain want of mental discipline which made it difficult for him to bend to any sort of plan. But the responsibility of it weighed on Olivier so heavily that he lost his head as the examination came near. He was worn out, and paralyzed by the fear of failure, and a morbid shyness that crept over him. He trembled at the thought of appearing before the examiners in public. He had always suffered from shyness; in class he would blush and choke when he had to speak; at first he could hardly do more than answer his name. And it was much more easy for him to reply impromptu than when he knew that he was going to be questioned; the thought of it made him ill; his mind rushed ahead picturing every detail of the ordeal as it would happen; and the longer he had to wait, the more he was obsessed by it. It might be said that he passed every examination at least twice; for he passed it in his dreams on the night before and expended all his energy, so that he had none left for the real examination.

But he did not even reach the *viva voce*, the very thought of which had sent him into a cold sweat the night before. In the written examination on a philosophical subject, which at any ordinary time would have sent him flying off, he could not even manage to squeeze out a couple of pages in six hours. For the first few hours his brain was empty; he could think of nothing, nothing. It was like a blank wall against which he hurled himself in vain. Then, an hour before the end, the wall was rent and a few rays of light shone through the crevices. He wrote an excellent short essay, but it was not enough to place him. When Antoinette saw the despair on his face as he came out, she foresaw the inevitable blow, and she

was as despairing as he; but she did not show it. Even in the most desperate situations she had always an inexhaustible capacity for hope.

Olivier was rejected.

He was crushed by it. Antoinette pretended to smile as though it were nothing of any importance; but her lips trembled. She consoled her brother, and told him that it was an easily remedied misfortune, and that he would be certain to pass next year, and win a better place. She did not tell him how vital it was to her that he should have passed that year, or how utterly worn out she felt in soul and body, or how uneasy she felt about fighting through another year like that. But she had to go on. If she were to go away before Olivier had passed he would never have the courage to go on fighting alone; he would succumb.

She concealed her weariness from him, and even redoubled her efforts. She wore herself to skin and bone to let him have amusement and change during the holidays so that he might resume work with greater energy and confidence. But at the very outset her small savings had to be broken into, and, to make matters worse, she lost some of her most profitable pupils.

Another year!... Within sight of the final ordeal they were almost at breaking-point. Above all, they had to live, and discover some other means of scraping along. Antoinette accepted a situation as a governess in Germany which had been offered her through the Nathans. It was the very last thing she would have thought of, but nothing else offered at the time, and she could not wait. She had never left her brother for a single day during the last six years; and she

could not imagine what life would be like without seeing and hearing him from day to day. Olivier was terrified when he thought of it; but he dared not say anything; it was he who had brought it about; if he had passed Antoinette would not have been reduced to such an extremity; he had no right to say anything, or to take into account his own grief at the parting; it was for her to decide.

They spent the last days together in dumb anguish, as though one of them were about to die; they hid away from each other when their sorrow was too much for them. Antoinette gazed into Olivier's eyes for counsel. If he had said to her; "Don't go!" she would have stayed, although she had to go. Up to the very last moment, in the cab in which they drove to the station, she was prepared to break her resolution; she felt that she could never go through with it. At a word from him, one word!... But he said nothing. Like her, he set his teeth and would not budge.—She made him promise to write to her every day, and to conceal nothing from her, and to send for her if he were ever in the least danger.

They parted. While Olivier returned with a heavy heart to his school, where it had been agreed that he should board, the train carried Antoinette, crushed and sorrowful, towards Germany. Lying awake and staring through the night they felt the minutes dragging them farther and farther apart, and they called to each other in whispering voices.

Antoinette was fearful of the new world to which she was going. She had changed much in six years. She who had once been so bold and afraid of nothing had grown so used to silence and isolation that it hurt her to go out into the world again. The laughing, gay, chattering Antoinette of the old happy times had passed away with them. Unhappiness had made her sensitive and shy. No doubt living with Olivier had infected her with his timidity. She had had hardly anybody to talk to except her brother. She was scared by the least little thing, and was really in a panic when she had to pay a call. And so it was a nervous torture to her to think that she was now going to live among strangers, to have to talk to them, to be always with them. The poor girl had no more real vocation for teaching than her brother; she did her work conscientiously, but her heart was not in it, and she had not the support of feeling that there was any use in it. She was made to love and not to teach. And no one cared for her love.

Nowhere was her capacity for love less in demand than in her new situation in Germany. The Grünebaums, whose children she was engaged to teach French, took not the slightest interest in her. They were haughty and familiar, indifferent and indiscreet; they paid fairly well; and, as a result, they regarded everybody in their payment as being under an obligation to them, and thought they could do just as they liked. They treated Antoinette as a superior sort of servant and allowed her hardly any liberty. She did not even have a room to herself; she slept in a room adjoining that of the children and had to leave the door open all night. She was

never alone. They had no respect for her need of taking refuge every now and then within herself—the sacred right of every human being to preserve an inner sanctuary of solitude. The only happiness she had lay in correspondence and communion with her brother; she made use of every moment of liberty she could snatch. But even that was encroached upon. As soon as she began to write they would prowl about in her room and ask her what she was writing. When she was reading a letter they would ask her what was in it; by their persistent impertinent curiosity they found out about her "little brother." She had to hide from them. Too shameful sometimes were the expedients to which she had to resort, and the holes and crannies in which she had to hide, in order to be able to read Olivier's letters unobserved. If she left a letter lying in her room she was sure it would be read; and as she had nothing she could lock except her box, she had to carry any papers she did not want to have read about with her; they were always prying into her business and her intimate affairs, and they were always fishing for her secret thoughts. It was not that the Grünebaums were really interested in her, only they thought that, as they paid her, she was their property. They were not malicious about it; indiscretion was with them an incurable habit; they were never offended with each other.

Nothing could have been more intolerable to Antoinette than such espionage, such a lack of moral modesty, which made it impossible for her to escape even for an hour a day from their curiosity. The Grünebaums were hurt by the haughty reserve with which she treated them. Naturally they found highly moral reasons to justify their vulgar curiosity, and to condemn Antoinette's desire to be immune from it.

“It was their duty,” they thought, “to know the private life of a girl living under their roof, as a member of their household, to whom they had intrusted the education of their children; they were responsible for her.”—(That is the sort of thing that so many mistresses say of their servants, mistresses whose “responsibility” does not go so far as to spare the unhappy girls any fatigue or work that must revolt them, but is entirely limited to denying them every sort of pleasure.)—“And that Antoinette should refuse to acknowledge that duty, imposed on them by conscience, could only show,” they concluded, “that she was conscious of being not altogether beyond reproach; an honest girl has nothing to conceal.”

So Antoinette lived under a perpetual persecution, against which she was always on her guard, so that it made her seem even more cold and reserved than she was.

