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JACQUELINE

By THERESE BENTZON (MME. BLANC)

With a Preface by M. THUREAU-DANGIN, of the French Academy

TH. BENTZON

It is natural that the attention and affection of Americans should be attracted to a woman who has devoted herself assiduously to understanding and to making known the aspirations of our country, especially in introducing the labors and achievements of our women to their sisters in France, of whom we also have much to learn; for simple, homely virtues and the charm of womanliness may still be studied with advantage on the cherished soil of France.

Marie-Therese Blanc, nee Solms--for this is the name of the author who writes under the nom de plume of Madame Bentzon--is considered the greatest of living French female novelists. She was born in an old French chateau at Seine-Porte (Seine et Oise), September 21, 1840. This chateau was owned by Madame Bentzon's grandmother, the Marquise de Vitry, who was a woman of great force and energy of character, "a ministering angel" to her country neighborhood. Her grandmother's first marriage was to a Dane, Major-General Adrien-Benjamin de Bentzon, a Governor of the Danish Antilles. By this marriage there was one daughter, the mother of Therese, who in turn married the Comte de Solms. "This mixture of races," Madame Blanc once wrote, "surely explains a kind of moral and intellectual cosmopolitanism which is found in my nature. My father of German descent, my mother of Danish--my nom de plume (which was her maiden-name) is Danish--with Protestant ancestors on her side, though she and I were Catholics--my grandmother a sound and witty Parisian, gay, brilliant, lively, with superb physical health and the consequent good spirits--surely these materials could not have produced other than a cosmopolitan being."

Somehow or other, the family became impoverished. Therese de Solms took to writing stories. After many refusals, her debut took place in the 'Revue des Deux Mondes', and her perseverance was largely due to the encouragement she received from George Sand, although that great woman saw everything through the magnifying glass of her genius. But the person to whom Therese Bentzon was most indebted in the matter of literary advice--she says herself--was the late M. Caro, the famous Sorbonne professor of philosophy, himself an admirable writer, "who put me through a course of literature, acting as my guide through a vast amount of solid reading, and criticizing my work with kindly severity." Success was slow. Strange as it may seem, there is a prejudice against female writers in France, a country that has produced so many admirable women-authors. However, the time was to come when M. Becloz found one of her stories in the 'Journal des Debats'. It was the one entitled 'Un Divorce', and he lost no time in engaging the young writer to become one of his staff. From that day to this she has found the pages of the Revue always open to her.

Madame Bentzon is a novelist, translator, and writer of literary essays. The list of her works runs as follows: 'Le Roman d'un Muet (1868); Un Divorce (1872); La Grande Sauliere (1877); Un remords (1878); Yette and Georgette (1880); Le Retour (1882); Tete folle (1883); Tony, (1884); Emancepee (1887); Constance (1891); Jacqueline (1893). We need not enter into the merits of style and composition if we mention that 'Un remords, Tony, and Constance' were crowned by the French Academy, and 'Jacqueline' in 1893. Madame Bentzon is likewise the translator of Aldrich, Bret Harte, Dickens, and Ouida. Some of her critical works are 'Litterature et Moeurs etrangeres', 1882, and 'Nouveaux romanciers americains', 1885.

M. THUREAU-DANGIN
de l'Academie Francaise.

BOOK 1.

JACQUELINE

CHAPTER I

A PARISIENNE'S "AT HOME"

Despite a short frock, checked stockings, wide turned-over collar, and a loose sash around the waist of her blouse in other words, despite the childish fashion of a dress which seemed to denote that she was not more than thirteen or fourteen years of age, she seemed much older. An observer would have put her down as the oldest of the young girls who on Tuesdays, at Madame de Nailles's afternoons, filled what was called "the young girls' corner" with whispered merriment and low laughter, while, under pretence of drinking tea, the noise went on which is always audible

when there is anything to eat.

No doubt the amber tint of this young girl's complexion, the raven blackness of her hair, her marked yet delicate features, and the general impression produced by her dark coloring, were reasons why she seemed older than the rest. It was Jacqueline's privilege to exhibit that style of beauty which comes earliest to perfection, and retains it longest; and, what was an equal privilege, she resembled no one.

The deep bow-window--her favorite spot--which enabled her to have a reception-day in connection with that of her mamma, seemed like a great basket of roses when all her friends assembled there, seated on low chairs in unstudied attitudes: the white rose of the group was Mademoiselle d'Etaples, a specimen of pale and pensive beauty, frail almost to transparency; the Rose of Bengal was the charming Colette Odinska, a girl of Polish race, but born in Paris; the dark-red rose was Isabelle Ray-Belle she was called triumphantly--whose dimpled cheeks flushed scarlet for almost any cause, some said for very coquetry. Then there were three little girls called Wermant, daughters of an agent de change--a spray of May roses, exactly alike in features, manners, and dress, sprightly and charming as little girls could be. A little pompon rose was tiny Dorothee d'Avrigny, to whom the pet name Dolly was appropriate, for never had any doll's waxen face been more lovely than her little round one, with its mouth shaped like a little heart--a mouth smaller than her eyes, and these were round eyes, too, but so bright, and blue, and soft, that it was easy to overlook their too frequently startled expression.

Jacqueline had nothing in common with a rose of any kind, but she was not the less charming to look at. Such was the unspoken reflection of a man who was well able to be a judge in such matters. His name was Hubert Marien. He was a great painter, and was now watching the clear-cut, somewhat Arab--like profile of this girl--a profile brought out distinctly against the dark-red silk background of a screen, much as we see a cameo stand out in sharp relief from the glittering stone from which the artist has fashioned it. Marien looked at her from a distance, leaning against the fireplace of the farther salon, whence he could see plainly the corner shaded by green foliage plants where Jacqueline had made her niche, as she called it. The two rooms formed practically but one, being separated only by a large recess without folding-doors, or 'portires'. Hubert Marien, from his place behind Madame de Nailles's chair, had often before watched Jacqueline as he was watching her at this moment. She had grown up, as it were, under his own eye. He had seen her playing with her dolls, absorbed in her story-books, and crunching sugar-plums, he had paid her visits--for how many years? He did not care to count them.

And little girls bloom fast! How old they make us feel! Who would have supposed the most unpromising of little buds would have transformed itself so soon into what he gazed upon? Marien, as an artist, had great pleasure in studying the delicate outline of that graceful head surmounted by thick tresses, with rebellious ringlets rippling over the brow before they were gathered into the thick braid that hung behind; and

Jacqueline, although she appeared to be wholly occupied with her guests, felt the gaze that was fixed upon her, and was conscious of its magnetic influence, from which nothing would have induced her to escape even had she been able. All the young girls were listening attentively (despite their more serious occupation of consuming dainties) to what was going on in the next room among the grown-up people, whose conversation reached them only in detached fragments.

So long as the subject talked about was the last reception at the French Academy, these young girls (comrades in the class-room and at the weekly catechising) had been satisfied to discuss together their own little affairs, but after Colonel de Valdonjon began to talk complete silence reigned among them. One might have heard the buzzing of a fly. Their attention, however, was of little use. Exclamations of oh! and ah! and protests more or less sincere drowned even the loud and somewhat hoarse voice of the Colonel. The girls heard it only through a sort of general murmur, out of which a burst of astonishment or of dissent would occasionally break forth. These outbreaks were all the curious group could hear distinctly. They sniffed, as it were, at the forbidden fruit, but they longed to inhale the full perfume of the scandal that they felt was in the air. That stout officer of cuirassiers, of whom some people spoke as "The Chatterbox," took advantage of his profession to tell many an unsavory story which he had picked up or invented at his club. He had come to Madame de Nailles's reception with a brand-new concoction of falsehood and truth, a story likely to be hawked round Paris with great success for several weeks to come, though ladies on first hearing it would think proper to cry out that they would not even listen to it, and would pretend to look round them for their fans to hide their confusion.

The principal object of interest in this scandalous gossip was a valuable diamond bracelet, one of those priceless bits of jewelry seldom seen except in show-windows on the Rue de la Paix, intended to be bought only for presentation to princesses--of some sort or kind. Well, by an extraordinary chance the Marquise de Versannes--aye, the lovely Georgine de Versannes herself--had picked up this bracelet in the street--by chance, as it were.

"It so happened," said the Colonel, "that I was at her mother-in-law's, where she was going to dine. She came in looking as innocent as you please, with her hand in her pocket. 'Oh, see what I have found!' she cried. 'I stepped upon it almost at your door.' And the bracelet was placed under a lamp, where the diamonds shot out sparkles fit to blind the old Marquise, and make that old fool of a Versannes see a thousand lights. He has long known better than to take all his wife says for gospel--but he tries hard to pretend that he believes her. 'My dear,' he said, 'you must take that to the police.'--'I'll send it to-morrow morning,' says the charming Georgine, 'but I wished to show you my good luck.' Of course nobody came forward to claim the bracelet, and a month later Madame de Versannes appeared at the Cranfords' ball with a brilliant diamond bracelet, worn like the Queen of Sheba's, high up on her arm, near the shoulder, to hide the lack of sleeve. This piece of finery, which drew everybody's attention to the wearer, was the famous bracelet picked up in the street. Clever of her!--wasn't it, now?"

"Horrid! Unlikely! Impossible.... What do you mean us to understand about it, Colonel? Could she have....?"

Then the Colonel went on to demonstrate, with many coarse insinuations, that that good Georgine, as he familiarly called her, had done many more things than people gave her credit for. And he went on to add: "Surely, you must have heard of the row about her between Givrac and the Homme-Volant at the Cirque?"

"What, the man that wears stockinet all covered with gold scales? Do tell us, Colonel!"

But here Madame de Nailles gave a dry little cough which was meant to impose silence on the subject. She was not a prude, but she disapproved of anything that was bad form at her receptions. The Colonel's revelations had to be made in a lower tone, while his hostess endeavored to bring back the conversation to the charming reply made by M. Renan to the somewhat insipid address of a member of the Academie.

"We sha'n't hear anything more now," said Colette, with a sigh. "Did you understand it, Jacqueline?"

"Understand--what?"

"Why, that story about the bracelet?"

"No--not all. The Colonel seemed to imply that she had not picked it up, and indeed I don't see how any one could have dropped in the street, in broad daylight, a bracelet meant only to be worn at night--a bracelet worn near the shoulder."

"But if she did not pick it up--she must have stolen it."

"Stolen it?" cried Belle. "Stolen it! What! The Marquise de Versannes? Why, she inherited the finest diamonds in Paris!"

"How do you know?"

"Because mamma sometimes takes me to the Opera, and her subscription day is the same as that of the Marquise. People say a good deal of harm of her--in whispers. They say she is barely received now in society, that people turn their backs on her, and so forth, and so on. However, that did not hinder her from being superb the other evening at 'Polyeucte'."

"So you only go to see 'Polyeucte'?" said Jacqueline, making a little face as if she despised that opera.

"Yes, I have seen it twice. Mamma lets me go to 'Polyeucte' and 'Guillaume Tell', and to the 'Prophete', but she won't take me to see 'Faust'--and it is just 'Faust' that I want to see. Isn't it provoking that one can't see everything, hear everything, understand everything? You see, we could not half understand that story which seemed to amuse

the people so much in the other room. Why did they send back the bracelet from the Prefecture to Madame de Versannes if it was not hers?"

"Yes--why?" said all the little girls, much puzzled.

Meantime, as the hour for closing the exhibition at the neighboring hippodrome had arrived, visitors came pouring into Madame de Nailles's reception--tall, graceful women, dressed with taste and elegance, as befitted ladies who were interested in horsemanship. The tone of the conversation changed. Nothing was talked about but superb horses, leaps over ribbons and other obstacles. The young girls interested themselves in the spring toilettes, which they either praised or criticised as they passed before their eyes.

"Oh! there is Madame Villegry," cried Jacqueline; "how handsome she is! I should like one of these days to be that kind of beauty, so tall and slender. Her waist measure is only twenty-one and two thirds inches. The woman who makes her corsets and my mamma's told us so. She brought us one of her corsets to look at, a love of a corset, in brocatelle, all over many-colored flowers. That material is much more 'distingue' than the old satin--"

"But what a queer idea it is to waste all that upon a thing that nobody will ever look at," said Dolly, her round eyes opening wider than before.

"Oh! it is just to please herself, I suppose. I understand that! Besides, nothing is too good for such a figure. But what I admire most is her extraordinary hair."

"Which changes its color now and then," observed the sharpest of the three Wermant sisters. "Extraordinary is just the word for it. At present it is dark red. Henna did that, I suppose. Raoul--our brother--when he was in Africa saw Arab women who used henna. They tied their heads up in a sort of poultice made of little leaves, something like tea-leaves. In twenty-four hours the hair will be dyed red, and will stay red for a year or more. You can try it if you like. I think it is disgusting."

"Oh! look, there is Madame de Sternay. I recognized her by her perfume before I had even seen her. What delightful things good perfumes are!"

"What is it? Is it heliotrope or jessamine?" asked Yvonne d'Étaples, sniffing in the air.

"No--it is only orris-root--nothing but orris-root; but she puts it everywhere about her--in the hem of her petticoat, in the lining of her dress. She lives, one might say, in the middle of a sachet. The thing that will please me most when I am married will be to have no limit to my perfumes. Till then I have to satisfy myself with very little," sighed Jacqueline, drawing a little bunch of violets from the loose folds of her blouse, and inhaling their fragrance with delight.

"Tiens"! here comes somebody who has to be contented with much less,"

said Yvonne, as a young girl joined their circle. She was small, awkward, timid, and badly dressed. On seeing her Colette whispered "Oh! that tiresome Giselle. We sha'n't be able to talk another word."

Jacqueline kissed Giselle de Monredon. They were distant cousins, though they saw each other very seldom. Giselle was an orphan, having lost both her father and her mother, and was being educated in a convent from which she was allowed to come out only on great occasions. Her grandmother, whose ideas were those of the old school, had placed her there. The Easter holidays accounted for Giselle's unexpected arrival. Wrapped in a large cloak which covered up her convent uniform, she looked, as compared with the gay girls around her, like a poor sombre night-moth, dazzled by the light, in company with other glittering creatures of the insect race, fluttering with graceful movements, transparent wings and shining corselets.

"Come and have some sandwiches," said Jacqueline, and she drew Giselle to the tea-table, with the kind intention apparently of making her feel more at her ease. But she had another motive. She saw some one who was very interesting to her coming at that moment toward the table. That some one was a man about forty, whose pointed black beard was becoming slightly gray--a man whom some people thought ugly, chiefly because they had never seen his somewhat irregular features illumined by a smile which, spreading from his lips to his eyes, lighted up his face and transformed it. The smile of Hubert Marien was rare, however. He was exclusive in his friendships, often silent, always somewhat unapproachable. He seldom troubled himself to please any one he did not care for. In society he was not seen to advantage, because he was extremely bored, for which reason he was seldom to be seen at the Tuesday receptions of Madame de Nailles; while, on other days, he frequented the house as an intimate friend of the family. Jacqueline had known him all her life, and for her he had always his beautiful smile. He had petted her when she was little, and had been much amused by the sort of adoration she had no hesitation in showing that she felt for him. He used to call her *Mademoiselle ma femme*, and M. de Nailles would speak of him as "my daughter's future husband." This joke had been kept up till the little lady had reached her ninth year, when it ceased, probably by order of Madame de Nailles, who in matters of propriety was very punctilious. Jacqueline, too, became less familiar than she had been with the man she called "my great painter." Indeed, in her heart of hearts, she cherished a grudge against him. She thought he presumed on the right he had assumed of teasing her. The older she grew the more he treated her as if she were a baby, and, in the little passages of arms that continually took place between them, Jacqueline was bitterly conscious that she no longer had the best of it as formerly. She was no longer as droll and lively as she had been. She was easily disconcerted, and took everything 'au serieux', and her wits became paralyzed by an embarrassment that was new to her. And, pained by the sort of sarcasm which Marien kept up in all their intercourse, she was often ready to burst into tears after talking to him. Yet she was never quite satisfied unless he was present. She counted the days from one Wednesday to another, for on Wednesdays he always dined with them, and she greeted any opportunity of seeing him on other days as a great pleasure. This week, for example, would be marked

with a white stone. She would have seen him twice. For half an hour Marien had been enduring the bore of the reception, standing silent and self-absorbed in the midst of the gay talk, which did not interest him. He wished to escape, but was always kept from doing so by some word or sign from Madame de Nailles. Jacqueline had been thinking: "Oh! if he would only come and talk to us!" He was now drawing near them, and an instinct made her wish to rush up to him and tell him--what should she tell him? She did not know. A few moments before so many things to tell him had been passing through her brain.