Every day her brother wrote her a twelve-page letter; and she contrived to write to him every day even if it were only a few lines. Olivier tried hard to be brave and not to show his grief too clearly. But he was bored and dull. His life had always been so bound up with his sister’s that, now that she was torn from him, he seemed to have lost part of himself; he could not use his arms, or his legs, or his brains, he could not walk, or play the piano, or work, or do anything, not even dream—except through her. He slaved away at his books from morning to night; but it was no good; his thoughts were elsewhere; he would be suffering, or thinking of her, or of the morrow’s letter; he would sit staring at the clock, waiting for the day’s letter; and when it arrived his fingers would tremble with joy—with fear, too—as he tore open the envelope. Never did lover tremble with more tenderness and

anxiety at a letter from his mistress. He would hide away, like Antoinette, to read his letters; he would carry them about with him; and at night he always had the last letter under his pillow, and he would touch it from time to time to make sure that it was still there, during the long, sleepless nights when he lay awake dreaming of his dear sister. How far removed from her he felt! He felt that most dreadfully when Antoinette's letters were delayed by the post and came a day late. Two days, two nights, between them!... He exaggerated the time and the distance because he had never traveled. His imagination would take fire:

"Heavens! If she were to fall ill! There would be time for her to die before he could see her.... Why had she not written to him, just a line or two, the day before?... Was she ill?... Yes. She was surely ill...." He would choke.—More often still he would be terrified of dying away from her, dying alone, among people who did not care, in the horrible school, in grim, gray Paris. He would make himself ill with the thought of it.... "Should he write and tell her to come back?"—But then he would be ashamed of his cowardice. Besides, as soon as he began to write to her it gave him such joy to be in communion with her that for a moment he would forget his suffering. It seemed to him that he could see her, hear her voice; he would tell her everything; never had he spoken to her so intimately, so passionately, when they had been together; he would call her "my true, brave, dear, kind, beloved, little sister," and say, "I love you so." Indeed they were real love-letters.

Their tenderness was sweet and comforting to Antoinette; they were all the air she had to breathe. If they did not come in the morning at the usual time she would be miserable.

Once or twice it happened that the Grünebaums, from carelessness, or—who knows?—from a wicked desire to tease, forgot to give them to her until the evening, and once even until the next morning; and she worked herself into a fever.—On New Year's Day they had the same idea, without telling each other; they planned a surprise, and each sent a long telegram—(at vast expense)—and their messages arrived at the same time.—Olivier always consulted Antoinette about his work and his troubles; Antoinette gave him advice, and encouragement, and fortified him with her strength, though indeed she had not really enough for herself.

She was stifled in the foreign country, where she knew nobody, and nobody was interested in her, except the wife of a professor, lately come to the town, who also felt out of her element. The good creature was kind and motherly, and sympathetic with the brother and sister who loved each other so and had to live apart—(for she had dragged part of her story out of Antoinette);—but she was so noisy, so commonplace, she was so lacking—though quite innocently—in tact and discretion that aristocratic little Antoinette was irritated and drew back. She had no one in whom she could confide and so all her troubles were pent up, and weighed heavily upon her; sometimes she thought she must give way under them; but she set her teeth and struggled on. Her health suffered; she grew very thin. Her brother's letters became more and more down-hearted. In a fit of depression he wrote:

"Come back, come back, come back!..."

But he had hardly sent the letter off than he was ashamed of it and wrote another begging Antoinette to tear up the first and give no further thought to it. He even pretended to be in

good spirits and not to be wanting his sister. It hurt his umbrageous vanity to think that he might seem incapable of doing without her.

Antoinette was not deceived; she read his every thought; but she did not know what to do. One day she almost went to him; she went to the station to find out what time the train left for Paris. And then she said to herself that it was madness; the money she was earning was enough to pay for Olivier's board; they must hold on as long as they could. She was not strong enough to make up her mind; in the morning her courage would spring forth again; but as the day dragged towards evening her strength would fail her and she would think of flying to him. She was homesick,—longing for the country that had treated her so hardly, the country that enshrined all the relics of her past life,—and she was aching to hear the language that her brother spoke, the language in which she told her love for him.

Then it was that a company of French actors passed through the little German town. Antoinette, who rarely visited the theater—(she had neither time nor taste for it)—was seized with an irresistible longing to hear her own language spoken, to take refuge in France.

The rest is known.[1]

There were no seats left in the theater; she met the young musician, Jean-Christophe, whom she did not know, and he, seeing her disappointment, offered to share with her a box which he had to give away; in her confusion she accepted. Her presence with Christophe set tongues wagging in the little town; and the malicious rumors came at once to the ears of the Grünebaums, who, being already inclined to believe

anything ill of the young Frenchwoman, and furious with Christophe as a result of certain events which have been narrated elsewhere, dismissed Antoinette without more ado.

She, who was so chaste and modest, she, whose whole life had been absorbed by her love for her brother and never yet had been besmirched with one thought of evil, nearly died of shame, when she understood the nature of the charge against her. Not for one moment was she resentful against Christophe. She knew that he was as innocent as she, and that, if he had injured her, he had meant only to be kind; she was grateful to him. She knew nothing of him, save that he was a musician, and that he was much maligned; but, in her ignorance of life and men, she had a natural intuition about people, which unhappiness had sharpened, and in her queer, boorish companion she had recognized a quality of candor equal to her own, and a sturdy kindness, the mere memory of which was comforting and good to think on. The evil she had heard of him did not at all affect the confidence which Christophe had inspired in her. Being herself a victim she had no doubt that he was in the same plight, suffering, as she did, though for a longer time, from the malevolence of the townspeople who insulted him. And as she always forgot herself in the thought of others the idea of what Christophe must have suffered distracted her mind a little from her own torment. Nothing in the world could have induced her to try to see him again, or to write to him; her modesty and pride forbade it. She told herself that he did not know the harm he had done, and, in her gentleness, she hoped that he would never know it.

She left Germany. An hour away from the town it chanced that the train in which she was traveling passed the

train by which Christophe was returning from a neighboring town where he had been spending the day.

For a few minutes their carriages stopped opposite each other, and in the silence of the night they saw each other, but did not speak. What could they have said save a few trivial words? That would have been a profanation of the indefinable feeling of common pity and mysterious sympathy which had sprung up in them, and was based on nothing save the sureness of their inward vision. During those last moments, when, still strangers, they gazed into each other's eyes, they saw in each other things which never had appeared to any other soul among the people with whom they lived. Everything must pass; the memory of words, kisses, passionate embraces; but the contact of souls, which have once met and hailed each other amid the throng of passing shapes, that never can be blotted out. Antoinette bore it with her in the innermost recesses of her heart—that poor heart, so swathed about with sorrow and sad thoughts, from out the midst of which there smiled a misty light, which seemed to steal sweetly from the earth, a pale and tender light like that which floods the Elysian Shades of Gluck.

She returned to Olivier. It was high time she returned to him. He had just fallen ill; and the poor, nervous, unhappy little creature who trembled at the thought of illness before it came—now that he was really ill, refused to write to his sister for fear of upsetting her. But he called to her, prayed for her coming as for a miracle.

When the miracle happened he was lying in the school infirmary, feverish and wandering. When he saw her he made no sound. How often had he seen her enter in his fevered fancy!... He sat up in bed, gaping, and trembling lest it should be once more only an illusion. And when she sat down on the bed by his side, when she took him in her arms and he had taken her in his, when he felt her soft cheek against his lips, and her hands still cold from traveling by night in his, when he was quite, quite sure that it was his dear sister he began to weep. He could do nothing else; he was still the "little cry-baby" that he had been when he was a child. He clung to her and held her close for fear she should go away from him again. How changed they were! How sad they looked!... No matter! They were together once more; everything was lit up, the infirmary, the school, the gloomy day; they clung to each other, they would never let each other go. Before she had said a word he made her swear that she would not go away again. He had no need to make her swear; no, she would never go away again; they had been too unhappy away from each other; their mother was right; anything was better than being parted. Even poverty, even death, so only they were together.

They took rooms. They wanted to take their old little flat, horrible though it was; but it was occupied. Their new rooms also looked out on to a yard; but above a wall they could see the top of a little acacia and grew fond of it at once, as a friend from the country, a prisoner like themselves, in the paved wilderness of the city. Olivier quickly recovered his health, or rather, what he was pleased to call his health;—(for what was health to him would have been illness to a stronger boy).—Antoinette's unhappy stay in Germany had helped

her to save a little money; and she made some more by the translation of a German book which a publisher accepted. For a time, then, they were free of financial anxiety; and all would be well if Olivier passed his examination at the end of the year.—But if he did not pass?

No sooner had they settled down to the happiness of being together again than they were once more obsessed by the prospect of the examination. They tried hard not to think about it, but in vain, they were always coming back to it. The fixed idea haunted them, even when they were seeking distraction from their thoughts; at concerts it would suddenly leap out at them in the middle of the performance; at night when they woke up it would lie there like a yawning gulf before them. In addition to his eagerness to please his sister and repay her for the sacrifice of her youth that she had made for his sake, Olivier lived in terror of his military service which he could not escape if he were rejected;—(at that time admission to the great schools was still admitted as an exemption from service).—He had an invincible disgust for the physical and moral promiscuity, the kind of intellectual degradation, which, rightly or wrongly, he saw in barrack-life. Every pure and aristocratic quality in him revolted from such compulsion, and it seemed to him that death would be preferable. In these days it is permitted to make light of such feelings, and even to decry them in the name of a social morality which, for the moment, has become a religion; but they are blind who deny it; there is no more profound suffering than that of the violation of moral solitude by the coarse liberal Communism of the present day.

The examinations began. Olivier was almost incapable of going in; he was unwell, and he was so fearful of the torment

he would have to undergo, whether he passed or not, that he almost longed to be taken seriously ill. He did quite well in the written examination. But he had a cruel time waiting to hear the results. Following the immemorial custom of the country of Revolutions, which is the worst country in the world for red-tape and routine, the examinations were held in July during the hottest days of the year, as though it were deliberately intended to finish off the luckless candidates, who were already staggering under the weight of cramming a monstrous list of subjects, of which even the examiners did not know a tenth part. The written examinations were held on the day after the holiday of the 14th July, when the whole city was upside down, and making merry, to the undoing of the young men who were by no means inclined to be merry, and asked for nothing but silence. In the square outside the house booths were set up, rifles cracked at the miniature ranges, merry-go-rounds creaked and grunted, and hideous steam organs roared from morning till night. The idiotic noise went on for a week. Then a President of the Republic, by way of maintaining his popularity, granted the rowdy merry-makers another three days' holiday. It cost him nothing; he did not hear the row. But Olivier and Antoinette were distracted and appalled by the noise, and had to keep their windows shut, so that their rooms were stifling, and stop their ears, trying vainly to escape the shrill, insistent, idiotic tunes which were ground out from morning till night and stabbed through their brains like daggers, so that they were reduced to a pitiful condition.

The *viva voce* examination began immediately after the publication of the first results. Olivier begged Antoinette not to go. She waited at the door,—much more anxious than he.

Of course he never told her what he thought of his performance. He tormented her by telling her what he had said and what he had not said.

At last the final results were published. The names of the candidates were posted in the courtyard of the Sorbonne. Antoinette would not let Olivier go alone. As they left the house, they thought, though they did not say it, that when they came back they would *know*, and perhaps they would regret their present fears, when at least there was still hope. When they came in sight of the Sorbonne they felt their legs give way under them. Brave little Antoinette said to her brother:

"Please not so fast...."

Olivier looked at his sister, and she forced a smile. He said:

"Shall we sit down for a moment on the seat here?"

He would gladly have gone no further. But, after a moment, she pressed his hand and said:

"It's nothing, dear. Let us go on."

They could not find the list at first. They read several others in which the name of Jeannin did not appear. When at last they saw it, they did not take it in at first; they read it several times and could not believe it. Then when they were quite sure that it was true that Jeannin was Olivier, that Jeannin had passed, they could say nothing; they hurried home; she took his arm, and held his wrist, and leaned her weight on him; they almost ran, and saw nothing of what was going on about them; as they crossed the boulevard they were almost run over. They said over and over again:

“Dear.... Darling.... Dear.... Dear....”

They tore upstairs to their rooms and then they flung their arms round each other. Antoinette took her brother’s hand and led him to the photographs of their father and mother, which hung on the wall near her bed, in a corner of her room, which was a sort of sanctuary to her; they knelt down before them; and with tears in their eyes they prayed.

Antoinette ordered a jolly little dinner; but they could not eat a morsel; they were not hungry. They spent the evening, Olivier kneeling by his sister’s side while she petted him like a child. They hardly spoke at all. They could not even be happy, for they were too worn out. They went to bed before nine o’clock and slept the sleep of the just.

Next day Antoinette had a frightful headache, but there was such a load taken from her heart! Olivier felt, for the first time in his life, that he could breathe freely. He was saved, she was saved, she had accomplished her task; and he had shown himself to be not unworthy of his sister’s expectations!... For the first time for years and years they allowed themselves a little laziness. They stayed in bed till twelve talking through the wall, with the door between their rooms open; when they looked in the mirror they saw their faces happy and tired-looking; they smiled, and threw kisses to each other, and dozed off again, and watched each other’s sleep, and lay weary and worn with hardly the strength to do more than mutter tender little scraps of words.

Antoinette had always put by a little money, sou by sou, so as to have some small reserve in case of illness. She did not tell her brother the surprise she had in store for him. The day after his success she told him that they were going to spend a month in Switzerland to make up for all their years of trouble and hardship. Now that Olivier was assured of three years at the *École Normale* at the expense of the State, and then, when he left the *École*, of finding a post, they could be extravagant and spend all their savings. Olivier shouted for joy when she told him. Antoinette was even more happy than he,—happy in her brother's happiness,—happy to think that she was going to see the country once more; she had so longed for it.