What she said was: "Monsieur Marien, I recommend to you these little spiced cakes." And, with some awkwardness, because her hand was trembling, she held out the plate to him.

"No, thank you, Mademoiselle," he said, affecting a tone of great ceremony, "I prefer to take this glass of punch, if you will permit me."

"The punch is cold, I fear; suppose we were to put a little tea in it. Stay--let me help you."

"A thousand thanks; but I like to attend to such little cookeries myself. By the way, it seems to me that Mademoiselle Giselle, in her character of an angel who disapproves of the good things of this life, has not left us much to eat at your table."

"Who--I?" cried the poor schoolgirl, in a tone of injured innocence and astonishment.

"Don't pay any attention to him," said Jacqueline, as if taking her under her protection. "He is nothing but a tease; what he says is only chaff. But I might as well talk Greek to her," she added, shrugging her shoulders. "In the convent they don't know what to make of a joke. Only spare her at least, if you please, Monsieur Marien."

"I know by report that Mademoiselle Giselle is worthy of the most profound respect," continued the pitiless painter. "I lay myself at her feet--and at yours. Now I am going to slip away in the English fashion. Good-evening."

"Why do you go so soon? You can't do any more work today."

"No, it has been a day lost--that is true."

"That's polite! By the way--" here Jacqueline became very red and she spoke rapidly--" what made you just now stare at me so persistently?"

"I? Impossible that I could have permitted myself to stare at you, Mademoiselle."

"That is just what you did, though. I thought you had found something to find fault with. What could it be? I fancied there was something wrong with my hair, something absurd that you were laughing at. You always do laugh, you know."

"Wrong with your hair? It is always wrong. But that is not your fault. You are not responsible for its looking like a hedgehog's."

"Hedgehogs haven't any hair," said Jacqueline, much hurt by the observation.

"True, they have only prickles, which remind me of the susceptibility of your temper. I beg your pardon I was looking at you critically. Being myself indulgent and kindhearted, I was only looking at you from an artist's point of view--as is always allowable in my profession. Remember, I see you very rarely by daylight. I am obliged to work as long as the light allows me. Well, in the light of this April sunshine I was saying to myself--excuse my boldness!--that you had reached the right age for a picture."

"For a picture? Were you thinking of painting me?" cried Jacqueline, radiant with pleasure.

"Hold a moment, please. Between a dream and its execution lies a great space. I was only imagining a picture of you."

"But my portrait would be frightful."

"Possibly. But that would depend on the skill of the painter."

"And yet a model should be--I am so thin," said Jacqueline, with confusion and discouragement.

"True; your limbs are like a grasshopper's."

"Oh! you mean my legs--but my arms...."

"Your arms must be like your legs. But, sitting as you were just now, I could see only your head, which is better. So! one has to be accountable for looking at you? Mademoiselle feels herself affronted if any one stares at her! I will remember this in future. There, now! suppose, instead of quarrelling with me, you were to go and cast yourself into the arms of your cousin Fred."

"Fred! Fred d'Argy! Fred is at Brest."

"Where are your eyes, my dear child? He has just come in with his mother."

And at that moment Madame de Nailles, with her pure, clear voice--a voice frequently compared to that of Mademoiselle Reichemberg, called:

"Jacqueline!"

Jacqueline never crossed the imaginary line which divided the two salons unless she was called upon to do so. She was still summoned like a child to speak to certain persons who took an especial interest in her, and who

were kind enough to wish to see her--Madame d'Argy, for example, who had been the dearest friend of her dead mother. The death of that mother, who had been long replaced by a stepmother, could hardly be said to be deeply regretted by Jacqueline. She remembered her very indistinctly. The stories of her she had heard from Modeste, her old nurse, probably served her instead of any actual memory. She knew her only as a woman pale and in ill health, always lying on a sofa. The little black frock that had been made for her had been hardly worn out when a new mamma, as gay and fresh as the other had been sick and suffering, had come into the household like a ray of sunshine.

After that time Madame d'Argy and Modeste were the only people who spoke to her of the mother who was gone. Madame d'Argy, indeed, came on certain days to take her to visit the tomb, on which the child read, as she prayed for the departed:

MARIE JACQUELINE ADELAIDE DE VALTIER

BARONNE DE NAILLES

DIED AGED TWENTY-SIX YEARS

And such filial sentiment as she still retained, concerning the unknown being who had been her mother, was tinged by her association with this melancholy pilgrimage which she was expected to perform at certain intervals. Without exactly knowing the reason why, Jacqueline was conscious of a certain hostility that existed between Madame d'Argy and her stepmother.

The intimate friend of the first Madame de Nailles was a woman with neither elegance nor beauty. She never had left off her widow's weeds, which she had worn since she had lost her husband in early youth. In the eyes of Jacqueline her sombre figure personified austere, exacting Duty, a kind of duty not attractive to her. That very day it seemed as if duty inconveniently stepped in to break up a conversation that was deeply interesting to her. The impatient gesture that she made when her mother called her might have been interpreted into: Bother Madame d'Argy!

"Jacqueline!" called again the silvery voice that had first summoned her; and a moment after the young girl found herself in the centre of a circle of grown people, saying good-morning, making curtseys, and kissing the withered hand of old Madame de Monredon, as she had been taught to do from infancy. Madame de Monredon was Giselle's grandmother. Jacqueline had been instructed to call her "aunt;" but in her heart she called her 'La Fee Gyognon', while Madame d'Argy, pointing to her son, said: "What do you think, darling, of such a surprise? He is home on leave. We came here the first place-naturally."

"It was very nice of you. How do you do, Fred?" said Jacqueline, holding out her hand to a very young man, in a jacket ornamented with gold lace, who stood twisting his cap in his hand with some embarrassment "It is a long time since we have seen each other. But it does not seem to me that you have grown a great deal."

Fred blushed up to the roots of his hair.

"No one can say that of you, Jacqueline," observed Madame d'Argy.

"No--what a may-pole!--isn't she?" said the Baronne, carelessly.

"If she realizes it," whispered Madame de Monredon, who was sitting beside Madame d'Argy on a 'causeuse' shaped like an S, "why does she persist in dressing her like a child six years old? It is absurd!"

"Still, she can have no reason for keeping her thus in order to make herself seem young. She is only a stepmother."

"Of course. But people might make comparisons. Beauty in the bud sometimes blooms out unexpectedly when it is not welcome."

"Yes--she is fading fast. Small women ought not to grow stout."

"Anyhow, I have no patience with her for keeping a girl of fifteen in short skirts."

"You are making her out older than she is."

"How is that?--how is that? She is two years younger than Giselle, who has just entered her eighteenth year."

While the two ladies were exchanging these little remarks, the Baronne de Nailles was saying to the young naval cadet:

"Monsieur Fred, we should be charmed to keep you with us, but possibly you might like to see some of your old friends. Jacqueline can take you to them. They will be glad to see you."

"Tiens!--that's true," said Jacqueline. "Dolly and Belle are yonder. You remember Isabelle Ray, who used to take dancing lessons with us."

"Of course I do," said Fred, following his cousin with a feeling of regret that his sword was not knocking against his legs, increasing his importance in the eyes of all the ladies who were present. He was not, however; sorry to leave their imposing circle. Above all, he was glad to escape from the clear-sighted, critical eyes of Madame de Nailles. On the other hand, to be sent off to the girls' corner, after being insulted by being told he had not grown, hurt his sense of self-importance.

Meantime Jacqueline was taking him back to her own corner, where he was greeted by two or three little exclamations of surprise, shaking hands, however, as his former playmates drew their skirts around them, trying to make room for him to sit down.

"Young ladies," said Jacqueline, "I present to you a 'bordachien'--a little midgy from the practice-ship the Borda."

They burst out laughing: "A bordachien! A middy from the practice-ship!" they cried.

"I shall not be much longer on the practice-ship," said the young man, with a gesture which seemed as if his hand were feeling for the hilt of his sword, which was not there, "for I am going very soon on my first voyage as an ensign."

"Yes," explained Jacqueline, "he is going to be transferred from the 'Borda' to the 'Jean-Bart'--which, by the way, is no longer the 'Jean-Bart', only people call her so because they are used to it. Meantime you see before you "C," the great "C," the famous "C," that is, he is the pupil who stands highest on the roll of the naval school at this moment."

There was a vague murmur of applause. Poor Fred was indeed in need of some appreciation on the score of merit, for he was not much to look upon, being at that trying age when a young fellow's moustache is only a light down, an age at which youths always look their worst, and are awkward and unsociable because they are timid.

"Then you are no longer an idle fellow," said Dolly, rather teasingly. "People used to say that you went into the navy to get rid of your lessons. That I can quite understand."

"Oh, he has passed many difficult exams," cried Giselle, coming to the rescue.

"I thought I had had enough of school," said Fred, without making any defense, "and besides I had other reasons for going into the navy."

His "other reasons" had been a wish to emancipate himself from the excessive solicitude of his mother, who kept him tied to her apron-strings like a little girl. He was impatient to do something for himself, to become a man as soon as possible. But he said nothing of all this, and to escape further questions devoured three or four little cakes that were offered him. Before taking them he removed his gloves and displayed a pair of chapped and horny hands.

"Why--poor Fred!" cried Jacqueline, who remarked them in a moment, "what kind of almond paste do you use?"

Much annoyed, he replied, curtly: "We all have to row, we have also to attend to the machinery. But that is only while we are cadets. Of course, such apprenticeship is very hard. After that we shall get our stripes and be ordered on foreign service, and expect promotion."

"And glory," said Giselle, who found courage to speak.

Fred thanked her with a look of gratitude. She, at least, understood his profession. She entered into his feelings far better than Jacqueline, who had been his first confidante--Jacqueline, to whom he had confided his purposes, his ambition, and his day-dreams. He thought Jacqueline was selfish. She seemed to care only for herself. And yet, selfish or

not selfish, she pleased him better than all the other girls he knew-- a thousand times more than gentle, sweet Giselle.

"Ah, glory, of course!" repeated Jacqueline. "I understand how much that counts, but there is glory of various kinds, and I know the kind that I prefer," she added in a tone which seemed to imply that it was not that of arms, or of perilous navigation. "We all know," she went on, "that not every man can have genius, but any sailor who has good luck can get to be an admiral."

"Let us hope you will be one soon, Monsieur Fred," said Dolly. "You will have well deserved it, according to the way you have distinguished yourself on board the 'Borda.'"

This induced Fred to let them understand something of life on board the practice-ship; he told how the masters who resided on shore ascended by a ladder to the gun-deck, which had been turned into a schoolroom; how six cadets occupied the space intended for each gun-carriage, where hammocks hung from hooks served them instead of beds; how the chapel was in a closet opened only on Sundays. He described the gymnastic feats in the rigging, the practice in gunnery, and many other things which, had they been well described, would have been interesting; but Fred was only a poor narrator. The conclusion the young ladies seemed to reach unanimously after hearing his descriptions, was discouraging. They cried almost with one voice

"Think of any woman being willing to marry a sailor."

"Why not?" asked Giselle, very promptly.

"Because, what's the use of a husband who is always out of your reach, as it were, between water and sky? One would better be a widow. Widows, at any rate, can marry again. But you, Giselle, don't understand these things. You are going to be a nun."

"Had I been in your place, Fred," said Isabelle Ray, "I should rather have gone into the cavalry school at Saint Cyr. I should have wanted to be a good huntsman, had I been a man, and they say naval officers are never good horsemen."

Poor Fred! He was not making much progress among the young girls. Almost everything people talked about outside his cadet life was unknown to him; what he could talk about seemed to have no interest for any one, unless indeed it might interest Giselle, who was an adept in the art of sympathetic listening, never having herself anything to say.

Besides this, Fred was by no means at his ease in talking to Jacqueline. They had been told not to 'tutoyer' each other, because they were getting too old for such familiarity, and it was he, and not she, who remembered this prohibition. Jacqueline perceived this after a while, and burst out laughing:

"Tiens! You call me 'you,'" she cried, "and I ought not to say 'thou'"

but 'you.' I forgot. It seems so odd, when we have always been accustomed to 'tutoyer' each other."

"One ought to give it up after one's first communion," said the eldest Mademoiselle Wermant, sententiously. "We ceased to 'tutoyer' our boy cousins after that. I am told nothing annoys a husband so much as to see these little familiarities between his wife and her cousins or her playmates."

Giselle looked very much astonished at this speech, and her air of disapproval amused Belle and Yvonne exceedingly. They began presently to talk of the classes in which they were considered brilliant pupils, and of their success in compositions. They said that sometimes very difficult subjects were given out. A week or two before, each had had to compose a letter purporting to be from Dante in exile to a friend in Florence, describing Paris as it was in his time, especially the manners and customs of its universities, ending by some allusion to the state of matters between the Guelphs and the Ghibellines.

"Good heavens! And could you do it?" said Giselle, whose knowledge of history was limited to what may be found in school abridgments.

It was therefore a great satisfaction to her when Fred declared that he never should have known how to set about it.

"Oh! papa helped me a little," said Isabelle, whose father wrote articles much appreciated by the public in the 'Revue des Deux Mondes.' "But he said at the same time that it was horrid to give such crack-brained stuff to us poor girls. Happily, our subject this week is much nicer. We have to make comparisons between La Tristesse d'Olympio, Souvenir, and Le Lac'. That will be something interesting."

"The Tristesse d'Olympio?" repeated Giselle, in a tone of interrogation.

"You know, of course, that it is Victor Hugo's," said Mademoiselle de Wermant, with a touch of pity.

Giselle answered with sincerity and humility, "I only knew that Le Lac was by Lamartine."

"Well!--she knows that much," whispered Belle to Yvonne--" just that much, anyhow."

While they were whispering and laughing, Jacqueline recited, in a soft voice, and with feeling that did credit to her instructor in elocution, Mademoiselle X----, of the Theatre Francais:

May the moan of the wind, the green rushes' soft sighing,
The fragrance that floats in the air you have moved,
May all heard, may all breathed, may all seen, seem but trying
To say: They have loved.

Then she added, after a pause: "Isn't that beautiful?"

"How dares she say such words?" thought Giselle, whose sense of propriety was outraged by this allusion to love. Fred, too, looked askance and was not comfortable, for he thought that Jacqueline had too much assurance for her age, but that, after all, she was becoming more and more charming.

At that moment Belle and Yvonne were summoned, and they departed, full of an intention to spread everywhere the news that Giselle, the little goose, had actually known that *Le Lac* had been written by Lamartine. The Benedictine Sisters positively had acquired that much knowledge.