It took them some time to get ready for the journey, but the work of preparation was an unending joy. It was well on in August when they set out. They were not used to traveling. Olivier did not sleep the night before. And he did not sleep in the train. The whole day they had been fearful of missing the train. They were in a feverish hurry, they had been jostled about at the station, and finally huddled into a second-class carriage, where they could not even lean back to go to sleep; —(that is one of the privileges of which the eminently democratic French companies deprive poor travelers, so that rich travelers may have the pleasure of thinking that they have a monopoly of it).—Olivier did not sleep a wink; he was not sure that they were in the right train, and he looked out for the name of every station. Antoinette slept lightly and woke up very frequently; the jolting of the train made her head bob. Olivier watched her by the light of the funereal lamp, which shone at the top of the moving sarcophagus; and he was suddenly struck by the change in her face. Her eyes

were hollow; her childish lips were half-open from sheer weariness; her skin was sallow, and there were little wrinkles on her cheeks, the marks of the sad years of sorrow and disillusion. She looked old and ill.—And, indeed, she was so tired! If she had dared she would have postponed their journey. But she did not like to spoil her brother's pleasure; she tried to persuade herself that she was only tired, and that the country would make her well again. She was fearful lest she should fall ill on the way.—She felt that he was looking at her; and she suddenly flung off the drowsiness that was creeping over her, and opened her eyes,—eyes still young, still clear and limpid, across which, from time to time, there passed an involuntary look of pain, like shadows on a little lake. He asked her in a whisper, anxiously and tenderly, how she was; she pressed his hand and assured him that she was well. A word of love revived her.

Then, when the rosy dawn tinged the pale country between Dôle and Pontarlier, the sight of the waking fields, and the gay sun rising from the earth,—the sun, who, like themselves, had escaped from the prison of the streets, and the grimy houses, and the thick smoke of Paris;—the waving fields wrapped in the light mist of their milk-white breath; the little things they passed; a little village belfry, a glimpse of a winding stream, a blue line of hills hovering on the far horizon; the tinkling, moving sound of the angelus borne from afar on the wind, when the train stopped in the midst of the sleeping country; the solemn shapes of a herd of cows browsing on a slope above the railway,—all absorbed Antoinette and her brother, to whom it all seemed new. They were like parched trees, drinking in ecstasy the rain from heaven.

Then, in the early morning, they reached the Swiss Customs, where they had to get out. A little station in a bare country-side. They were almost worn out by their sleepless night, and the cold, dewy freshness of the dawn made them shiver; but it was calm, and the sky was clear, and the fragrant air of the fields was about them, upon their lips, on their tongues, down their throats, flowing down into their lungs like a cooling stream; and they stood by a table, out in the open air, and drank comforting hot coffee with creamy milk, heavenly sweet, and tasting of the grass and the flowers of the fields.

They climbed up into the Swiss carriage, the novel arrangement of which gave them a childish pleasure. But Antoinette was so tired! She could not understand why she should feel so ill. Why was everything about her so beautiful, so absorbing, when she could take so little pleasure in it? Was it not all just what she had been dreaming for years; a journey with her brother, with all anxiety for the future left behind, dear mother Nature?... What was the matter with her? She was annoyed with herself, and forced herself to admire and share her brother's naïve delight.

They stopped at Thun. They were to go up into the mountains next day. But that night in the hotel, Antoinette was stricken with a fever, and violent illness, and pains in her head. Olivier was at his wits' ends, and spent a night of frightful anxiety. He had to send for a doctor in the morning —(an unforeseen expense which was no light tax on their slender purse).—The doctor could find nothing immediately serious, but said that she was run down, and that her constitution was undermined. There could be no question of their going on. The doctor forbade Antoinette to get up all

day; and he thought they would perhaps have to stay at Thun for some time. They were very downcast—though very glad to have got off so cheaply after all their fears. But it was hard to have come so far to be shut up in a nasty hotel-room into which the sunlight poured so that it was like a hothouse. Antoinette insisted on her brother going out. He went a few yards from the hotel, saw the beautiful green Aar, and, hovering in the distance against the sky, a white peak; he bubbled over with joy; but he could not keep it to himself. He rushed back to his sister's room, and told her excitedly what he had just seen; and when she expressed her surprise at his coming back so soon and made him promise to go out again, he said, as once before he had said when he came back from the *Châtelet* concert:

"No, no. It is too beautiful; it hurts me to see it without you."

That feeling was not new to them; they knew that they had to be together to enjoy anything wholly. But they always loved to hear it said. His tender words did Antoinette more good than any medicine. She smiled now, languidly, happily. —And after a good night, although it was not very wise to go on so soon, she decided that they would get away very early, without telling the doctor, who would only want to keep them back. The pure air and the joy of seeing so much beauty made her stronger, so that she did not have to pay for her rashness, and without any further misadventure they reached the end of their journey—a mountain village, high above the lake, some distance away from Spiez.

There they spent three or four weeks in a little hotel. Antoinette did not have any further attack of fever, but she

never got really well. She still felt a heaviness, an intolerable weight, in her head, and she was always unwell. Olivier often asked her about her health; he longed to see her grow less pale; but he was intoxicated by the beauty of the country, and instinctively avoided all melancholy thoughts; when she assured him that she was really quite well, he tried to believe that it was true,—although he knew perfectly well that it was not so. And she enjoyed to the full her brother's exuberance and the fine air, and the all-pervading peace. How good it was to rest at last after those terrible years!

Olivier tried to induce her to go for walks with him; she would have been happy to join him; but on several occasions when she had bravely set out, she had been forced to stop after twenty minutes, to regain her breath, and rest her heart. So he went out alone,—climbing the safe peaks, though they filled her with terror until he came home again. Or they would go for little walks together; she would lean on his arm, and walk slowly, and they would talk, and he would suddenly begin to chatter, and laugh, and discuss his plans, and make quips and jests. From the road on the hillside above the valley they would watch the white clouds reflected in the still lake, and the boats moving like insects on the surface of a pond; they would drink in the warm air and the music of the goat-bells, borne on the gusty wind, and the smell of the new-mown hay and the warm resin. And they would dream together of the past and the future, and the present which seemed to them to be the most unreal and intoxicating of dreams. Sometimes Antoinette would be infected with her brother's jolly childlike humor; they would chase each other and roll about on the grass. And one day he saw her laughing as she used to do when they were children,

madly, carelessly, laughter clear and bubbling as a spring, such as he had not heard for many years.

But, most often, Olivier could not resist the pleasure of going for long walks. He would be sorry for it at once, and later he had bitterly to regret that he had not made enough of those dear days with his sister. Even in the hotel he would often leave her alone. There was a party of young men and girls in the hotel, from whom they had at first kept apart. Then Olivier was attracted by them, and shyly joined their circle. He had been starved of friendship; outside his sister he had hardly known any one but his rough schoolfellows and their girls, who repelled him. It was very sweet to him to be among well-mannered, charming, merry boys and girls of his own age. Although he was very shy, he was naïvely curious, sentimental, and affectionate, and easily bewitched by the little burning, flickering fires that shine in a woman's eyes. And in spite of his shyness, women liked him. His frank longing to love and be loved gave him, unknown to himself, a youthful charm, and made him find words and gestures and affectionate little attentions, the very awkwardness of which made them all the more attractive. He had the gift of sympathy. Although in his isolation his intelligence had taken on an ironical tinge which made him see the vulgarity of people and their defects, which he often loathed,—yet in their presence he saw nothing but their eyes, in which he would see the expression of a living being, who one day would die, a being who had only one life, even as he, and, even as he, would lose it all too soon; then of that creature he would involuntarily be fond; in that moment nothing in the world could make him do anything to hurt; whether he liked it or not, he had to be kind and amiable. He was weak; and,

in being so, he was sure to please the “world” which pardons every vice, and even every virtue,—except one; force, on which all the rest depend.

Antoinette did not join them. Her health, her tiredness, her apparently causeless moral collapse, paralyzed her. Through the long years of anxiety and ceaseless toil, exhausting body and soul, the positions of the brother and sister had been inverted; now it was she who felt far removed from the world, far from everything and everybody, so far!... She could not break down the wall between them; all their chatter, their noise, their laughter, their little interests, bored her, wearied her, almost hurt her. It hurt her to be so; she would have loved to go with the other girls, to share their interests and laugh with them.... But she could not!... Her heart ached; she seemed to be as one dead. In the evening she would shut herself up in her room; and often she would not even turn on the light; she would sit there in the dark, while downstairs Olivier would be amusing himself, surrendering to the current of one of those romantic little love-affairs to which he so easily succumbed. She would only shake off her torpor when she heard him coming upstairs, laughing and talking to the girls, hanging about saying good-night outside their rooms, being unable to tear himself away. Then in the darkness Antoinette would smile, and get up to turn on the light. The sound of her brother’s laughter revived her.

Autumn was setting in. The sun was dying down. Nature was a-weary. Under the thick mists and clouds of October the colors were fading fast; snow fell on the mountains; mists descended upon the plains. The visitors went away one by one, and then several at a time. And it was sad to see even the friends of a little while going away, but sadder still to see

the passing of the summer, the time of peace and happiness which had been an oasis in their lives. They went for a last walk together, on a cloudy autumn day, through the forest on the mountain-side. They did not speak; they mused sadly, as they walked along with the collars of their cloaks turned up, clinging close together; their hands were locked. There was silence in the wet woods, and in silence the trees wept. From the depths there came the sweet plaintive cry of a solitary bird who felt the coming of winter. Through the mist came the clear tinkling of the goat-bells, far away, so faint they could hardly hear it, so faint it was as though it came up from their inmost hearts....

They returned to Paris. They were both sad. Antoinette was no better.

They had to set to work to prepare Olivier's wardrobe for the *École*. Antoinette spent the last of her little store of money, and even sold some of her jewels. What did it matter? He would repay her later on. And then, she would need so little when he was gone from her!... She tried not to think of what it would be like when he was gone; she worked away at his clothes, and put into the work all the tenderness she had for her brother, and she had a presentiment that it would be the last thing she would do for him.

During the last days together they were never apart; they were fearful of wasting the tiniest moment. On their last evening they sat up very late by the fireside, Antoinette occupying the only armchair, and Olivier a stool at her feet,

and she made a fuss of him like the spoiled child he was. He was dreading—though he was curious about it, too—the new life upon which he was to enter. Antoinette thought only that it was the end of their dear life together, and wondered fearfully what would become of her. As though he were trying to make the thought even more bitter for her, he was more tender than ever he had been, with the innocent instinctive coquetry of those who always wait until they are just going to show themselves at their best and most charming. He went to the piano and played her their favorite passages from Mozart and Gluck—those visions of tender happiness and serene sorrow with which so much of their past life was bound up.

When the time came for them to part, Antoinette accompanied Olivier as far as the gates of the *École*. Then she returned. Once more she was alone. But now it was not, as when she had gone away to Germany, a separation which she could bring to an end at will when she could bear it no longer. Now it was she who remained behind, he who went away; it was he who had gone away, for a long, long time—perhaps for life. And yet her love for him was so maternal that at first she thought less of herself than of him; she thought only of how different the first few days would be for him, of the strict rules of the *École*, and was preoccupied with those harmless little worries which so easily assume alarming proportions in the minds of people who live alone and are always tormenting themselves about those whom they love. Her anxiety did at least have this advantage, that it distracted her thoughts from her own loneliness. She had already begun to think of the half-hour when she would be able to see him next day in the visitors' room. She arrived a

quarter of an hour too soon. He was very nice to her, but he was altogether taken up with all the new things he had seen. And during the following days, when she went to see him, full of the most tender anxiety, the contrast between what those meetings meant for her and what they meant for him was more and more marked. For her they were her whole life. For Olivier—no doubt he loved Antoinette dearly; but it was too much to expect him to think only of her, as she thought of him. Once or twice he came down late to the visitors' room. One day, when she asked him if he were at all unhappy, he said that he was nothing of the kind. Such little things as that stabbed Antoinette to the heart.—She was angry with herself for being so sensitive, and accused herself of selfishness; she knew quite well that it would be absurd, even wrong and unnatural, for him to be unable to do without her, and for her to be unable to do without him, and to have no other object in life. Yes; she knew all that. But what was the good of her knowing it? She could not help it if for the last ten years her whole life had been bound up in that one idea; her brother. Now that the one interest of her life had been torn from her, she had nothing left.

She tried bravely to keep herself occupied and to take up her music and read her beloved books.... But alas! how empty were Shakespeare and Beethoven without Olivier!...—Yes; no doubt they were beautiful.... But Olivier was not there. What is the good of beautiful things if the eyes of the beloved are not there to see them? What is the use of beauty, what is the use even of joy, if they cannot be won through the heart of the beloved?

If she had been stronger she would have tried to build up her life anew, and give it another object. But she was at the

end of her tether. Now that there was nothing to force her to hold on, at all costs, the effort of will to which she had subjected herself snapped; she collapsed. The illness, which had been gaining grip on her for over a year, during which she had fought it down by force of will, was now left to take its course.

She spent her evenings alone in her room, by the spent fire, a prey to her thoughts; she had neither the courage to light the fire again, nor the strength to go to bed; she would sit there far into the night, dozing, dreaming, shivering. She would live through her life again, and summon up the beloved dead and her lost illusions; and she would be terribly sad at the thought of her lost youth, without love or hope of love. A dumb, aching sorrow, obscure, unconfessed.... A child laughed in the street; its little feet pattered up to the floor below.... Its little feet trampled on her heart.... She would be beset with doubts and evil thoughts; her soul in its weakness would be contaminated by the soul of that city of selfish pleasure.—She would fight down her regrets, and burn with shame at certain longings which she thought evil and wicked; she could not understand what it was that hurt her so, and attributed it to her evil instincts. Poor little Ophelia, devoured by a mysterious evil, she felt with horror dark and uneasy desires mounting from the depths of her being, from the very pit of life. She could not work, and she had given up most of her pupils; she, who was so plucky, and had always risen so early, now lay in bed sometimes until the afternoon; she had no more reason for getting up than for going to bed; she ate little or nothing. Only on her brother’s holidays—Thursday afternoons and Sundays—she would make an effort to be her old self with him.