These girls were not the only persons that day at the reception who indulged in a little ill-natured talk after going away. Mesdames d'Argy and de Monredon, on their way to the Faubourg St. Germain, criticised Madame de Nailles pretty freely. As they crossed the Parc Monceau to reach their carriage, which was waiting for them on the Boulevard Malesherbes, they made the young people, Giselle and Fred, walk ahead, that they might have an opportunity of expressing themselves freely, the old dowager especially, whose toothless mouth never lost an opportunity of smirching the character and the reputation of her neighbors.

"When I think of the pains my poor cousin de Nailles took to impress upon us all that he was making what is called a 'mariage raisonnable'! Well, if a man wants a wife who is going to set up her own notions, her own customs, he had better marry a poor girl without fortune! This one will simply ruin him. My dear, I am continually amazed at the way people are living whose incomes I know to the last sou. What an example for Jacqueline! Extravagance, fast living, elegant self-indulgence.... Did you observe the Baronne's gown?--of rough woolen stuff. She told some one it was the last creation of Doucet, and you know what that implies! His serge costs more than one of our velvet gowns And then her artistic tastes, her bric-a-brac! Her salon looks like a museum or a bazaar. I grant you it makes a very pretty setting for her and all her coqueteries. But in my time respectable women were contented with furniture covered with red or yellow silk damask furnished by their upholsterers. They didn't go about trying to hunt up the impossible. 'On ne cherche pas midi a quatorze heures'. You hold, as I do, to the old fashions, though you are not nearly so old, my dear Elise, and Jacqueline's mother thought as we think. She would say that her daughter is being very badly brought up. To be sure, all young creatures nowadays are the same. Parents, on a plea of tenderness, keep them at home, where they get spoiled among grown people, when they had much better have the same kind of education that has succeeded so well with Giselle; bolts on the garden-gates, wholesome seclusion, the company of girls of their own age, a great regularity of life, nothing which stimulates either vanity or imagination. That is the proper way to bring up girls without notions, girls who will let themselves be married without opposition, and are satisfied with the state of life to which Providence may be pleased to call them. For my part, I am enchanted with the ladies in the Rue de Monsieur, and, what is more, Giselle is very happy among them; to hear her talk you would suppose she was quite ready to take the veil. Of course, that is a mere passing fancy. But fancies of that sort are

never dangerous, they have nothing in common with those that are passing nowadays through most girls' brains. Having 'a day!'--what a foolish notion: And then to let little girls take part in it, even in a corner of the room. I'll wager that, though her skirts are half way up her legs, and her hair is dressed like a baby's, that that little de Nailles is less of a child than my granddaughter, who has been brought up by the Benedictines. You say that she probably does not understand all that goes on around her. Perhaps not, but she breathes it in. It's poison--that's what it is!"

There was a good deal of truth in this harsh picture, although it contained considerable exaggeration.

At this moment, when Madame de Monredon was sitting in judgment on the education given to the little girls brought up in the world, and on the ruinous extravagance of their young stepmothers, Madame de Nailles and Jacqueline--their last visitors having departed--were resting themselves, leaning tenderly against each other, on a sofa. Jacqueline's head lay on her mother's lap. Her mother, without speaking, was stroking the girl's dark hair. Jacqueline, too, was silent, but from time to time she kissed the slender fingers sparkling with rings, as they came within reach of her lips.

When M. de Nailles, about dinner-time, surprised them thus, he said, with satisfaction, as he had often said before, that it would be hard to find a home scene more charming, as they sat under the light of a lamp with a pink shade.

That the stepmother and stepdaughter adored each other was beyond a doubt. And yet, had any one been able to look into their hearts at that moment, he would have discovered with surprise that each was thinking of something that she could not confide to the other.

Both were thinking of the same person. Madame de Nailles was occupied with recollections, Jacqueline with hope. She was absorbed in Machiavellian strategy, how to realize a hope that had been formed that very afternoon.

"What are you both thinking of, sitting there so quietly?" said the Baron, stooping over them and kissing first his wife and then his child.

"About nothing," said the wife, with the most innocent of smiles.

"Oh! I am thinking," said Jacqueline, "of many things. I have a secret, papa, that I want to tell you when we are quite alone. Don't be jealous, dear mamma. It is something about a surprise--Oh, a lovely surprise for you."

"Saint Clotilde's day--my fete-day is still far off," said Madame de Nailles, refastening, mother-like, the ribbon that was intended to keep in order the rough ripples of Jacqueline's unruly hair, "and usually your whisperings begin as the day approaches my fete."

"Oh, dear!--you will go and guess it!" cried Jacqueline in alarm.

"Oh! don't guess it, please."

"Well! I will do my best not to guess, then," said the good-natured Clotilde, with a laugh.

"And I assure you, for my part, that I am discretion itself," said M. de Nailles.

So saying, he drew his wife's arm within his own, and the three passed gayly together into the dining-room.

CHAPTER II

A CLEVER STEPMOTHER

No man took more pleasure than M. de Nailles in finding himself in his own home--partly, perhaps, because circumstances compelled him to be very little there. The post of deputy in the French Chamber is no sinecure.

He was not often an orator from the tribune, but he was absorbed by work in the committees--"Harnessed to a lot of bothering reports," as Jacqueline used to say to him. He had barely any time to give to those important duties of his position, by which, as is well known, members of the Corps Legislatif are shamelessly harassed by constituents, who, on pretence that they have helped to place the interests of their district in your hands, feel authorized to worry you with personal matters, such as the choice of agricultural machines, or a place to be found for a wet-nurse.

Besides his public duties, M. de Nailles was occupied by financial speculations--operations that were no doubt made necessary by the style of living commented on by his cousin, Madame de Monredon, who was as stingy as she was bitter of tongue. The elegance that she found fault with was, however, very far from being great when compared with the luxury of the present day. Of course, the Baronne had to have her horses, her opera-box, her fashionable frocks. To supply these very moderate needs, which, however, she never insisted upon, being, so far as words went, most simple in her tastes, M. de Nailles, who had not the temperament which makes men find pleasure in hard work, became more and more fatigued. His days were passed in the Chamber, but he never neglected his interest on the Bourse; in the evening he accompanied his young wife into society, which, she always declared, she did not care for, but which had claims upon her nevertheless. It was therefore not surprising that M. de Nailles's face showed traces of the habitual fatigue that was fast aging him; his tall, thin form had acquired a slight stoop; though only fifty he was evidently in his declining years. He had once been a man of pleasure, it was said, before he entered politics. He had married his first wife late in life. She was a prudent woman who feared to expose him to temptation, and had kept him as far as possible away from Paris.

In the country, having nothing to do, he became interested in agriculture, and in looking after his estate at Grandchaux. He had been made a member of the Conseil General, when unfortunately death too early deprived him of the wise and gentle counsellor for whom he felt, possibly not a very lively love, but certainly a high esteem and affection. After he became a widower he met in the Pyrenees, where, as he was whiling away the time of seclusion proper after his loss, a young lady who appeared to him exactly the person he needed to bring up his little daughter--because she was extremely attractive to himself. Of course M. de Nailles found plenty of other reasons for his choice, which he gave to the world and to himself to justify his second marriage--but this was the true reason and the only one. His friends, however, all of whom had urged on him the desirability of taking another wife, in consideration of the age of Jacqueline, raised many objections as soon as he announced his intention of espousing Mademoiselle Clotilde Hecker, eldest daughter of a man who had been, at one time, a prefect under the Empire, but who had been turned out of office by the Republican Government. He had a large family and many debts; but M. de Nailles had some answer always ready for the objections of his family and friends. He was convinced that Mademoiselle Hecker, having no fortune, would be less exacting than other women and more disposed to lead a quiet life.

She had been almost a mother to her own young brothers and sisters, which was a pledge for motherliness toward Jacqueline, etc., etc. Nevertheless, had she not had eyes as blue as those of the beauties painted by Greuze, plenty of audacious wit, and a delicate complexion, due to her Alsatian origin--had she not possessed a slender waist and a lovely figure, he might have asked himself why a young lady who, in winter, studied painting with the commendable intention of making her own living by art, passed the summers at all the watering-places of France and those of neighboring countries, without any perceptible motive.

But, thanks to the bandage love ties over the eyes of men, he saw only what Mademoiselle Clotilde was willing that he should see. In the first place he saw the great desirability of a talent for painting which, unlike music--so often dangerous to married happiness--gives women who cultivate it sedentary interests. And then he was attracted by the model daughter's filial piety as he beheld her taking care of her mother, who was the victim of an incurable disorder, which required her by turns to reside at Cauterets, or sometimes at Ems, sometimes at Aix in Savoy, and sometimes even at Trouville. The poor girl had assured him that she asked no happier lot than to live eight months of the year in the country, where she would devote herself to teaching Jacqueline, for whom at first sight she had taken a violent fancy (the attraction indeed was mutual). She assured him she would teach her all she knew herself, and her diplomas proved how well educated she had been.

Indeed, it seemed as if only prejudice could find any objection to so prudent and reasonable a marriage, a marriage contracted principally for the good of Jacqueline.

It came to pass, however, that the air of Grandchaux, which is situated in the most unhealthful part of Limouzin, proved particularly hurtful to the new Madame de Nailles. She could not live a month on her husband's property without falling into a state of health which she attributed to malaria. M. de Nailles was at first much concerned about the condition of things which seemed likely to upset all his plans for retirement in the country, but, his wife having persuaded him that his position in the Conseil General was only a stepping-stone to a seat in the Corps Legislatif, where his place ought to be, he presented himself to the electors as a candidate, and was almost unanimously elected deputy, the conservative vote being still all powerful in that part of the country.

His wife, it was said, had shown rare zeal and activity at the time of the election, employing in her husband's service all those little arts which enable her sex to succeed in politics, as well as in everything else they set their minds to. No lady ever more completely turned the heads of country electors. It was really Madame de Nailles who took her seat in the Left Centre of the Chamber, in the person of her husband.

After that she returned to Limouzin only long enough to keep up her popularity, though, with touching resignation, she frequently offered to spend the summer at Grandchaux, even if the consequences should be her death, like that of Pia in the Maremma. Her husband, of course, peremptorily set his face against such self-sacrifice.

The facilities for Jacqueline's education were increased by their settling down as residents of Paris. Madame de Nailles superintended the instruction of her stepdaughter with motherly solicitude, seconded, however, by a 'promeneuse', or walking-governess, which left her free to fulfil her own engagements in the afternoons. The walking-governess is a singular modern institution, intended to supply the place of the too often inconvenient daily governess of former times. The necessary qualifications of such a person are that she should have sturdy legs, and such knowledge of some foreign language as will enable her during their walks to converse in it with her pupil. Fraulein Schult, who came from one of the German cantons of Switzerland, was an ideal 'promeneuse'. She never was tired and she was well-informed. The number of things that could be learned from her during a walk was absolutely incredible.

Madame de Nailles, therefore, after a time, gave up to her, not without apparent regret, the duty of accompanying Jacqueline, while she herself fulfilled those duties to society which the most devoted of mothers can not wholly avoid; but the stepmother and stepdaughter were always to be seen together at mass at one o'clock; together they attended the Cours (that system of classes now so much in vogue) and also the weekly instruction given in the catechism; and if Madame de Nailles, when, at night, she told her husband all she had been doing for Jacqueline during the day (she never made any merit of her zeal for the child's welfare), added: "I left Jacqueline in this place or in that, where Mademoiselle Schult was to call for her," M. de Nailles showed no disposition to ask questions, for he well understood that his wife felt a certain delicacy in telling him that she had been to pay a brief visit to her own relatives, who, she knew, were distasteful to him. He had, indeed, very

soon discerned in them a love of intrigue, a desire to get the most they could out of him, and a disagreeable propensity to parasitism. With the consummate tact she showed in everything she did, Madame de Nailles kept her own family in the background, though she never neglected them. She was always doing them little services, but she knew well that there were certain things about them that could not but be disagreeable to her husband. M. de Nailles knew all this, too, and respected his wife's affection for her family. He seldom asked her where she had been during the day. If he had she would have answered, with a sigh: "I went to see my mother while Jacqueline was taking her dancing-lesson, and before she went to her singing-master."

That she was passionately attached to Jacqueline was proved by the affection the little girl conceived for her. "We two are friends," both mother and daughter often said of each other. Even Modeste, old Modeste, who had been at first indignant at seeing a stranger take the place of her dead mistress, could not but acknowledge that the usurper was no ordinary step mother. It might have been truly said that Madame de Nailles had never scolded Jacqueline, and that Jacqueline had never done anything contrary to the wishes of Madame de Nailles. When anything went wrong it was Fraulein Schult who was reproached first; if there was any difficulty in the management of Jacqueline, she alone received complaints. In the eyes of the "two friends," Fraulein Schult was somehow to be blamed for everything that went wrong in the family, but between themselves an observer might have watched in vain for the smallest cloud. Madame de Nailles, when she was first married, could not make enough of the very ugly yet attractive little girl, whose tight black curls and gypsy face made an admirable contrast to her own more delicate style of beauty, which was that of a blonde. She caressed Jacqueline, she dressed her up, she took her about with her like a little dog, and overwhelmed her with demonstrations of affection, which served not only to show off her own graceful attitudes, but gave spectators a high opinion of her kindness of heart.

When from time to time some one, envious of her happiness, pitied her for being childless, Madame de Nailles would say: "What do you mean? I have one daughter; she is enough for me."

It is a pity children grow so fast, and that little girls who were once ugly sometimes develop into beautiful young women. The time came when the model stepmother began to wish that Jacqueline would only develop morally, intellectually, and not physically. But she showed nothing of this in her behavior, and replied to any compliments addressed to her concerning Jacqueline with as much maternal modesty as if the dawning loveliness of her stepdaughter had been due to herself.

"Her nose is rather too long--don't you think so? And she will always be too dark, I fear." But she used always to add, "She is good enough and pretty enough to pass muster with any critic--poor little pussy-cat!" She became desirous to discover some tendency to ill-health in the plant that was too ready to bloom into beauty and perfection. She would have liked to be able to assert that Jacqueline's health would not permit her to sit up late at night, that fashionable hours would be injurious to

her, that it would be undesirable to let her go into society as long as she could be kept from doing so. But Jacqueline persisted in never being ill, and was calculating with impatience how many years it would be before she could go to her first ball--three or four possibly. Was Madame de Nailles in three or four years to be reduced to the position of a chaperon? The young stepmother thought of such a possibility with horror. Her anxiety on this subject, however, as well as several other anxieties, was so well concealed that even her husband suspected nothing.

The complete sympathy which existed between the two beings he most loved made M. de Nailles very happy. He had but one thing to complain of in his wife, and that thing was very small. Since she had married she had completely given up her painting. He had no knowledge of art himself, and had therefore given her credit for great artistic capacity. The fact was that in her days of poverty she had never been artist enough to make a living, and now that she was rich she felt inclined to laugh at her own limited ability. Her practice of art, she said, had only served to give her a knowledge of outline and of color; a knowledge she utilized in her dress and in the smallest details of house decoration and furniture. Everything she wore, everything that surrounded her, was arranged to perfection. She had a genius for decoration, for furniture, for trifles, and brought her artistic knowledge to bear even on the tying of a ribbon, or the arrangement of a nosegay.

"This is all I retain of your lessons," she said sometimes to Hubert Marien, when recalling to his memory the days in which she sought his advice as to how to prepare herself for the "struggle for life."

This phrase was amusing when it proceeded from her lips. What!--"struggle for life" with those little delicate, soft, childlike hands? How absurd! She laughed at the idea now, and all those who heard her laughed with her; Marien laughed more than any one. He, who had befriended her in her days of adversity, seemed to retain for the Baroness in her prosperity the same respectful and discreet devotion he had shown her as Mademoiselle Hecker. He had sent a wonderful portrait of her, as the wife of M. de Nailles, to the Salon--a portrait that the richer electors of Grandchaux, who had voted for her husband and who could afford to travel, gazed at with satisfaction, congratulating themselves that they had a deputy who had married so pretty a woman. It even seemed as if the beauty of Madame de Nailles belonged in some sort to the arrondissement, so proud were those who lived there of having their share in her charms.

Another portrait--that of M. de Nailles himself--was sent down to Limouzin from Paris, and all the peasants in the country round were invited to come and look at it. That also produced a very favorable impression on the rustic public, and added to the popularity of their deputy. Never had the proprietor of Grandchaux looked so grave, so dignified, so majestic, so absorbed in deep reflection, as he looked standing beside a table covered with papers--papers, no doubt, all having relation to local interests, important to the public and to individuals. It was the very figure of a statesman destined to high dignities. No one who gazed on such a deputy could doubt that one day he would be in the

ministry.

It was by such real services that Marien endeavored to repay the friendship and the kindness always awaiting him in the small house in the Parc Monceau, where we have just seen Jacqueline eagerly offering him some spiced cakes. To complete what seemed due to the household there only remained to paint the curiously expressive features of the girl at whom he had been looking that very day with more than ordinary attention. Once already, when Jacqueline was hardly out of baby-clothes, the great painter had made an admirable sketch of her tousled head, a sketch in which she looked like a little imp of darkness, and this sketch Madame de Nailles took pains should always be seen, but it bore no resemblance to the slender young girl who was on the eve of becoming, whatever might be done to arrest her development, a beautiful young woman. Jacqueline disliked to look at that picture. It seemed to do her an injury by associating her with her nursery. Probably that was the reason why she had been so pleased to hear Hubert Marien say unexpectedly that she was now ready for the portrait which had been often joked about, every one putting it off to the period, always remote, when "the may-pole" should have developed a pretty face and figure.

And now she was disquieted lest the idea of taking her picture, which she felt was very flattering, should remain inoperative in the painter's brain. She wanted it carried out at once, as soon as possible. Jacqueline detested waiting, and for some reason, which she never talked about, the years that seemed so short and swift to her stepmother seemed to her to be terribly long. Marien himself had said: "There is a great interval between a dream and its execution." These words had thrown cold water on her sudden joy. She wanted to force him to keep his promise--to paint her portrait immediately. How to do this was the problem her little head, reclining on Madame de Nailles's lap after the departure of their visitors, had been endeavoring to solve.

Should she communicate her wish to her indulgent stepmother, who for the most part willed whatever she wished her to do? A vague instinct--an instinct of some mysterious danger--warned her that in this case her father would be her better confidant.

CHAPTER III

THE FRIEND OF THE FAY

A week later M. de Nailles said to Hubert Marien, as they were smoking together in the conservatory, after the usual little family dinner on Wednesday was over:

"Well!--when would you like Jacqueline to come to sit for her picture?"

"What! are you thinking about that?" cried the painter, letting his cigar fall in his astonishment.

"She told me that you had proposed to make her portrait."

"The sly little minx!" thought Marien. "I only spoke of painting it some day," he said, with embarrassment.

"Well! she would like that 'some day' to be now, and she has a reason for wanting it at once, which, I hope, will decide you to gratify her. The third of June is Sainte-Clotilde's day, and she has taken it into her head that she would like to give her mamma a magnificent present-- a present that, of course, we shall unite to give her. For some time past I have been thinking of asking you to paint a portrait of my daughter," continued M. de Nailles, who had in fact had no more wish for the portrait than he had had to be a deputy, until it had been put into his head. But the women of his household, little or big, could persuade him into anything.

"I really don't think I have the time now," said Marien.

"Bah!--you have whole two months before you. What can absorb you so entirely? I know you have your pictures ready for the Salon."

"Yes--of course--of course--but are you sure that Madame de Nailles would approve of it?"

"She will approve whatever I sanction," said M. de Nailles, with as much assurance as if he had been master in his domestic circle; "besides, we don't intend to ask her. It is to be a surprise. Jacqueline is looking forward to the pleasure it will give her. There is something very touching to me in the affection of that little thing for--for her mother." M. de Nailles usually hesitated a moment before saying that word, as if he were afraid of transferring something still belonging to his dead wife to another--that dead wife he so seldom remembered in any other way. He added, "She is so eager to give her pleasure."

Marien shook his head with an air of uncertainty.

"Are you sure that such a portrait would be really acceptable to Madame de Nailles?"

"How can you doubt it?" said the Baron, with much astonishment. "A portrait of her daughter!--done by a great master? However, of course, if we are putting you to any inconvenience--if you would rather not undertake it, you had better say so."

"No--of course I will do it, if you wish it," said Marien, quickly, who, although he was anxious to do nothing to displease Madame de Nailles, was equally desirous to stand well with her husband. "Yet I own that all the mystery that must attend on what you propose may put me to some embarrassment. How do you expect Jacqueline will be able to conceal--"

"Oh! easily enough. She walks out every day with Mademoiselle Schult. Well, Mademoiselle Schult will bring her to your studio instead of taking

her to the Champs Elysees--or to walk elsewhere."

"But every day there will be concealments, falsehoods, deceptions. I think Madame de Nailles might prefer to be asked for her permission."

"Ask for her permission when I have given mine? Ah, fa! my dear Marien, am I, or am I not, the father, of Jacqueline? I take upon myself the whole responsibility."

"Then there is nothing more to be said. But do you think that Jacqueline will keep the secret till the picture is done?"

"You don't know little girls; they are all too glad to have something of which they can make a mystery."

"When would you like us to begin?"

Marien had by this time said to himself that for him to hold out longer might seem strange to M. de Nailles. Besides, the matter, though in some respects it gave him cause for anxiety, really excited an interest in him. For some time past, though he had long known women and knew very little of mere girls, he had had his suspicions that a drama was being enacted in Jacqueline's heart, a drama of which he himself was the hero. He amused himself by watching it, though he did nothing to promote it. He was an artist and a keen and penetrating observer; he employed psychology in the service of his art, and probably to that might have been attributed the individual character of his portraits--a quality to be found in an equal degree only in those of Ricard.

What particularly interested him at this moment was the assumed indifference of Jacqueline while her father was conducting the negotiation which was of her suggestion. When they returned to the salon after smoking she pretended not to be the least anxious to know the result of their conversation. She sat sewing near the lamp, giving all her attention to the piece of lace on which she was working. Her father made her a sign which meant "He consents," and then Marien saw that the needle in her fingers trembled, and a slight color rose in her face--but that was all. She did not say a word. He could not know that for a week past she had gone to church every time she took a walk, and had offered a prayer and a candle that her wish might be granted. How very anxious and excited she had been all that week! The famous composition of which she had spoken to Giselle, the subject of which had so astonished the young girl brought up by the Benedictine nuns, felt the inspiration of her emotion and excitement. Jacqueline was in a frame of mind which made reading those three masterpieces by three great poets, and pondering the meaning of their words, very dangerous. The poems did not affect her with the melancholy they inspire in those who have "lived and loved," but she was attracted by their tenderness and their passion. Certain lines she applied to herself--certain others to another person. The very word love so often repeated in the verses sent a thrill through all her frame. She aspired to taste those "intoxicating moments," those "swift delights," those "sublime ecstasies," those "divine transports"--all the beautiful things, in short, of which the poems spoke, and which were as

yet unknown to her. How could she know them? How could she, after an experience of sorrow, which seemed to her to be itself enviable, retain such sweet remembrances as the poets described?

"Let us love--love each other! Let us hasten to enjoy the passing hour!" so sang the poet of Le Lac. That passing hour of bliss she thought she had already enjoyed. She was sure that for a long time past she had loved. When had that love begun? She hardly knew. But it would last as long as she might live. One loves but once.

These personal emotions, mingling with the literary enchantments of the poets, caused Jacqueline's pen to fly over her paper without effort, and she produced a composition so far superior to anything she usually wrote that it left the lucubrations of her companions far behind. M. Regis, the professor, said so to the class. He was enthusiastic about it, and greatly surprised. Belle, who had been always first in this kind of composition, was far behind Jacqueline, and was so greatly annoyed at her defeat that she would not speak to her for a week. On the other hand Colette and Dolly, who never had aspired to literary triumphs, were moved to tears when the "Study on the comparative merits of Three Poems, 'Le Lac,' 'Souvenir,' and 'La Tristesse d'Olympio,'" signed "Mademoiselle de Nailles," received the honor of being read aloud. This reading was followed by a murmur of applause, mingled with some hisses which may have proceeded from the viper of jealousy. But the paper made a sensation like that of some new scandal. Mothers and governesses whispered together. Many thought that that little de Nailles had expressed sentiments not proper at her age. Some came to the conclusion that M. Regis chose subjects for composition not suited to young girls. A committee waited on the unlucky professor to beg him to be more prudent for the future. He even lost, in consequence of Jacqueline's success, one of his pupils (the most stupid one, be it said, in the class), whose mother took her away, saying, with indignation, "One might as well risk the things they are teaching at the Sorbonne!"

This literary incident greatly alarmed Madame de Nailles! Of all things she dreaded that her daughter should early become dreamy and romantic. But on this point Jacqueline's behavior was calculated to reassure her. She laughed about her composition, she frolicked like a six-year-old child; without any apparent cause, she grew gayer and gayer as the time approached for the execution of her plot.

The evening before the day fixed on for the first sitting, Modeste, the elderly maid of the first Madame de Nailles, who loved her daughter, whom she had known from the moment of her birth, as if she had been her own foster-child, arrived at the studio of Hubert Marien in the Rue de Prony, bearing a box which she said contained all that would be wanted by Mademoiselle. Marien had the curiosity to look into it. It contained a robe of oriental muslin, light as air, diaphanous--and so dazzlingly white that he remarked:

"She will look like a fly in milk in that thing."

"Oh!" replied Modeste, with a laugh of satisfaction, "it is very

becoming to her. I altered it to fit her, for it is one of Madame's dresses. Mademoiselle has nothing but short skirts, and she wanted to be painted as a young lady."

"With the approval of her papa?"

"Yes, of course, Monsieur, Monsieur le Baron gave his consent. But for that I certainly should not have minded what the child said to me."

"Then," replied Marien, "I can say nothing," and he made ready for his sitter the next day, by turning two or three studies of the nude, which might have shocked her, with their faces to the wall.

A foreign language can not be properly acquired unless the learner has great opportunities for conversation. It therefore became a fixed habit with Fraulein Schult and Jacqueline to keep up a lively stream of talk during their walks, and their discourse was not always about the rain, the fine weather, the things displayed in the shop-windows, nor the historical monuments of Paris, which they visited conscientiously.

What is near the heart is sure to come eventually to the surface in continual tete-a-tete intercourse. Fraulein Schult, who was of a sentimental temperament, in spite of her outward resemblance to a grenadier, was very willing to allow her companion to draw from her confessions relating to an intended husband, who was awaiting her at Berne, and whose letters, both in prose and verse, were her comfort in her exile. This future husband was an apothecary, and the idea that he pounded out verses as he pounded his drugs in a mortar, and rolled out rhymes with his pills, sometimes inclined Jacqueline to laugh, but she listened patiently to the plaintive outpourings of her 'promeneuse', because she wished to acquire a right to reciprocate by a few half-confidences of her own. In her turn, therefore, she confided to Fraulein Schult--moved much as Midas had been, when for his own relief he whispered to the reeds--that if she were sometimes idle, inattentive, "away off in the moon," as her instructors told her by way of reproach, it was caused by one ever-present idea, which, ever since she had been able to think or feel, had taken possession of her inmost being--the idea of being loved some day by somebody as she herself loved.

"Was that somebody a boy of her own age?"

Oh, fie!--mere boys--still schoolboys--could only be looked upon as playfellows or comrades. Of course she considered Fred--Fred, for example!--Frederic d'Argy--as a brother, but how different he was from her ideal. Even young men of fashion--she had seen some of them on Tuesdays--Raoul Wermant, the one who so distinguished himself as a leader in the 'german', or Yvonne's brother, the officer of chasseurs, who had gained the prize for horsemanship, and others besides these--seemed to her very commonplace by comparison. No!--he whom she loved was a man in the prime of life, well known to fame. She didn't care if he had a few white hairs.

"Is he a person of rank?" asked Fraulein Schult, much puzzled.

"Oh! if you mean of noble birth, no, not at all. But fame is so superior to birth! There are more ways than one of acquiring an illustrious name, and the name that a man makes for himself is the noblest of all!"

Then Jacqueline begged Fraulein Schult to imagine something like the passion of Bettina for Goethe--Fraulein Schult having told her that story simply with a view of interesting her in German conversation only the great man whose name she would not tell was not nearly so old as Goethe, and she herself was much less childish than Bettina. But, above all, it was his genius that attracted her--though his face, too, was very pleasing. And she went on to describe his appearance--till suddenly she stopped, burning with indignation; for she perceived that, notwithstanding the minuteness of her description, what she said was conveying an idea of ugliness and not one of the manly beauty she intended to portray.

"He is not like that at all," she cried. "He has such a beautiful smile--a smile like no other I ever saw. And his talk is so amusing--and--" here Jacqueline lowered her voice as if afraid to be overheard, "and I do think--I think, after all, he does love me--just a little."

On what could she have founded such a notion? Good heaven!--it was on something that had at first deeply grieved her, a sudden coldness and reserve that had come over his manner to her. Not long before she had read an English novel (no others were allowed to come into her hands). It was rather a stupid book, with many tedious passages, but in it she was told how the high-minded hero, not being able, for grave reasons, to aspire to the hand of the heroine, had taken refuge in an icy coldness, much as it cost him, and as soon as possible had gone away. English novels are nothing if not moral.

This story, not otherwise interesting, threw a gleam of light on what, up to that time, had been inexplicable to Jacqueline. He was above all things a man of honor. He must have perceived that his presence troubled her. He had possibly seen her when she stole a half-burned cigarette which he had left upon the table, a prize she had laid up with other relics--an old glove that he had lost, a bunch of violets he had gathered for her in the country. Yes! When she came to think of it, she felt certain he must have seen her furtively lay her hand upon that cigarette; that cigarette had compromised her. Then it was he must have said to himself that it was due to her parents, who had always shown him kindness, to surmount an attachment that could come to nothing--nothing at present. But when she should be old enough for him to ask her hand, would he dare? Might he not rashly think himself too old? She must seek out some way to give him encouragement, to give him to understand that she was not, after all, so far--so very far from being a young lady--old enough to be married. How difficult it all was! All the more difficult because she was exceedingly afraid of him.

It is not surprising that Fraulein Schult, after listening day after day to such recitals, with all the alternations of hope and of discouragement

which succeeded one another in the mind of her precocious pupil, guessed, the moment that Jacqueline came to her, in a transport of joy, to ask her to go with her to the Rue de Prony, that the hero of the mysterious love-story was no other than Hubert Marien.

As soon as she understood this, she perceived that she should be placed in a very false position. But she thought to herself there was no possible way of getting out of it, without giving a great deal too much importance to a very innocent piece of childish folly; she therefore determined to say nothing about it, but to keep a strict watch in the mean time. After all, M. de Nailles himself had given her her orders. She was to accompany Jacqueline, and do her crochet-work in one corner of the studio as long as the sitting lasted.

All she could do was to obey.

"And above all not a word to mamma, whatever she may ask you," said Jacqueline.

And her father added, with a laugh, "Not a word." Fraulein Schult felt that she knew what was expected of her. She was naturally compliant, and above all things she was anxious to get paid for as many hours of her time as possible--much like the driver of a fiacre, because the more money she could make the sooner she would be in a position to espouse her apothecary.