He saw nothing. He was too much taken up with his new life to notice his sister much. He was at that period of boyhood when it was difficult for him to be communicative, and he always seemed to be indifferent to things outside himself which would only be his concern in later days.—People of riper years sometimes seem to be more open to impressions, and to take a simpler delight in life and Nature, than young people between twenty and thirty. And so it is often said that young people are not so young in heart as they were, and have lost all sense of enjoyment. That is often a mistaken idea. It is not because they have no sense of enjoyment that they seem less sensitive. It is because their whole being is often absorbed by passion, ambition, desire, some fixed idea. When the body is worn and has no more to expect from life, then the emotions become disinterested and fall into their place; and then once more the source of childish tears is reopened.—Olivier was preoccupied with a thousand little things, the most outstanding of which was an absurd little passion,—(he was always a victim to them),—which so obsessed him as to make him blind and indifferent to everything else.—Antoinette did not know what was happening to her brother; she only saw that he was drawing away from her. That was not altogether Olivier's fault. Sometimes when he came he would be glad to see her and start talking. He would come in. Then all of a sudden he would dry up. Her affectionate anxiety, the eagerness with which she clung to him, and drank in his words, and overwhelmed him with little attentions,—all her excess of tenderness and querulous devotion would deprive him utterly of any desire to be warm and open with her. He might have seen that Antoinette was not in a normal condition. Nothing could be farther from her usual tact and discretion. But he

never gave a thought to it. He would reply to her questions with a curt “Yes” or “No.” He would grow more stiff and surly, the more she tried to win him over; sometimes even he would hurt her by some brusque reply. Then she would be crushed and silent. Their day together would slip by, wasted. But hardly had he set foot outside the house on his way back to the *École* than he would be heartily ashamed of his treatment of her. He would torture himself all night as he lay awake thinking of the pain he had caused her. Sometimes even, as soon as he reached the *École*, he would write an effusive letter to his sister.—But next morning, when he read it through, he would tear it up. And Antoinette would know nothing at all about it. She would go on thinking that he had ceased to love her.

She had—if not one last joy—one last flutter of tenderness and youth, when her heart beat strongly once more; one last awakening of love in her, and hope of happiness, hope of life. It was quite ridiculous, so utterly unlike her tranquil nature! It could never have been but for her abnormal condition, the state of fear and over-excitement which was the precursor of illness.

She went to a concert at the *Châtelet* with her brother. As he had just been appointed musical critic to a little Review, they were in better places than those they occupied in old days, but the people among whom they sat were much more apathetic. They had stalls near the stage. Christophe Krafft was to play. Neither of them had ever heard of the German musician. When she saw him come on, the blood rushed to

her heart. Although her tired eyes could only see him through a mist, she had no doubt when he appeared; he was the unknown young man of her unhappy days in Germany. She had never mentioned him to her brother; and she had hardly even admitted his existence to her thoughts; she had been entirely absorbed by the anxieties of her life since then. Besides, she was a reasonable little Frenchwoman, and refused to admit the existence of an obscure feeling which she could not trace to its source, while it seemed to lead nowhere. There was in her a whole region of the soul, of unsuspected depths, wherein there slept many other feelings which she would have been ashamed to behold; she knew that they were there; but she looked away from them in a sort of religious terror of that Being within herself which lies beyond the mind's control.

When she had recovered a little, she borrowed her brother's glasses to look at Christophe; she saw him in profile at the conductor's stand, and she recognized his expression of forceful concentration. He was wearing a shabby old coat which fitted him very badly.—Antoinette sat in silent agony through the vagaries of that lamentable concert when Christophe joined issue with the unconcealed hostility of his audience, who were at the time ill-disposed towards German artists, and actively bored by his music. And when he appeared, after a symphony which had seemed unconscionably long, to play some piano music, he was received with cat-calls which left no room for doubt as to their displeasure at having to put up with him again. However, he began to play in the face of the bored resignation of his audience; but the uncomplimentary remarks exchanged in a loud voice by two men in the gallery

went on, to the great delight of the rest of the audience. Then he broke off; and in a childish fit of temper he played *Malbrouck s'en va t'en guerre* with one finger, got up from the piano, faced the audience, and said:

"That is all you are fit for."

The audience were for a moment so taken aback that they did not quite take in what the musician meant. Then there was an outburst of angry protests. Followed a terrible uproar. They hissed and shouted:

"Apologize! Make him apologize!"

They were all red in the face with anger, and they blew out their fury—tried to persuade themselves that they were really enraged; as perhaps they were, but the chief thing was that they were delighted to have a chance of making a row, and letting themselves go; they were like schoolboys after a few hours in school.

Antoinette could not move; she was petrified; she sat still tugging at one of her gloves. Ever since the last bars of the symphony she had had a growing presentiment of what would happen; she felt the blind hostility of the audience, felt it growing; she read Christophe's thoughts, and she was sure he would not go through to the end without an explosion; she sat waiting for the explosion while agony grew in her; she stretched every nerve to try to prevent it; and when at last it came, it was so exactly what she had foreseen that she was overwhelmed by it, as by some fatal catastrophe against which there was nothing to be done. And as she gazed at Christophe, who was staring insolently at the howling audience, their eyes met. Christophe's eyes recognized her,

greeted her, for the space of perhaps a second; but he was in such a state of excitement that his mind did not recognize her (he had not thought of her for long enough). He disappeared while the audience yelled and hissed.

She longed to cry out; to say or do something; but she was bound hand and foot, and could not stir; it was like a nightmare. It was some comfort to her to hear her brother at her side, and to know that, without having any idea of what was happening to her, he had shared her agony and indignation. Olivier was a thorough musician, and he had an independence of taste which nothing could encroach upon; when he liked a thing, he would have maintained his liking in the face of the whole world. With the very first bars of the symphony, he had felt that he was in the presence of something big, something the like of which he had never in his life come across. He went on muttering to himself with heartfelt enthusiasm:

"That's fine! That's beautiful! Beautiful!" while his sister instinctively pressed close to him, gratefully. After the symphony he applauded loudly by way of protest against the ironic indifference of the rest of the audience. When it came to the great fiasco, he was beside himself; he stood up, shouted that Christophe was right, abused the booers, and offered to fight them; it was impossible to recognize the timid Olivier. His voice was drowned in the uproar; he was told to shut up; he was called a "snotty little kid," and told to go to bed. Antoinette saw the futility of standing up to them, and took his arm and said:

"Stop! Stop! I implore you! Stop!"

He sat down in despair, and went on muttering:

"It's shameful! Shameful! The swine!..."

She said nothing and bore her suffering in silence; he thought she was insensible to the music, and said:

"Antoinette, don't *you* think it beautiful?"

She nodded. She was frozen, and could not recover herself. But when the orchestra began another piece, she suddenly got up, and whispered to her brother in a tone of savage hatred:

"Come, come! I can't bear the sight of these people!"

They hurried out. They walked along arm-in-arm, and Olivier went on talking excitedly. Antoinette said nothing.

All that day and the days following she sat alone in her room, and a feeling crept over her which at first she refused to face; but then it went on and took possession of her thoughts, like the furious throbbing of the blood in her aching temples.

Some time afterwards Olivier brought her Christophe's collection of songs, which he had just found at a publisher's. She opened it at random. On the first page on which her eyes fell she read in front of a song this dedication in German:

"*To my poor dear little victim*," together with a date.