When Jacqueline, escorted by her Swiss duenna, penetrated almost furtively into Marien's studio, her heart beat as if she had a consciousness of doing something very wrong. In truth, she had pictured to herself so many impossible scenes beforehand, had rehearsed the probable questions and answers in so many strange dialogues, had soothed her fancy with so many extravagant ideas, that she had at last created, bit by bit, a situation very different from the reality, and then threw herself into it, body and soul.

The look of the atelier--the first she had ever been in in her life--disappointed her. She had expected to behold a gorgeous collection of bric-a-brac, according to accounts she had heard of the studios of several celebrated masters. That of Marien was remarkable only for its vast dimensions and its abundance of light. Studies and sketches hung on the walls, were piled one over another in corners, were scattered about everywhere, attesting the incessant industry of the artist, whose devotion to his calling was so great that his own work never satisfied him.

Only some interesting casts from antique bronzes, brought out into strong relief by a background of tapestry, adorned this lofty hall, which had none of that confusion of decorative objects, in the midst of which some modern artists seem to pose themselves rather than to labor.

A fresh canvas stood upon an easel, all ready for the sitter.

"If you please, we will lose no time," said Marien, rather roughly,

seeing that Jacqueline was about to explore all the corners of his apartment, and that at that moment, with the tips of her fingers, she was drawing aside the covering he had cast over his Death of Savonarola, the picture he was then at work upon. It was not the least of his grudges against Jacqueline for insisting on having her portrait painted that it obliged him to lay aside this really great work, that he might paint a likeness.

"In ten minutes I shall be ready," said Jacqueline, obediently taking off her hat.

"Why can't you stay as you are? That jacket suits you. Let us begin immediately."

"No, indeed! What a horrid suggestion!" she cried, running up to the box which was half open. "You'll see how much better I can look in a moment or two."

"I put no faith in your fancies about your toilette. I certainly don't promise to accept them."

Nevertheless, he left her alone with her Bernese governess, saying: "Call me when you are ready, I shall be in the next room."

A quarter of an hour, and more, passed, and no signal had been given. Marien, getting out of patience, knocked on the door.

"Have you nearly done beautifying yourself?" he asked, in a tone of irony.

"Just done," replied a low voice, which trembled.

He went in, and to the great amusement of Fraulein Schult, who was not too preoccupied to notice everything, he stood confounded--petrified, as a man might be by some work of magic. What had become of Jacqueline? What had she in common with that dazzling vision? Had she been touched by some fairy's wand? Or, to accomplish such a transformation, had nothing been needed but the substitution of a woman's dress, fitted to her person, for the short skirts and loose waists cut in a boyish fashion, which had made the little girl seem hardly to belong to any sex, an indefinite being, condemned, as it were, to childishness? How tall, and slender, and graceful she looked in that long gown, the folds of which fell from her waist in flowing lines, a waist as round and flexible as the branch of a willow; what elegance there was in her modest corsage, which displayed for the first time her lovely arms and neck, half afraid of their own exposure. She still was not robust, but the leanness that she herself had owned to was not brought into prominence by any bone or angle, her dark skin was soft and polished, the color of ancient statues which have been slightly tinted yellow by exposure to the sun. This girl, a Parisienne, seemed formed on the model of a figurine of Tanagra. Greek, too, was her small head, crowned only by her usual braid of hair, which she had simply gathered up so as to show the nape of her neck, which was perhaps the most beautiful thing in all her beautiful person.

"Well!--what do you think of me?" she said to Marien, with a searching glance to see how she impressed him--a glance strangely like that of a grown woman.

"Well!--I can't get over it!--Why have you bedizened yourself in that fashion?" he asked, with an affectation of 'brusquerie', as he tried to recover his power of speech.

"Then you don't like me?" she murmured, in a low voice. Tears came into her eyes; her lips trembled.

"I don't see Jacqueline."

"No--I should hope not--but I am better than Jacqueline, am I not?"

"I am accustomed to Jacqueline. This new acquaintance disconcerts me. Give me time to get used to her. But once again let me ask, what possessed you to disguise yourself?"

"I am not disguised. I am disguised when I am forced to wear those things, which do not suit me," said Jacqueline, pointing to her gray jacket and plaid skirt which were hung up on a hat-rack. "Oh, I know why mamma keeps me like that--she is afraid I should get too fond of dress before I have finished my education, and that my mind may be diverted from serious subjects. It is no doubt all intended for my good, but I should not lose much time if I turned up my hair like this, and what harm could there be in lengthening my skirts an inch or two? My picture will show her that I am improved by such little changes, and perhaps it will induce her to let me go to the Bal Blanc that Madame d'Etaples is going to give on Yvonne's birthday. Mamma declined for me, saying I was not fit to wear a low-necked corsage, but you see she was mistaken."

"Rather," said Marien, smiling in spite of himself.

"Yes--wasn't she?" she went on, delighted at his look. "Of course, I have bones, but they don't show like the great hollows under the collar-bones that Dolly shows, for instance--but Dolly looks stouter than I because her face is so round. Well! Dolly is going to Madame d'Etaples's ball."

"I grant," said Marien, devoting all his attention to the preparation of his palette, that she might not see him laugh, "I grant that you have bones--yes, many bones--but they are not much seen because they are too well placed to be obtrusive."

"I am glad of that," said Jacqueline, delighted.

"But let me ask you one question. Where did you pick up that queer gown? It seems to me that I have seen it somewhere."

"No doubt you have," replied Jacqueline, who had quite recovered from her first shock, and was now ready to talk; "it is the dress mamma had made

some time ago when she acted in a comedy."

"So I thought," growled Marien, biting his lips.

The dress recalled to his mind many personal recollections, and for one instant he paused. Madame de Nailles, among other talents, possessed that of amateur acting. On one occasion, several years before, she had asked his advice concerning what dress she should wear in a little play of Scribe's, which was to be given at the house of Madame d'Avrigny--the house in all Paris most addicted to private theatricals. This reproduction of a forgotten play, with its characters attired in the costume of the period in which the play was placed, had had great success, a success due largely to the excellence of the costumes. In the comic parts the dressing had been purposely exaggerated, but Madame de Nailles, who played the part of a great coquette, would not have been dressed in character had she not tried to make herself as bewitching as possible.

Marien had shown her pictures of the beauties of 1840, painted by Dubufe, and she had decided on a white gauze embroidered with gold, in which, on that memorable evening, she had captured more than one heart, and which had had its influence on the life and destiny of Marien. This might have been seen in the vague glance of indignation with which he now regarded it.

"Never," he thought, "was it half so pretty when worn by Madame de Nailles as by her stepdaughter."

Jacqueline meantime went on talking.

"You must know--I was rather perplexed what to do--almost all mamma's gowns made me look horribly too old. Modeste tried them on me one after another. We burst out laughing, they seemed so absurd. And then we were afraid mamma might chance to want the one I took. This old thing it was not likely she would ask for. She had worn it only once, and then put it away. The gauze is a little yellow from lying by, don't you think so? But we asked my father, who said it was all right, that I should look less dark in it, and that the dress was of no particular date, which was always an advantage. These Grecian dresses are always in the fashion. Ah! four years ago mamma was much more slender than she is now. But we have taken it in--oh! we took it in a great deal under the arms, but we had to let it down. Would you believe it?--I am taller than mamma--but you can hardly see the seam, it is concealed by the gold embroidery."

"No matter for that. We shall only take a three-quarters' length," said Marien.

"Oh, what a pity! No one will see I have a long skirt on. But I shall be 'decolletee', at any rate. I shall wear a comb. No one would know the picture for me--nobody!--You yourself hardly knew me--did you?"

"Not at first sight. You are much altered."

"Mamma will be amazed," said Jacqueline, clasping her hands. "It was a good idea!"

"Amazed, I do not doubt," said Marien, somewhat anxiously. "But suppose we take our pose--Stay!--keep just as you are. Your hands before you, hanging down--so. Your fingers loosely clasped--that's it. Turn your head a little. What a lovely neck!--how well her head is set upon it!" he cried, involuntarily.

Jacqueline glanced at Fraulein Schult, who was at the farther end of the studio, busy with her crochet. "You see," said the look, "that he has found out I am pretty--that I am worth something--all the rest will soon happen."

And, while Marien was sketching in the graceful figure that posed before him, Jacqueline's imagination was investing it with the white robe of a bride. She had a vision of the painter growing more and more resolved to ask her hand in marriage as the portrait grew beneath his brush; of course, her father would say at first: "You are mad--you must wait. I shall not let Jacqueline marry till she is seventeen." But long engagements, she had heard, had great delights, though in France they are not the fashion. At last, after being long entreated, she was sure that M. and Madame de Nailles would end by giving their consent--they were so fond of Marien. Standing there, dreaming this dream, which gave her face an expression of extreme happiness, Jacqueline made a most admirable model. She had not felt in the least fatigued when Marien at last said to her, apologetically: "You must be ready to drop--I forgot you were not made of wood; we will go on to-morrow."

Jacqueline, having put on her gray jacket with as much contempt for it as Cinderella may have felt for her rags after her successes at the ball, departed with the delightful sensation of having made a bold first step, and being eager to make another.

Thus it was with all her sittings, though some left her anxious and unhappy, as for instance when Marien, absorbed in his work, had not paused, except to say, "Turn your head a little--you are losing the pose." Or else, "Now you may rest for today."

On such occasions she would watch him anxiously as he painted swiftly, his brush making great splashes on the canvas, his dark features wearing a scowl, his chin on his breast, a deep frown upon his forehead, on which the hair grew low. It was evident that at such times he had no thought of pleasing her. Little did she suspect that he was saying to himself: "Fool that I am!--A man of my age to take pleasure in seeing that little head filled with follies and fancies of which I am the object. But can one--let one be ever so old--always act--or think reasonably? You are mad, Marien! A child of fourteen! Bah!--they make her out to be fourteen--but she is fifteen--and was not that the age of Juliet? But, you old graybeard, you are not Romeo!--"Ma foi! I am in a pretty scrape. It ought to teach me not to play with fire at my age."

Those words "at my age" were the refrain to all the reflections of Hubert

Marien. He had seen enough in his relations with women to have no doubt about Jacqueline's feelings, of which indeed he had watched the rise and progress from the time she had first begun to conceive a passion for him, with a mixture of amusement and conceit. The most cautious of men are not insensible to flattery, whatever form it may take. To be fallen in love with by a child was no doubt absurd--a thing to be laughed at--but Jacqueline seemed no longer a child, since for him she had uncovered her young shoulders and arranged her dark hair on her head with the effect of a queenly diadem. Not only had her dawning loveliness been revealed to him alone, but to him it seemed that he had helped to make her lovely. The innocent tenderness she felt for him had accomplished this miracle. Why should he refuse to inhale an incense so pure, so genuine? How could he help being sensible to its fragrance? Would it not be in his power to put an end to the whole affair whenever he pleased? But till then might he not bask in it, as one does in a warm ray of spring sunshine? He put aside, therefore, all scruples. And when he did this Jacqueline with rapture saw the painter's face, no longer with its scowl, but softened by some secret influence, the lines smoothed from his brow, while the beautiful smile which had fascinated so many women passed like a ray of light over his expressive mobile features; then she would once more fancy that he was making love to her, and indeed he said many things, which, without rousing in himself any scruples of conscience, or alarming the propriety of Fraulein Schult, were well calculated to delude a girl who had had no experience, and who was charmed by the illusions of a love-affair, as she might have been by a fairy-story.

It is true that sometimes, when he fancied he might have gone too far, Marien would grow sarcastic, or stay silent for a time. But this change of behavior produced on Jacqueline only the same effect that the caprices of a coquette produce upon a very young admirer. She grew anxious, she wanted to find out the reason, and finally found some explanation or excuse for him that coincided with her fancies.

The thing that reassured her in such cases was her picture. If she could seem to him as beautiful as he had made her look on canvas she was sure that he must love her.

"Is this really I? Are you sure?" she said to Marien with a laugh of delight. "It seems to me that you have made me too handsome."

"I have hardly done you justice," he replied. "It is not my fault if you are more beautiful than seems natural, like the beauties in the keepsakes. By the way, I hold those English things in horror. What do you say of them?"

Then Jacqueline undertook to defend the keepsake beauties with animation, declaring that no one but a hopelessly realistic painter would refuse to do justice to those charming monstrosities.

"Good heavens!" thought Marien, "if she is adding a quick wit to her other charms--that will put the finishing stroke to me."

When the portrait was sufficiently advanced, M. de Nailles came to the

studio to judge of the likeness. He was delighted: "Only, my friend, I think," he cried to Marien, endeavoring to soften his one objection to the picture, "that you have given her a look--how can I put it?--an expression very charming no doubt, but which is not that of a child of her age. You know what I mean. It is something tender--intense--profound, too feminine. It may come to her some day, perhaps--but hitherto Jacqueline's expression has been generally that of a merry, mischievous child."

"Oh, papa!" cried the young girl, stung by the insult.

"You may possibly be right," Marien hastened to reply, "it was probably the fatigue of posing that gave her that expression."

"Oh!" repeated Jacqueline, more shocked than ever.

"I can alter it," said the painter, much amused by her extreme despair. But Marien thought that Jacqueline had not in the least that precocious air which her father attributed to her, when standing before him she gave herself up to thoughts the current of which he followed easily, watching on her candid face its changes of expression. How could he have painted her other than she appeared to him? Was what he saw an apparition--or was it a work of magic?

Several times during the sittings M. de Nailles made his appearance in the studio, and after greatly praising the work, persisted in his objection that it made Jacqueline too old. But since the painter saw her thus they must accept his judgment. It was no doubt an effect of the grown-up costume that she had had a fancy to put on.

"After all," he said to Jacqueline, "it is of not much consequence; you will grow up to it some of these days. And I pay you my compliments in advance on your appearance in the future."

She felt like choking with rage. "Oh! is it right," she thought, "for parents to persist in keeping a young girl forever in her cradle, so to speak?"

CHAPTER IV

A DANGEROUS MODEL

Time passed too quickly to please Jacqueline. Her portrait was finished at last, notwithstanding the willingness Marien had shown--or so it seemed to her--to retouch it unnecessarily that she might again and again come back to his atelier. But it was done at last. She glided into that dear atelier for the last time, her heart big with regret, with no hope that she would ever again put on the fairy robe which had, she thought, transfigured her till she was no longer little Jacqueline.

"I want you only for one moment, and I need only your face," said Marien.
"I want to change--a line--I hardly know what to call it, at the corner of your mouth. Your father is right; your mouth is too grave. Think of something amusing--of the Bal Blanc at Madame d'Etaples, or merely, if you like, of the satisfaction it will give you to be done with these everlasting sittings--to be no longer obliged to bear the burden of a secret, in short to get rid of your portrait-painter."

She made him no answer, not daring to trust her voice.

"Come! now, on the contrary you are tightening your lips," said Marien, continuing to play with her as a cat plays with a mouse--provided there ever was a cat who, while playing with its mouse, had no intention of crunching it. "You are not merry, you are sad. That is not at all becoming to you."

"Why do you attribute to me your own thoughts? It is you who will be glad to get rid of all this trouble."

Fraulein Schult, who, while patiently adding stitch after stitch to the long strip of her crochet-work, was often much amused by the dialogues between sitter and painter, pricked up her ears to hear what a Frenchman would say to what was evidently intended to provoke a compliment.

"On the contrary, I shall miss you very much," said Marien, quite simply; "I have grown accustomed to see you here. You have become one of the familiar objects of my studio. Your absence will create a void."

"About as much as if this or that were gone," said Jacqueline, in a hurt tone, pointing first to a Japanese bronze and then to an Etruscan vase; "with only this difference, that you care least for the living object."

"You are bitter, Mademoiselle."

"Because you make me such provoking answers, Monsieur. My feeling is different," she went on impetuously, "I could pass my whole life watching you paint."

"You would get tired of it probably in the long run."

"Never!" she cried, blushing a deep red.

"And you would have to put up with my pipe--that big pipe yonder--a horror."

"I should like it," she cried, with conviction.

"But you would not like my bad temper. If you knew how ill I can behave sometimes! I can scold, I can become unbearable, when this, for example," here he pointed with his mahlstick to the Savonarola, "does not please me."

"But it is beautiful--so beautiful!"

"It is detestable. I shall have to go back some day and renew my impressions of Florence--see once more the Piazzes of the Signora and San Marco--and then I shall begin my picture all over again. Let us go together--will you?"

"Oh!" she cried, fervently, "think of seeing Italy! --and with you!"

"It might not be so great a pleasure as you think. Nothing is such a bore as to travel with people who are pervaded by one idea, and my 'idée fixe' is my picture--my great Dominican. He has taken complete possession of me--he overshadows me. I can think of nothing but him."

"Oh! but you think of me sometimes, I suppose," said Jacqueline, softly, "for I share your time with him."

"I think of you to blame you for taking me away from the fifteenth century," replied Hubert Marien, half seriously. "Ouf!--There! it is done at last. That dimple I never could manage I have got in for better or for worse. Now you may fly off. I set you at liberty--you poor little thing!"

She seemed in no hurry to profit by his permission. She stood perfectly still in the middle of the studio.

"Do you think I have posed well, faithfully, and with docility all these weeks?" she asked at last.

"I will give you a certificate to that effect, if you like. No one could have done better."

"And if the certificate is not all I want, will you give me some other present?"

"A beautiful portrait--what can you want more?"

"The picture is for mamma. I ask a favor on my own account."

"I refuse it beforehand. But you can tell me what it is, all the same."

"Well, then--the only part of your house that I have ever been in is this atelier. You can imagine I have a curiosity to see the rest."

"I see! you threaten me with a domiciliary visit without warning. Well! certainly, if that would give you any amusement. But my house contains nothing wonderful. I tell you that beforehand."

"One likes to know how one's friends look at home--in their own setting, and I have only seen you here at work in your atelier."

"The best point of view, believe me. But I am ready to do your bidding. Do you wish to see where I eat my dinner?" asked Marien, as he took her down the staircase leading to his dining-room.

Fraulein Schult would have liked to go with them--it was, besides, her duty. But she had not been asked to fulfil it. She hesitated a moment, and in that moment Jacqueline had disappeared. After consideration, the 'promeneuse' went on with her crochet, with a shrug of her shoulders which meant: "She can't come to much harm."

Seated in the studio, she heard the sound of their voices on the floor below. Jacqueline was lingering in the fencing-room where Marien was in the habit of counteracting by athletic exercises the effects of a too sedentary life. She was amusing herself by fingering the dumb-bells and the foils; she lingered long before some precious suits of armor. Then she was taken up into a small room, communicating with the atelier, where there was a fine collection of drawings by the old masters. "My only luxury," said Marien.

Mademoiselle Schult, getting impatient, began to roll up yards and yards of crochet, and coughed, by way of a signal, but remembering how disagreeable it would have been to herself to be interrupted in a tete-a-tete with her apothecary, she thought it not worth while to disturb them in these last moments. M. de Nailles's orders had been that she was to sit in the atelier. So she continued to sit there, doing what she had been told to do without any qualms of conscience.

When Marien had shown Jacqueline all his drawings he asked her: "Are you satisfied?"

But Jacqueline's hand was already on the portiere which separated the little room from Marien's bedchamber.

"Oh! I beg pardon," she exclaimed, pausing on the threshold.

"One would think you would like to see me asleep," said Marien with some little embarrassment.

"I never should have thought your bedroom would have been so pretty. Why, it is as elegant as a lady's chamber," said Jacqueline, slipping into it as she spoke, with an exciting consciousness of doing something she ought not to do.

"What an insult, when I thought all my tastes were simple and severe," he replied; but he had not followed her into the chamber, withheld by an impulse of modesty men sometimes feel, when innocence is led into audacity through ignorance.

"What lovely flowers you have!" said Jacqueline, from within. "Don't they make your head ache?"

"I take them out at night."

"I did not know that men liked, as we do, to be surrounded by flowers. Won't you give me one?"

"All, if you like."

"Oh! one pink will be enough for me."

"Then take it," said Marien; her curiosity alarmed him, and he was anxious to get her away.

"Would it not be nicer if you gave it me yourself?" she replied, with reproach in her tones.

"Here is one, Mademoiselle. And now I must tell you that I want to dress. I have to go out immediately."

She pinned the pink into her bodice so high that she could inhale its perfume.

"I beg your pardon. Thank you, and good-by," she said, extending her hand to him with a sigh.

"Au revoir."

"Yes--'au revoir' at home--but that will not be like here."

As she stood there before him there came into her eyes a strange expression, to which, without exactly knowing why, he replied by pressing his lips fervently on the little hand he was still holding in his own.

Very often since her infancy he had kissed her before witnesses, but this time she gave a little cry, and turned as white as the flower whose petals were touching her cheek.

Marien started back alarmed.

"Good-by," he said in a tone that he endeavored to make careless--but in vain.

Though she was much agitated herself she failed not to remark his emotion, and on the threshold of the atelier, she blew a kiss back to him from the tips of her gloved fingers, without speaking or smiling. Then she went back to Fraulein Schult, who was still sitting in the place where she had left her, and said: "Let us go."

The next time Madame de Nailles saw her stepdaughter she was dazzled by a radiant look in her young face.

"What has happened to you?" she asked, "you look triumphant."

"Yes--I have good reason to triumph," said Jacqueline. "I think that I have won a victory."

"How so? Over yourself?"

"No, indeed--victories over one's self give us the comfort of a good

conscience, but they do not make us gay--as I am."

"Then tell me--"

"No-no! I can not tell you yet. I must be silent two days more," said Jacqueline, throwing herself into her mother's arms.

Madame de Nailles asked no more questions, but she looked at her stepdaughter with an air of great surprise. For some weeks past she had had no pleasure in looking at Jacqueline. She began to be aware that near her, at her side, an exquisite butterfly was about for the first time to spread its wings--wings of a radiant loveliness, which, when they fluttered in the air, would turn all eyes away from other butterflies, which had lost some of their freshness during the summer.

A difficult task was before her. How could she keep this too precocious insect in its chrysalis state? How could she shut it up in its dark cocoon and retard its transformation?

"Jacqueline," she said, and the tones of her voice were less soft than those in which she usually addressed her, "it seems to me that you are wasting your time a great deal. You hardly practise at all; you do almost nothing at the 'cours'. I don't know what can be distracting your attention from your lessons, but I have received complaints which should make a great girl like you ashamed of herself. Do you know what I am beginning to think?--That Madame de Monredon's system of education has done better than mine."

"Oh! mamma, you can't be thinking of sending me to a convent!" cried Jacqueline, in tones of comic despair.

"I did not say that--but I really think it might be good for you to make a retreat where your cousin Giselle is, instead of plunging into follies which interrupt your progress."

"Do you call Madame d'Etaples's 'bal blanc' a folly?"

"You certainly will not go to it--that is settled," said the young stepmother, dryly.

CHAPTER V

SURPRISES

In all other ways Madame de Nailles did her best to assist in the success of the surprise. On the second of June, the eve of Ste.-Clotilde's day, she went out, leaving every opportunity for the grand plot to mature. Had she not absented herself in like manner the year before at the same date--thus enabling an upholsterer to drape artistically her little salon with beautiful thick silk tapestries which had just been imported from

the East? Her idea was that this year she might find a certain lacquered screen which she coveted. The Baroness belonged to her period; she liked Japanese things. But, alas! the charming object that awaited her, with a curtain hung over it to prolong the suspense, had nothing Japanese about it whatever. Madame de Nailles received the good wishes of her family, responded to them with all proper cordiality, and then was dragged up joyously to a picture hanging on the wall of her room, but still concealed under the cloth that covered it.

"How good of you!" she said, with all confidence to her husband.

"It is a picture by Marien!--A portrait by Marien! A likeness of Jacqueline!"

And he uncovered the masterpiece of the great artist, expecting to be joyous in the joy with which she would receive it. But something strange occurred. Madame de Nailles sprang back a step or two, stretching out her arms as if repelling an apparition, her face was distorted, her head was turned away; then she dropped into the nearest seat and burst into tears.

"Mamma!--dear little mamma!--what is it?" cried Jacqueline, springing forward to kiss her.

Madame de Nailles disengaged herself angrily from her embrace.

"Let me alone!" she cried, "let me alone!--How dared you?"

And impetuously, hardly restraining a gesture of horror and hate, she rushed into her own chamber. Thither her husband followed her, anxious and bewildered, and there he witnessed a nervous attack which ended in a torrent of reproaches:

Was it possible that he had, not seen the impropriety of those sittings to Marien? Oh, yes! No doubt he was an old friend of the family, but that did not prevent all these deceptions, all these disguises, and all the other follies which he had sanctioned--he--Jacqueline's father!--from being very improper. Did he wish to take from her all authority over his child?--a girl who was already too much disposed to emancipate herself. Her own efforts had all been directed to curb this alarming propensity--yes, alarming--alarming for the future. And all in vain! There was no use in saying more. 'Mon Dieu'! had he no trust in her devotion to his child, in her prudence and her foresight, that he must thwart her thus? And she had always imagined that for ten years she had faithfully fulfilled a mother's duties! What ingratitude from every one! Mademoiselle Schult should be sent away at once. Jacqueline should go to a convent. They would break off all intercourse with Marien. They had conspired against her--every one.

And then she wept more bitterly than ever--tears of rage, salt tears which rubbed the powder off her cheeks and disfigured the face that had remained beautiful by her power of will and self-control. But now the disorder of her nerves got the better of precautions. The blonde angel,

whose beauty was on the wane, was transformed into a fury. Her six-and-thirty years were fully apparent, her complexion appeared slightly blotched, all her defects were obtrusive in contrast with the precocious development of beauty in Jacqueline. She was firmly resolved that her stepdaughter's obtrusive womanhood should remain in obscurity a very much longer time, under pretence that Jacqueline was still a child. She was a child, at any rate! The portrait was a lie! an imposture! an affront! an outrage!

Meantime M. de Nailles, almost beside himself, fancied at first that his wife was going mad, but in the midst of her sobs and reproaches he managed to discover that he had somehow done her wrong, and when, with a broken voice, she cried, "You no longer love me!" he did not know what to do to prove how bitterly he repented having grieved her. He stammered, he made excuses, he owned that he had been to blame, that he had been very stupid, and he begged her pardon. As to the portrait, it should be taken from the salon, where, if seen, it might become a pretext for foolish compliments to Jacqueline. Why not send it at once to Grandchaux? In short, he would do anything she wished, provided she would leave off crying.

But Madame de Nailles continued to weep. Her husband was forced at last to leave her and to return to Jacqueline, who stood petrified in the salon.

"Yes," he said, "your mamma is right. We have made a deplorable mistake in what we have done. Besides, you must know that this unlucky picture is not in the least like you. Marien has made some use of your features to paint a fancy portrait--so we will let nobody see it. They might laugh at you."

In this way he hoped to repair the evil he had done in flattering his daughter's vanity, and promoting that dangerous spirit of independence, denounced to him a few minutes before, but of which, up to that time, he had never heard.

Jacqueline, in her turn, began to sob.

Mademoiselle Schult had cause, too, to wipe her eyes, pretending a more or less sincere repentance for her share in the deception. Vigorously cross-questioned by Madame de Nailles, who called upon her to tell all she knew, under pain of being dismissed immediately, she saw but one way of retaining her situation, which was to deliver up Jacqueline, bound hand and foot, to the anger of her stepmother, by telling all she knew of the childish romance of which she had been the confidante. As a reward she was permitted (as she had foreseen) to retain her place in the character of a spy.

It was a sad Ste.-Clotilde's day that year. Marien, who came in the evening, heard with surprise that the Baroness was indisposed and could see no one. For twelve days after this he continued in disgrace, being refused admittance when he called. Those twelve days were days of anguish for Jacqueline. To see Marien no longer, to be treated with

coldness by her father, to see in the blue eyes of her stepmother--eyes so soft and tender when they looked upon her hitherto--only a harsh, mistrustful glare, almost a look of hatred, was a punishment greater than she could bear. What had she done to deserve punishment? Of what was she accused? She spoke of her wretchedness to Fraulein Schult, who, perfidiously, day after day, drew from her something to report to Madame de Nailles. That lady was somewhat consoled, while suffering tortures of jealousy, to know that the girl to whom these sufferings were due was paying dearly for her fault and was very unhappy.

On the twelfth day something occurred which, though it made no noise in the household, had very serious consequences. The effect it produced on Jacqueline was decisive and deplorable. The poor child, after going through all the states of mind endured by those who suffer under unmerited disgrace--revolt, indignation, sulkiness, silent obstinacy--felt unable to bear it longer. She resolved to humble herself, hoping that by so doing the wall of ice that had arisen between her stepmother and herself might be cast down. By this time she cared less to know of what fault she was supposed to be guilty than to be taken back into favor as before. What must she do to obtain forgiveness? Explanations are usually worthless; besides, none might be granted her. She remembered that when she was a small child she had obtained immediate oblivion of any fault by throwing herself impulsively into the arms of her little mamma, and asking her to forget whatever she had done to displease her, for she had not done it on purpose. She would do the same thing now. Putting aside all pride and obstinacy, she would go to this mamma, who, for some days, had seemed so different. She would smother her in kisses. She might possibly be repelled at first. She would not mind it. She was sure that in the end she would be forgiven.

No sooner was this resolution formed than she hastened to put it into execution. It was the time of day when Madame de Nailles was usually alone. Jacqueline went to her bedchamber, but she was not there, and a moment after she stood on the threshold of the little salon. There she stopped short, not quite certain how she should proceed, asking herself what would be her reception.

"How shall I do it?" she thought. "How had I better do it?"

"Bah!" she answered these doubts. "It will be very easy. I will go in on tiptoe, so that she can't hear me. I will slip behind her chair, and I will hug her suddenly, so tight, so tenderly, and kiss her till she tells me that all has been forgiven."

As she thought thus Jacqueline noiselessly opened the door of the salon, over which, on the inner side, hung a thick plush 'portiere'. But as she was about to lift it, the sound of a voice within made her stand motionless. She recognized the tones of Marien. He was pleading, imploring, interrupted now and then by the sharp and still angry voice of her mamma. They were not speaking above their breath, but if she listened she could hear them, and, without any scruples of conscience, she did listen intently, anxious to see her way through the dark fog in which, for twelve days, she had wandered.

"I do not go quite so far as that," said Madame de Nailles, dryly. "It is enough for me that she produced an illusion of such beauty upon you. Now I know what to expect--"

"That is nonsense," replied Marien--"mere foolishness. You jealous! jealous of a baby whom I knew when she wore white pinafores, who has grown up under my very eyes? But, so far as I am concerned, she exists no longer. She is not, she never will be in my eyes, a woman. I shall think of her as playing with her doll, eating sugar-plums, and so on."

Jacqueline grew faint. She shivered and leaned against the door-post.

"One would not suppose so, to judge by the picture with which she has inspired you. You may say what you like, but I know that in all this there was a set purpose to insult me."

"Clotilde!"

"In the first place, on no pretext ought you to have been induced to paint her portrait."

"Do you think so? Consider, had I refused, the danger of awakening suspicion? I accepted the commission most unwillingly, much put out by it, as you may suppose. But you are making too much of an imaginary fault. Consign the wretched picture to the barn, if you like. We will never say another word about so foolish a matter. You promise me to forget it, won't you?... Dear! you will promise me?" he added, after a pause.