She knew the date well.—She was so upset that she could read no farther. She put the book down and asked her brother to play, and went and shut herself up in her room. Olivier,

full of his delight in the new music, began to play without remarking his sister's emotion. Antoinette sat in the adjoining room, striving to repress the beating of her heart. Suddenly she got up and looked through a cupboard for a little account-book in which was written the date of her departure from Germany, and the mysterious date. She knew it already; yes, it was the evening of the performance at the theater to which she had been with Christophe. She lay down on her bed and closed her eyes, blushing, with her hands folded on her breast, while she listened to the dear music. Her heart was overflowing with gratitude.... Ah! Why did her head hurt her so?

When Olivier saw that his sister had not come back, he went into her room after he had done playing, and found her lying there. He asked her if she were ill. She said she was rather tired, and got up to keep him company. They talked; but she did not answer his questions at once; her thoughts seemed to be far away; she smiled, and blushed, and said, by way of excuse, that her headache was making her stupid. At last Olivier went away. She had asked him to leave the book of songs. She sat up late reading them at the piano, without playing, just lightly touching a note here and there, for fear of annoying her neighbors. But for the most part she did not even read; she sat dreaming; she was carried away by a feeling of tenderness and gratitude towards the man who had pitied her, and had read her mind and soul with the mysterious intuition of true kindness. She could not fix her thoughts. She was happy and sad—sad!... Ah! How her head ached!

She spent the night in sweet and painful dreams, a crushing melancholy. During the day she tried to go out for a

little to shake off her drowsiness. Although her head was still aching, to give herself something to do, she went and made a few purchases at a great shop. She hardly gave a thought to what she was doing. Her thoughts were always with Christophe, though she did not admit it to herself. As she came out, worried and mortally sad, through the crowd of people she saw Christophe go by on the other side of the street. He saw her, too, at the same moment. At once,—(suddenly and without thinking), she held out her hands towards him. Christophe stopped; this time he recognized her. He sprang forward to cross the road to Antoinette; and Antoinette tried to go to meet him. But the insensate current of the passing throng carried her along like a windlestraw, while the horse of an omnibus, falling on the slippery asphalt, made a sort of dyke in front of Christophe, by which the opposing streams of carriages were dammed, so that for a few moments there was an impassable barrier. Christophe tried to force his way through in spite of everything; but he was trapped in the middle of the traffic, and could not move either way. When at last he did extricate himself and managed to reach the place where he had seen Antoinette, she was gone; she had struggled vainly against the human torrent that carried her along; then she yielded to it—gave up the struggle. She felt that she was dogged by some fatality which forbade the possibility of her ever meeting Christophe; against Fate there was nothing to be done. And when she did succeed in escaping from the crowd, she made no attempt to go back; she was suddenly ashamed; what could she dare to say to him? What had she done? What must he have thought of her? She fled away home.

She did not regain assurance until she reached her room. Then she sat by the table in the dark, and had not even the strength to take off her hat or her gloves. She was miserable at having been unable to speak to him; and at the same time there glowed a new light in her heart; she was unconscious of the darkness, and unconscious of the illness that was upon her. She went on and on turning over and over every detail of the scene in the street; and she changed it about and imagined what would have happened if certain things had turned out differently. She saw herself holding out her arms to Christophe, and Christophe's expression of joy as he recognized her, and she laughed and blushed. She blushed; and then in the darkness of her room, where there was no one to see her, and she could hardly see herself, once more she held out her arms to him. Her need was too strong for her; she felt that she was losing ground, and instinctively she sought to clutch at the strong vivid life that passed so near her, and gazed so kindly at her. Her heart was full of tenderness and anguish, and through the night she cried:

"Help me! Save me!"

All in a fever she got up and lit the lamp, and took pen and paper. She wrote to Christophe. Her illness was full upon her, or she would never even have thought of writing to him, so proud she was and timid. She did not know what she wrote. She was no longer mistress of herself. She called to him, and told him that she loved him.... In the middle of her letter she stopped, appalled. She tried to write it all over again; but her impulse was gone; her mind was a blank, and her head was aching; she had a horrible difficulty in finding words; she was utterly worn out. She was ashamed.... What was the good of it all? She knew perfectly well that she was

trying to trick herself, and that she would never send the letter.... Even if she had wished to do so, how could she? She did not know Christophe's address.... Poor Christophe! And what could he do for her? Even if he knew all and were kind to her, what could he do?... It was too late! No, no; it was all in vain, the last dying struggle of a bird, blindly, desperately beating its wings. She must be resigned to it....

So for a long time she sat there by the table, lost in thought, unable to move hand or foot. It was past midnight when she struggled to her feet—bravely. Mechanically she placed the loose sheets of her letter in one of her few books, for she had the strength neither to put them in order nor to tear them up. Then she went to bed, shivering and shaking with fever. The key to the riddle lay near at hand; she felt that the will of God was to be fulfilled.—And a great peace came upon her.

On Sunday morning when Olivier came he found Antoinette in bed, delirious. A doctor was called in. He said it was acute consumption.

Antoinette had known how serious her condition was; she had discovered the cause of the moral turmoil in herself which had so alarmed her. She had been dreadfully ashamed, and it was some consolation to her to think that not she herself but her illness was the cause of it. She had managed to take a few precautions and to burn her papers and to write a letter to Madame Nathan; she appealed to her kindness to look after her brother during the first few weeks after her "death"—(she dared not write the word)....

The doctor could do nothing; the disease was too far gone, and Antoinette's constitution had been wrecked by the

years of hardship and unceasing toil.

Antoinette was quite calm. Since she had known that there was no hope her agony and torment had left her. She lay turning over in her mind all the trials and tribulations through which she had passed; she saw that her work was done and her dear Olivier saved; and she was filled with unutterable joy. She said to herself:

"I have achieved that."

And then she turned in shame from her pride and said:

"I could have done nothing alone. God has given me His aid."

And she thanked God that He had granted her life until she had accomplished her task. There was a catch at her heart as she thought that now she had to lay down her life; but she dared not complain; that would have been to feel ingratitude towards God, who might have called her away sooner. And what would have happened if she had passed away a year sooner?—She sighed, and humbled herself in gratitude.

In spite of her weakness and oppression she did not complain,—except when she was sleeping heavily, when every now and then she moaned like a little child. She watched things and people with a calm smile of resignation. It was always a joy to her to see Olivier. She would move her lips to call him, though she made no sound; she would want to hold his hand in hers; she would bid him lay his head on the pillow near hers, and then, gazing into his eves, she would go on looking at him in silence. At last she would raise herself up and hold his face in her hands and say:

"Ah! Olivier!... Olivier!..."

She took the medal that she wore round her neck, and hung it on her brother's. She commended her beloved Olivier to the care of her confessor, her doctor, everybody. It seemed as though she was to live henceforth in him, that, on the point of death, she was taking refuge in his life, as upon some island in uncharted seas. Sometimes she seemed to be uplifted by a mystic exaltation of tenderness and faith, and she forgot her illness, and sadness changed to joy in her,—a joy divine indeed that shone upon her lips and in her eyes. Over and over again she said:

"I am happy...."