Madame de Nailles sighed and replied: "If not she it will be some one else. I am very unhappy.... I am weak and contemptible...."

"Clotilde!" replied Marien, in an accent that went to Jacqueline's heart like a knife.

She fancied that after this she heard the sound of a kiss, and, with her cheeks aflame and her head burning, she rushed away. She understood little of what she had overheard. She only realized that he had given her up, that he had turned her into ridicule, that he had said "Clotilde!" to her mother, that he had called her dear--she!--the woman she had so adored, so venerated, her best friend, her father's wife, her mother by adoption! Everything in this world seemed to be giving way under her feet. The world was full of falsehood and of treason, and life, so bad, so cruel, was no longer what she had supposed it to be. It had broken its promise to herself, it had made her bad--bad forever. She loved no one, she believed in no one. She wished she were dead.

How she reached her own room in this state Jacqueline never knew. She was aware at last of being on her knees beside her bed, with her face hidden in the bed-clothes. She was biting them to stifle her desire to scream. Her hands were clenched convulsively.

"Mamma!" she cried, "mamma!"

Was this a reproach addressed to her she had so long called by that name?
Or was it an appeal, vibrating with remorse, to her real mother, so long
forgotten in favor of this false idol, her rival, her enemy?

Undoubtedly, Jacqueline was too innocent, too ignorant to guess the real truth from what she had overheard. But she had learned enough to be no longer the pure-minded young girl of a few hours before. It seemed to her as if a fetid swamp now lay before her, barring her entrance into life. Vague as her perceptions were, this swamp before her seemed more deep, more dark, more dreadful from uncertainty, and Jacqueline felt that thenceforward she could make no step in life without risk of falling into it. To whom now could she open her heart in confidence--that heart bleeding and bruised as if it had been trampled one as if some one had crushed it? The thing that she now knew was not like her own little personal secrets, such as she had imprudently confided to Fraulein Schult. The words that she had overheard she could repeat to no one. She must carry them in her heart, like the barb of an arrow in a secret wound, where they would fester and grow more painful day by day.

"But, above all," she said at length, rising from her knees, "let me show proper pride."

She bathed her fevered face in cold water, then she walked up to her mirror. As she gazed at herself with a strange interest, trying to see whether the entire change so suddenly accomplished in herself had left its visible traces on her features, she seemed to see something in her eyes that spoke of the clairvoyance of despair. She smiled at herself, to see whether the new Jacqueline could play the part, which--whether she would or not--was now assigned to her. What a sad smile it was!

"I have lost everything," she said, "I have lost everything!" And she remembered, as one remembers something in the far-off long ago, how that very morning, when she awoke, her first thought had been "Shall I see him to-day?" Each day she passed without seeing him had seemed to her a lost day, and she had accustomed herself to go to sleep thinking of him, remembering all he had said to her, and how he had looked at her. Of course, sometimes she had been unhappy, but what a difference it seemed between such vague unhappiness and what she now experienced? And then, when she was sad, she could always find a refuge in that dear mamma--in that Clotilde whom she vowed she would never kiss again, except with such kisses as might be necessary to avoid suspicion. Kisses of that kind were worth nothing. Quite the contrary! Could she kiss her father now without a pang? Her father! He had gone wholly over to the side of that other in this affair. She had seen him in one moment turn against herself. No!--no one was left her!.... If she could only lay her head in Modeste's lap and be soothed while she crooned her old songs as in the nursery! But, whatever Marien or any one else might choose to say, she was no longer a baby. The bitter sense of her isolation arose in her. She could hardly breathe. Suddenly she pressed her lips upon the glass which reflected her own image, so sad, so pale, so desolate. She put the pity for herself into a long, long, fervent kiss, which seemed to say:

"Yes, I am all alone--alone forever." Then, in a spirit of revenge, she opened what seemed a safety-valve, preventing her from giving way to any other emotion.

She rushed for a little box which she had converted into a sort of reliquary. She took out of it the half-burned cigarette, the old glove, the withered violets, and a visiting-card with his name, on which three unimportant lines had been written. She insulted these keepsakes, she tore them with her nails, she trampled them underfoot, she reduced them to fragments; she left nothing whatever of them, except a pile of shreds, which at last she set fire to. She had a feeling as if she were employed in executing two great culprits, who deserved cruel tortures at her hands; and, with them, she slew now and forever the foolish fancy she had called her love. By a strange association of ideas, the famous composition, so praised by M. Regis, came back to her memory, and she cried:

"Je ne veux me souvenir.... me souvenir de rien!"

"If I remember, I shall be more unhappy. All has been a dream. His look was a dream, his pressure of my hand, his kiss on the last day, all--all--were dreams. He was making a fool of me when he gave me that pink which is now in this pile of ashes. He was laughing when he told me I was more beautiful than was natural. Never have I been--never shall I be in his eyes--more than the baby he remembers playing with her doll."

And unconsciously, as Jacqueline said these words, she imitated the careless accent with which she had heard them fall from the lips of the artist. And she would have again to meet him! If she had had thunder and lightning at her command, as she had had the match with which she had set fire to the memorials of her juvenile folly, Marien would have been annihilated on the spot. She was at that moment a murderess at heart. But the dinner-bell rang. The young fury gave a last glance at the adornments of her pretty bedchamber, so elegant, so original--all blue and pink, with a couch covered with silk embroidered with flowers. She seemed to say to them all: "Keep my secret. It is a sad one. Be careful: keep it safely." The cupids on the clock, the little book-rest on a velvet stand, the picture of the Virgin that hung over her bed, with rosaries and palms entwined about it, the photographs of her girl-friends standing on her writing table in pretty frames of old-fashioned silk--all seemed to see her depart with a look of sympathy.

She went down to the dining-room, resolved to prove that she would not submit to punishment. The best way to brave Madame de Nailles was, she thought, to affect great calmness and indifference, aye, even, if she could, some gayety. But the task before her was more difficult than she had expected. Apparently, as a proof of reconciliation, Marien had been kept to dinner. To see him so soon again after his words of outrage was more than she could bear. For one moment the earth seemed to sink under her feet; she roused her pride by an heroic effort, and that sustained her. She exchanged with the artist, as she always did, a friendly "Good-evening!" and ate her dinner, though it nearly choked her.

Madame de Nailles had red eyes; and Jacqueline made the reflection that women who are thirty-five should never weep. She knew that her face had not been made ugly by her tears, and this gave her a perverse satisfaction in the midst of her misery. Of Marien she thought: "He sits there as if he had been put 'en penitence'." No doubt he could not endure scenes, and the one he had just passed through must have given him the downcast look which Jacqueline noticed with contempt.

What she did not know was that his depression had more than one cause. He felt--and felt with shame and with discouragement--that the fetters of a connection which had long since ceased to charm had been fastened on his wrists tighter than ever; and he thought: "I shall lose all my energy, I shall lose even my talent! While I wear these chains I shall see ever before me--ah! tortures of Tantalus!--the vision of a new love, fresh as the dawn which beckons to me as it passes before my sight, which lays on me the light touch of a caress, while I am forced to see it glide away, to let it vanish, disappear forever! And alas! that is not all. If I have deceived an inexperienced heart by words spoken or deeds done in a moment of weakness or temptation, can I flatter myself that I have acted like an honest man?"

This is what Marien was really thinking, while Jacqueline looked at him with an expression she strove to make indifferent, but which he interpreted, though she knew it not: "You have done me all the harm you can."

M. de Nailles meantime went on talking, with little response from his wife or his guest, about some vehement discussion of a new law going on just then in the Chamber, and he became so interested in his own discourse that he did not remark the constraint of the others.

Marien at last, tired of responding in monosyllables to his remarks, said abruptly, a short time before dessert was placed upon the table, something about the probability of his soon going to Italy.

"A pilgrimage of art to Florence!" cried the Baron, turning at once from politics. "That's good. But wait a little--let it be after the rising of the Chamber. We will follow your steps. It has been the desire of my wife's life--a little jaunt to Italy. Has it not, Clotilde? So we will all go in September or October. What say you?"

"In September or October, whichever suits you," said Marien, with despair.

Not one month of liberty! Why couldn't they leave him to his Savanarola! Must he drag about a ball and chain like a galley-slave?

Clotilde rewarded M. de Nailles with a smile--the first smile she had given him since their quarrel about Jacqueline.

"My wife has got over her displeasure," he said to himself, delightedly.

Jacqueline, on her part, well remembered the day when Hubert had spoken

to her for the first time of his intended journey, and how he had added, in a tone which she now knew to be badinage, but which then, alas! she had believed serious: "Suppose we go together!"

And her impulse to shed tears became so great, that when they left the dinner-table she escaped to her own room, under pretence of a headache.

"Yes--you are looking wretchedly," said her stepmother. And, turning to M. de Nailles, she added: "Don't you think, 'mon ami', she is as yellow as a quince!" Marien dared not press the hand which she, who had been his little friend for years, offered him as usual, but this time with repugnance.

"You are suffering, my poor Jacqueline!" he ventured to say.

"Oh! not much," she answered, with a glance at once haughty and defiant, "to-morrow I shall be quite well again."

And, saying this, she had the courage to laugh.

But she was not quite well the next day; and for many days after she was forced to stay in bed. The doctor who came to see her talked about "low fever," attributed it to too rapid growth, and prescribed sea-bathing for her that summer. The fever, which was not very severe, was of great service to Jacqueline. It enabled her to recover in quiet from the effects of a bitter deception.

Madame de Nailles was not sufficiently uneasy about her to be always at her bedside. Usually the sick girl stayed alone, with her window-curtains closed, lying there in the soft half-light that was soothing to her nerves. The silence was broken at intervals by the voice of Modeste, who would come and offer her her medicine. When Jacqueline had taken it, she would shut her eyes, and resume, half asleep, her sad reflections. These were always the same. What could be the tie between her stepmother and Marien?

She tried to recall all the proofs of friendship she had seen pass between them, but all had taken place openly. Nothing that she could remember seemed suspicious. So she thought at first, but as she thought more, lying, feverish, upon her bed, several things, little noticed at the time, were recalled to her remembrance. They might mean nothing, or they might mean much. In the latter case, Jacqueline could not understand them very well. But she knew he had called her "Clotilde," that he had even dared to say "thou" to her in private--these were things she knew of her own knowledge. Her pulse beat quicker as she thought of them; her head burned. In that studio, where she had passed so many happy hours, had Marien and her stepmother ever met as lovers?

Her stepmother and Marien! She could not understand what it meant. Must she apply to them a dreadful word that she had picked up in the history books, where it had been associated with such women as Margaret of Burgundy, Isabeau of Bavaria, Anne Boleyn, and other princesses of very evil reputation? She had looked it out in the dictionary, where the

meaning given was: "To be unfaithful to conjugal vows." Even then she could not understand precisely the meaning of adultery, and she set herself to solve it during the long lonely days when she was convalescent. When she was able to walk from one room to another, she wandered in a loose dressing-gown, whose long, lank folds showed that she had grown taller and thinner during her illness, into the room that held the books, and went boldly up to the bookcase, the key of which had been left in the lock, for everybody had entire confidence in Jacqueline's scrupulous honesty. Never before had she broken a promise; she knew that a well-brought-up young girl ought to read only such books as were put into her hands. The idea of taking a volume from those shelves had no more occurred to her than the idea of taking money out of somebody's purse; that is, up to this moment it had not occurred to her to do so; but now that she had lost all respect for those in authority over her, Jacqueline considered herself released from any obligation to obey them. She therefore made use of the first opportunity that presented itself to take down a novel of George Sand, which she had heard spoken of as a very dangerous book, not doubting it would throw some light on the subject that absorbed her. But she shut up the volume in a rage when she found that it had nothing but excuses to offer for the fall of a married woman. After that, and guided only by chance, she read a number of other novels, most of which were of antediluvian date, thus accounting, she supposed, for their sentiments, which she found old fashioned. We should be wrong, however, if we supposed that Jacqueline's crude judgment of these books had nothing in common with true criticism. Her only object, however, in reading all this sentimental prose was to discover, as formerly she had found in poetry, something that applied to her own case; but she soon discovered that all the sentimental heroines in the so-called bad books were persons who had had bad husbands; besides, they were either widows or old women--at least thirty years old! It was astounding! There was nothing--absolutely nothing--about young girls, except instances in which they renounced their hopes of happiness. What an injustice! Among these victims the two that most attracted her sympathy were Madame de Camors and Renee Mauperin. But what horrors surrounded them! What a varied assortment of deceptions, treacheries, and mysteries, lay hidden under the outward decency and respectability of what men called "the world!" Her young head became a stage on which strange plays were acted. What one reads is good or bad for us, according to the frame of mind in which we read it--according as we discover in a volume healing for the sickness of our souls--or the contrary. In view of the circumstances in which she found herself, what Jacqueline absorbed from these books was poison.

When, after the physical and moral crisis through which she had passed, Jacqueline resumed the life of every day, she had in her sad eyes, around which for some time past had been dark circles, an expression of anxiety such as the first contact with a knowledge of evil might have put into Eve's eyes after she had plucked the apple. Her investigations had very imperfectly enlightened her. She was as much perplexed as ever, with some false ideas besides. When she was well again, however, she continued weak and languid; she felt somehow as if, she had come back to her old surroundings from some place far away. Everything about her now seemed sad and unfamiliar, though outwardly nothing was altered. Her parents had apparently forgotten the unhappy episode of the picture.

It had been sent away to Grandchaux, which was tantamount to its being buried. Hubert Marien had resumed his habits of intimacy in the family. From that time forth he took less and less notice of Jacqueline--whether it were that he owed her a grudge for all the annoyance she had been the means of bringing upon him, or whether he feared to burn himself in the flame which had once scorched him more than he admitted to himself, who can say? Perhaps he was only acting in obedience to orders.

CHAPTER VI

A CONVENT FLOWER

One of Jacqueline's first walks, after she had recovered, was to see her cousin Giselle at her convent. She did not seek this friend's society when she was happy and in a humor for amusement, for she thought her a little straightlaced, or, as she said, too like a nun; but nobody could condole or sympathize with a friend in trouble like Giselle. It seemed as if nature herself had intended her for a Sister of Charity--a Gray Sister, as Jacqueline would sometimes call her, making fun of her somewhat dull intellect, which had been benumbed, rather than stimulated, by the education she had received.

The Benedictine Convent is situated in a dull street on the left bank of the Seine, all gardens and hotels--that is, detached houses. Grass sprouted here and there among the cobblestones. There were no street-lamps and no policemen. Profound silence reigned there. The petals of an acacia, which peeped timidly over its high wall, dropped, like flakes of snow, on the few pedestrians who passed by it in the springtime.

The enormous porte-cochere gave entrance into a square courtyard, on one side of which was the chapel, on the other, the door that led into the convent. Here Jacqueline presented herself, accompanied by her old nurse, Modeste. She had not yet resumed her German lessons, and was striving to put off as long as possible any intercourse with Fraulein Schult, who had known of her foolish fancy, and who might perhaps renew the odious subject. Walking with Modeste, on the contrary, seemed like going back to the days of her childhood, the remembrance of which soothed her like a recollection of happiness and peace, now very far away; it was a reminiscence of the far-off limbo in which her young soul, pure and white, had floated, without rapture, but without any great grief or pain.

The porteress showed them into the parlor. There they found several pupils who were talking to members of their families, from whom they were separated by a grille, whose black bars gave to those within the appearance of captives, and made rather a barrier to eager demonstrations of affection, though they did not hinder the reception of good things to eat.