Her senses grew dim. In her last moments of consciousness her lips moved and it seemed that she was repeating something to herself. Olivier went to her bedside and bent down over her. She recognized him once more and smiled feebly up at him; her lips went on moving and her eyes were filled with tears. They could not make out what she was trying to say.... But faintly Olivier heard her breathe the words of the dear old song they used to love so much, the song she was always singing:

"*I will come again, my sweet and bonny, I will come again.*"

Then she relapsed into unconsciousness. So she passed away.

Unconsciously she had aroused a profound sympathy in many people whom she did not even know; in the house in

which she lived she did not even know the names of the other tenants. Olivier received expressions of sympathy from people who were strangers to him. Antoinette was not taken to her grave unattended as her mother had been. Her body was followed to the cemetery by friends and schoolfellows of her brother, and members of the families whose children she had taught, and people whom she had met without saying a word of her own life or hearing a word from them, though they admired her secretly, knowing her devotion, and many of the poor, and the housekeeper who had helped her, and even many of the small tradesmen of the neighborhood. Madame Nathan had taken Olivier under her wing on the day of his sister's death, and she had carried him off in spite of himself, and done her best to turn his thoughts away from his grief.

If it had come later in his life he could never have borne up against such a catastrophe,—but now it was impossible for him to succumb absolutely to his despair. He had just begun a new life; he was living in a community, and had to live the common life whatever he might be feeling. The full busy life of the *École*, the intellectual pressure, the examinations, the struggle for life, all kept him from withdrawing into himself; he could not be alone. He suffered, but it proved his salvation. A year earlier, or a few years earlier, he must have succumbed.

And yet he did as far as possible retire into isolation in the memory of his sister. It was a great sorrow to him that he could not keep the rooms where they had lived together; but he had no money. He hoped that the people who seemed to be interested in him would understand his distress at not being able to keep the things that had been hers. But nobody

seemed to understand. He borrowed some money and made a little more by private tuition and took an attic in which he stored all that he could preserve of his sister's furniture; her bed, her table, and her armchair. He made it the sanctuary of her memory. He took refuge there whenever he was depressed. His friends thought he was carrying on an intrigue. He would stay there for hours dreaming of her with his face buried in his hands; unhappily he had no portrait of her except a little photograph, taken when she was a child, of the two of them together. He would talk to her and weep.... Where was she? Ah! if she had been at the other end of the world, wherever she might be and however inaccessible the spot,—with what great joy and invincible ardor he would have rushed forth in search of her, though a thousand sufferings lay in wait for him, though he had to go barefoot, though he had to wander for hundreds of years, if only it might be that every step would bring him nearer to her!... Yes, even though there were only one chance in a thousand of his ever finding her.... But there was nothing.... Nowhere to go.... No way of ever finding her again.... How utterly lonely he was now! Now that she was no longer there to love and counsel and console him, inexperienced and childish as he was, he was flung into the waters of life, to sink or swim!... He who has once had the happiness of perfect intimacy and boundless friendship with another human being has known the divinest of all joys,—a joy that will make him miserable for the remainder of his life....

Nessun maggior dolore che ricordarsi del tempo felice nella miseria....

For a weak and tender soul it is the greatest of misfortunes ever to have known the greatest happiness.

But though it is sad indeed to lose the beloved at the beginning of life, it is even more terrible later on when the springs of life are running dry. Olivier was young; and, in spite of his inborn pessimism, in spite of his misfortune, he had to live his life. As often seems to happen after the loss of those dear to us, it was as though when Antoinette passed away she had breathed part of her soul into her brother's life. And he believed it was so. Though he had not such faith as hers, yet he did arrive at a vague conviction that his sister was not dead, but lived on in him, as she had promised. There is a Breton superstition that those who die young are not dead, but stay and hover over the places where they lived until they have fulfilled the normal span of their existence.— So Antoinette lived out her life in Olivier.

He read through the papers he had found in her room. Unhappily she had burned most of them. Besides, she was not the sort of woman to keep notes and tallies of her inner life. She was too modest to uncloak her inmost thoughts in morbid babbling indiscretion. She only kept a little notebook which was almost unintelligible to anybody else—a bare record in which she had written down without remark certain dates, and certain small events in her daily life, which had given her joys and emotions, which she had no need to write down in detail to keep alive. Almost all these dates were connected with some event in Olivier's life. She had kept every letter he had ever written to her, without exception.— Alas! He had not been so careful; he had lost almost all the letters she had written to him. What need had he of letters? He thought he would have his sister always with him; that dear fount of tenderness seemed inexhaustible; he thought that he would always be able to quench his thirst of lips and

heart at it; he had most prodigally squandered the love he had received, and now he was eager to gather up the smallest drops.... What was his emotion when, as he skimmed through one of Antoinette's books, he found these words written in pencil on a scrap of paper:

"Olivier, my dear Olivier!..."

He almost swooned. He sobbed and kissed the invisible lips that so spoke to him from the grave.—Thereafter he took down all her books and hunted through them page by page to see if she had not left some other words of him. He found the fragment of the letter to Christophe, and discovered the unspoken romance which had sprung to life in her; so for the first time he happed upon her emotional life, that he had never known in her and never tried to know; he lived through the last passionate days, when, deserted by himself, she had held out her arms to the unknown friend. She had never told him that she had seen Christophe before. Certain words in her letter revealed the fact that they had met in Germany. He understood that Christophe had been kind to Antoinette, in circumstances the details of which were unknown to him, and that Antoinette's feeling for the musician dated from that day, though she had kept her secret to the end.

Christophe, whom he loved already for the beauty of his art, now became unutterably dear to him. She had loved him; it seemed to Olivier that it was she whom he loved in Christophe. He moved heaven and earth to meet him. It was not an easy matter to trace him. After his rebuff Christophe had been lost in the wilderness of Paris; he had shunned all society and no one gave a thought to him.—After many months it chanced that Olivier met Christophe in the street;

he was pale and sunken from the illness from which he had only just recovered. But Olivier had not the courage to stop him. He followed him home at a distance. He wanted to write to him, but could not screw himself up to it. What was there to say? Olivier was not alone; Antoinette was with him; her love, her modesty had become a part of him; the thought that his sister had loved Christophe made him as bashful in Christophe's presence as though he had been Antoinette. And yet how he longed to talk to him of her!—But he could not. Her secret was a seal upon his lips.

He tried to meet Christophe again. He went everywhere where he thought Christophe might be. He was longing to shake hands with him. And when he saw him he tried to hide so that Christophe should not see him.

At last Christophe saw him at the house of some mutual friends where they both happened to be one evening. Olivier stood far away from him and said nothing; but he watched him. And no doubt the spirit of Antoinette was hovering near Olivier that night; for Christophe saw her in Olivier's eyes; and it was her image, so suddenly evoked, that made him cross the room and go towards the unknown messenger, who, like a young Hermes, brought him the melancholy greeting of the blessed dead.

FOOTNOTES:

1 See *Jean-Christophe*—I. “Revolt.”

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 *Jean Christophe: Antoinette* by Romain Rolland; Tr: Gilbert Cannan]