"Tiens! I have brought you some chocolate," said Jacqueline to Giselle, as soon as her cousin appeared, looking far prettier in her black cloth

frock than when she wore an ordinary walking-costume. Her fair hair was drawn back 'a la Chinoise' from a white forehead resembling that of a German Madonna; it was one of those foreheads, slightly and delicately curved, which phrenologists tell us indicate reflection and enthusiasm.

But Giselle, without thanking Jacqueline for the chocolate, exclaimed at once: "Mon Dieu! What has been the matter with you?"

She spoke rather louder than usual, it being understood that conversations were to be carried on in a low tone, so as not to interfere with those of other persons. She added: "I find you so altered."

"Yes--I have been ill," said Jacqueline, carelessly, "sorrow has made me ill," she added, in a whisper, looking to see whether the nun, who was discreetly keeping watch, walking to and fro behind the grille, might chance to be listening. "Oh, ask me no questions! I must never tell you--but for me, you must know--the happiness of my life is at an end--is at an end--"

She felt herself to be very interesting while she was speaking thus; her sorrows were somewhat assuaged. There was undoubtedly a certain pleasure in letting some one look down into the unfathomable, mysterious depths of a suffering soul.

She had expected much curiosity on the part of Giselle, and had resolved beforehand to give her no answers; but Giselle only sighed, and said, softly:

"Ah--my poor darling! I, too, am very unhappy. If you only knew--"

"How? Good heavens! what can have happened to you here?"

"Here? oh! nothing, of course; but this year I am to leave the convent --and I think I can guess what will then be before me."

Here, seeing that the nun who was keeping guard was listening, Giselle, with great presence of mind, spoke louder on indifferent subjects till she had passed out of earshot, then she rapidly poured her secret into Jacqueline's ear.

From a few words that had passed between her grandmother and Madame d'Argy, she had found out that Madame de Monredon intended to marry her.

"But that need not make you unhappy," said Jacqueline, "unless he is really distasteful to you."

"That is what I am not sure about--perhaps he is not the one I think. But I hardly know why--I have a dread, a great dread, that it is one of our neighbors in the country. Grandmamma has several times spoken in my presence of the advantage of uniting our two estates--they touch each other--oh! I know her ideas! she wants a man well-born, one who has a position in the world--some one, as she says, who knows something of life--that is, I suppose, some one no longer young, and who has not much

hair on his head--like Monsieur de Talbrun."

"Is he very ugly--this Monsieur de Talbrun?"

"He's not ugly--and not handsome. But, just think! he is thirty-four!"

Jacqueline blushed, seeing in this speech a reflection on her own taste in such matters.

"That's twice my age," sighed Giselle.

"Of course that would be dreadful if he were to stay always twice your age--for instance, if you were now thirty-five, he would be seventy, and a hundred and twenty when you reached your sixtieth year--but really to be twice your age now will only make him seventeen years older than yourself."

In the midst of this chatter, which was beginning to attract the notice of the nun, they broke off with a laugh, but it was only one of those laughs 'au bout des levres', uttered by persons who have made up their minds to be unhappy. Then Giselle went on:

"I know nothing about him, you understand--but he frightens me. I tremble to think of taking his arm, of talking to him, of being his wife. Just think even of saying thou to him!"

"But married people don't say thou to each other nowadays," said Jacqueline, "it is considered vulgar."

"But I shall have to call him by his Christian name!"

"What is Monsieur de Talbrun's Christian name?"

"Oscar."

"Humph! That is not a very pretty name, but you could get over the difficulty--you could say 'mon ami'. After all, your sorrows are less than mine."

"Poor Jacqueline!" said Giselle, her soft hazel eyes moist with sympathy.

"I have lost at one blow all my illusions, and I have made a horrible discovery, that it would be wicked to tell to any one--you understand--not even to my confessor."

"Heavens! but you could tell your mother!"

"You forget, I have no mother," replied Jacqueline in a tone which frightened her friend: "I had a dear mamma once, but she would enter less than any one into my sorrows; and as to my father--it would make things worse to speak to him," she added, clasping her hands. "Have you ever read any novels, Giselle?"

"Hem!" said the discreet voice of the nun, by way of warning.

"Two or three by Walter Scott."

"Oh! then you can imagine nothing like what I could tell you. How horrid that nun is, she stops always as she comes near us! Why can't she do as Modeste does, and leave us to talk by ourselves?"

It seemed indeed as if the Argus in a black veil had overheard part of this conversation, not perhaps the griefs of Jacqueline, which were not very intelligible, but some of the words spoken by Giselle, for, drawing near her, she said, gently: "We, too, shall all grieve to lose you, my dearest child; but remember one can serve God anywhere, and save one's soul--in the world as well as in a convent." And she passed on, giving a kind smile to Jacqueline, whom she knew, having seen her several times in the convent parlor, and whom she thought a nice girl, notwithstanding what she called her "fly-away airs"--"the airs they acquire from modern education," she said to herself, with a sigh.

"Those poor ladies would have us think of nothing but a future life," said Jacqueline, shrugging her shoulders.

"We ought to think of it first of all," said Giselle, who had become serious. "Sometimes I think my place should have been among these ladies who have brought me up. They are so good, and they seem to be so happy. Besides, do you know, I stand less in awe of them than I do of my grandmother. When grandmamma orders me I never shall dare to object, even if--But you must think me very selfish, my poor Jacqueline! I am talking only of myself. Do you know what you ought to do as you go away? You should go into the chapel, and pray with all your heart for me, that I may be brought in safety through my troubles about which I have told you, and I will do the same for yours, about which you have not told me. An exchange of prayers is the best foundation for a friendship," she added; for Giselle had many little convent maxims at her fingers' ends, to which, when she uttered them, her sincerity of look and tone gave a personal meaning.

"You are right," said Jacqueline, much moved. "It has done me good to see you. Take this chocolate."

"And you must take this," said Giselle, giving her a little illuminated card, with sacred words and symbols.

"Adieu, dearest--say, have you ever detested any one?"

"Never!" cried Giselle, with horror.

"Well! I do detest--detest--You are right, I will go into the chapel. I need some exorcism."

And laughing at her use of this last word--the same little mirthless laugh that she had uttered before--Jacqueline went away, followed by the

admiring glances of the other girls, who from behind the bars of their cage noted the brilliant plumage of this bird who was at liberty. She crossed the courtyard, and, followed by Modeste, entered the chapel, where she sank upon her knees. The mystic half-light of the place, tinged purple by its passage through the stained windows, seemed to enlarge the little chancel, parted in two by a double grille, behind which the nuns could hear the service without being seen.

The silence was so deep that the low murmur of a prayer could now and then be heard. The worshipers might have fancied themselves a hundred leagues from all the noises of the world, which seemed to die out when they reached the convent walls.

Jacqueline read, and re-read mechanically, the words printed in letters of gold on the little card Giselle had given her. It was a symbolical picture, and very ugly; but the words were: "Oh! that I had wings like a dove, for then would I flee away and be at rest."

"Wings!" she repeated, with vague aspiration. The aspiration seemed to disengage her from herself, and from this earth, which had nothing more to offer her. Ah! how far away was now the time when she had entered churches, full of happiness and hope, to offer a candle that her prayer might be granted, which she felt sure it would be! All was vanity! As she gazed at the grille, behind which so many women, whose worldly lives had been cut short, now lived, safe from the sorrows and temptations of this world, Jacqueline seemed for the first time to understand why Giselle regretted that she might not share forever the blessed peace enjoyed in the convent. A torpor stole over her, caused by the dimness, the faint odor of the incense, and the solemn silence. She imagined herself in the act of giving up the world. She saw herself in a veil, with her eyes raised to Heaven, very pale, standing behind the grille. She would have to cut off her hair.

That seemed hard, but she would make the sacrifice. She would accept anything, provided the ungrateful pair, whom she would not name, could feel sorrow for her loss--maybe even remorse. Full of these ideas, which certainly had little in common with the feelings of those who seek to forgive those who trespass against them, Jacqueline continued to imagine herself a Benedictine sister, under the soothing influence of her surroundings, just as she had mistaken the effects of physical weakness when she was ill for a desire to die. Such feelings were the result of a void which the whole universe, as she thought, never could fill, but it was really a temporary vacuum, like that caused by the loss of a first tooth. These teeth come out with the first jar, and nature intends them to be speedily replaced by others, much more permanent; but children cry when they are pulled out, and fancy they are in very tight. Perhaps they suffer, after all, nearly as much as they think they do.

"Mademoiselle!" said Modeste, touching her on the shoulder.

"I was content to be here," answered Jacqueline, with a sigh. "Do you know, Modeste," she went on, when they got out of doors, "that I have almost made up my mind to be a nun. What do you say to that?"

"Heaven forbid!" cried the old nurse, much startled.

"Life is so hard," replied her young mistress.

"Not for you, anyhow. It would be a sin to say so."

"Ah! Modeste, we so little know the real truth of things--we can see only appearances. Don't you think that a linen band over my forehead would be very becoming to me? I should look like Saint Theresa."

"And what would be the good of your looking like Saint Theresa, when there would be nobody to tell you so?" said Modeste, with the practical good-sense that never forsook her. "You would be beautiful for yourself alone. You would not even be allowed a looking-glass just talk about that fancy to Monsieur--we should soon see what he would say to such a notion."

M. de Nailles, having just left the Chamber, was crossing the Pont de la Concorde on foot at this moment. His daughter ran up to him, and caught him by the arm. They walked homeward talking of very different things from bolts and bars. The Baron, who was a weak man, thought in his heart that he had been too severe with his daughter for some time past. As he recalled what had taken place, the anger of Madame de Nailles in the matter of the picture seemed to him to have been extreme and unnecessary. Jacqueline was just at an age when young girls are apt to be nervous and impressionable; they had been wrong to be rough with one who was so sensitive. His wife was quite of his opinion, she acknowledged (not wishing him to think too much on the subject) that she had been too quick-tempered.

"Yes," she had said, frankly, "I am jealous; I want things to myself. I own I was angry when I thought that Jacqueline was about to throw off my authority, and hurt when I found she was capable of keeping up a concealment--when I believed she was so open always with me. My behavior was foolish, I acknowledge. But what can we do? Neither of us can go and ask her pardon?"

"Of course not," said the father, "all we can do is to treat her with a little more consideration for the future; and, with your permission, I shall use her illness as an excuse for spoiling her a little."

"You have carte blanche, my dear, I agree to everything." So M. de Nailles, with his daughter's arm in his, began to spoil her, as he had intended.

"You are still rather pale," he said, "but sea-bathing will change all that. Would you like to go to the seaside next month?"

Jacqueline answered with a little incredulous smile:

"Oh, certainly, papa."

"You don't seem very sure about it. In the first place, where shall we go? Your mamma seems to fancy Houlgate?"

"Of course we must do what she wishes," replied Jacqueline, rather bitterly.

"But, little daughter, what would you like? What do you say to Treport?"

"I should like Treport very much, because there we should be near Madame d'Argy."

Jacqueline had felt much drawn to Madame d'Argy since her troubles, for she had been the nearest friend of her own mother--her own dead mother, too long forgotten. The chateau of Madame d'Argy, called Lizerolles, was only two miles from Treport, in a charming situation on the road to St. Valery.

"That's the very thing, then!" said M. de Nailles.

"Fred is going to spend a month at Lizerolles with his mother. You might ride on horseback with him. He is going to enjoy a holiday, poor fellow! before he has to be sent off on long and distant voyages."

"I don't know how to ride," said Jacqueline, still in the tone of a victim.

"The doctor thinks riding would be good for you, and you have time enough yet to take some lessons. Mademoiselle Schult could take you nine or ten times to the riding-school. And I will go with you the first time," added M. de Nailles, in despair at not having been able to please her.

"To-day we will go to Blackfern's and order a habit--a riding-habit! Can I do more?"

At this, as if by magic, whether she would or not, the lines of sadness and sullenness disappeared from Jacqueline's face; her eyes sparkled. She gave one more proof, that to every Parisienne worthy of the name, the two pleasures in riding are, first to have a perfectly fitting habit, secondly, to have the opportunity of showing how pretty she can be after a new fashion.

"Shall we go to Blackfern's now?"

"This very moment, if you wish it."

"You really mean Blackfern? Yvonne's habit came from Blackfern's!" Yvonne d'Etaples was the incarnation of chic--of fashionable elegance--in Jacqueline's eyes. Her heart beat with pleasure when she thought how Belle and Dolly would envy her when she told them: "I have a myrtle-green riding-habit, just like Yvonne's." She danced rather than walked as they went together to Blackfern's. A habit was much nicer than a long gown.

A quarter of an hour later they were in the waiting-room, where the last creations of the great ladies' tailor, were displayed upon lay figures,

among saleswomen and 'essayeuses', the very prettiest that could be found in England or the Batignolles, chosen because they showed off to perfection anything that could be put upon their shoulders, from the ugliest to the most extravagant. Deceived by the unusual elegance of these beautiful figures, ladies who are neither young nor well-shaped allow themselves to be beguiled and cajoled into buying things not suited to them. Very seldom does a hunchbacked dowager hesitate to put upon her shoulders the garment that draped so charmingly those of the living statue hired to parade before her. Jacqueline could not help laughing as she watched this way of hunting larks; and thought the mirror might have warned them, like a scarecrow, rather than have tempted them into the snare.

The head tailor of the establishment made them wait long enough to allow the pretty showgirls to accomplish their work of temptation. They fascinated Jacqueline's father by their graces and their glances, while at the same time they warbled into his daughter's ear, with a slightly foreign' accent: "That would be so becoming to Mademoiselle."

For ladies going to the seaside there were things of the most exquisite simplicity: this white fur, trimmed with white velvet, for instance; that jacket like the uniform of a naval officer with a cap to match--"All to please Fred," said Jacqueline, laughing. M. de Nailles, while they waited for the tailor, chose two costumes quite as original as those of Mademoiselle d'Étaples, which delighted Jacqueline all the more, because she thought it probable they would displease her stepmother. At last the magnificent personage, his face adorned with luxuriant whiskers, appeared with the bow of a great artist or a diplomatist; took Jacqueline's measure as if he were fulfilling some important function, said a few brief words to his secretary, and then disappeared; the group of English beauties saying in chorus that Mademoiselle might come back that day week and try it on.

Accordingly, a week later Jacqueline, seated on the wooden-horse used for this purpose, had the satisfaction of assuring herself that her habit, fitting marvelously to her bust, showed not a wrinkle, any more than a 'gant de Suede' shows on the hand; it was closely fitted to a figure not yet fully developed, but which the creator of the chef-d'oeuvre deigned to declare was faultless. Usually, he said, he recommended his customers to wear a certain corset of a special cut, with elastic material over the hips covered by satin that matched the riding-habit, but at Mademoiselle's age, and so supple as she was, the corset was not necessary. In short, the habit was fashioned to perfection, and fitted like her skin to her little flexible figure. In her close-fitting petticoat, her riding-trousers and nothing else, Jacqueline felt herself half naked, though she was buttoned up to her throat. She had taken an attitude on her wooden horse such as might have been envied by an accomplished equestrienne, her elbows held well back, her shoulders down, her chest expanded, her right leg over the pommel, her left foot in the stirrup, and never after did any real gallop give her the same delight as this imaginary ride on an imaginary horse, she looking at herself with entire satisfaction all the time in an enormous cheval-glass.

ETEXT EDITOR'S BOOKMARKS:

Great interval between a dream and its execution
Music--so often dangerous to married happiness
Old women--at least thirty years old!
Seldom troubled himself to please any one he did not care for
Small women ought not to grow stout
Sympathetic listening, never having herself anything to say
The bandage love ties over the eyes of men
Waste all that upon a thing that nobody will ever look at
Women who are thirty-five should never weep

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